

*Inventing Architectural Identity:*  
The Institutional Architecture of James Renwick, Jr., 1818-95

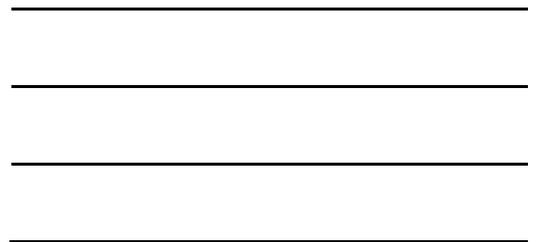
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## ABSTRACT

James Renwick, Jr. (1818-95) ranks among the most influential architects in the history of American architecture. Throughout his proficient career, Renwick designed some of the most recognizable urban monuments and complexes while exhibiting great fluency in historical modes and modern methods of design. The architect's work, indeed, established lasting models of various building types and institutions, which directed how contemporaries viewed certain institutional spaces through their enduring designs.

Renwick's overall corpus embodies the architectural mosaic of late-nineteenth-century America, especially through its embrace of the period's most fundamental cultural and societal developments. The myriad of building types in which Renwick showed proficiency in design, moreover, enhances even further his overall contribution to the urban landscape of his time. This dissertation shows how Renwick gave architectural image to a number of unprecedented building types in America, which still emerge as foundational models for historical conception and modern design.

Following a chapter that offers a survey of Renwick's career, including discussion of his upbringing and education, the study examines a selection of the architect's institutional design. First, it deals with St. Patrick's Cathedral and its role as an icon of Catholicism in the United States. Next, this study analyses Renwick's museum designs, which include the Smithsonian Institution and Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., whose unique architecture embodies the concept of cultural control within the museum setting. Lastly, Renwick's health-care buildings on Blackwell's Island, New York City will be discussed as major contributions to the fledgling practices of medicine and reform in nineteenth-century America.

This dissertation presents the first major study on James Renwick, Jr., whose prolific career will emerge not only as representative of contemporary trends, but also as foundational to the formation of the architectural legacies of numerous institutions that play a major role in the social, religious, and cultural climate of nineteenth-century America.

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Renwick's Corpus and Historiography*

The architectural career of James Renwick, Jr. (fig. 1) presents a paradoxical picture for the modern historian. The extensiveness of Renwick's corpus has been recognized by twentieth-century scholars; for example, a catalogue compiled in 1942 by Effingham Humphrey, adopted and slightly amended in subsequent studies, lists approximately 100 projects, including failed competition entries and additions to previous designs, in which Renwick had some design input.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the enterprise of artistic attribution is often imprecise as it is difficult to define exactly how much influence an architect had on a project or whether the final building completely reflects decisions made by him or her. Nonetheless, considering that in the mid-nineteenth century the professionalization of architecture in America (e.g., professional associations, licensing laws, university programs) was still in a nascent form, Renwick's production provides a confident counterpart to that of his closest colleagues.

Renwick, unfortunately, measures less favorably in terms of existing documentary evidence. Unlike many of his contemporaries and, especially, the modern architect, who prioritized self-promotion and longevity, Renwick wrote few descriptions of his work and no essays on style or theory.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, even for the more prestigious commissions, there exist few architectural documents (e.g., sketches, plans, elevations) or other primary sources (e.g., correspondences, notes), which would provide invaluable insight into the

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<sup>1</sup> Effingham Humphrey, "The Churches of James Renwick, Jr." (Master's thesis, New York University, 1942). A complete catalogue of Renwick's works, which lists 125 buildings, appears as an appendix of this dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> One important exception is Robert Dale Owen's *Hints on Public Architecture* (probably written with significant input by Renwick), which is the closest indication of the architect's design philosophy. This seminal publication will be discussed more thoroughly in a subsequent chapter on Renwick's museum designs.

history of the respective building and Renwick's overall contribution. The projects that boast the most documentation are typically those associated with prominent patrons, for whom history has assigned particular preference. Therefore, the most informative studies of Renwick have treated Grace Church, St. Patrick's Cathedral, and the Smithsonian Institution unproportionally to the rest of the architect's works, thereby claiming precedent of these monuments over other equally important structures and ignoring the forty years of architectural production thereafter.

Since the aforementioned buildings together represent the spectrum of the American iteration of the Gothic Revival, Renwick is routinely deemed an exemplar of the architectural movement and a professional peer of A. J. Davis, Richard Upjohn, and others, whose works have become paradigmatic of medieval revivalism in the United States. While Grace Church, St. Patrick's Cathedral, and the Smithsonian Institution compose an important aspect of Renwick's career, such reduction belies the greater significance and eclecticism of Renwick's professional production. The overall bibliography on Renwick follows the same pattern and is similarly sparse. Except for a few books dealing with specific buildings and their institutional history, no complete publication exists on his life or architecture.<sup>3</sup> The only comprehensive studies on the architect are three master's theses, the latest written in 1967.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, there is

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Margaret Carthy, O.S.U., *A Cathedral of Suitable Magnificence: St. Patrick's Cathedral New York* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazer, Inc., 1984); Cynthia R. Field, Richard E. Stamm, and Heather P. Ewing, *The Castle: An Illustrated History of the Smithsonian Building* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993); Kenneth Hafertepe, *America's Castle: The Evolution of the Smithsonian Building and Its Institution, 1840-1978* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984); William Rhinelander Stewart, *Grace Church and Old New York* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1924).

<sup>4</sup> Humphrey, "The Churches of James Renwick, Jr."; Rosalie Thorne McKenna, "A Study of the Architecture of the Main Building and Landscaping of Vassar College, 1860-1870" (Master's thesis, Vassar College, 1949); Jay E. Cantor, "The Public Architecture of James Renwick Jr.: An investigation of

sporadic treatment of Renwick in minor journal articles or encyclopedia entries, which characteristically only provide superficial and selective information on the architect's life and career. These sources, while providing the basis for later work, scarcely engage with modern methodologies of art and architectural history, thus necessitating a more thorough examination of the architect and his career, which this dissertation addresses.

Since the 1970s, however, interest in Renwick's life and work has moderately increased. The most important engine for this renewal was the research of Selma Rattner at Columbia University.<sup>5</sup> Rattner, a special collections curator, compiled an extensive research collection on Renwick, which she intended to culminate in the publication of a monograph on the architect.<sup>6</sup> Although no major publication emerged from her tireless research, Rattner, along with some of her colleagues, recognized Renwick as a major contributor to the architectural landscape of nineteenth-century America. In conjunction with Rattner's research, certain efforts and projects developed to preserve, rejuvenate, or adapt some of Renwick's most prominent monuments from ruin or redundancy.<sup>7</sup> While

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the concept of an American national style of architecture during the nineteenth century" (Master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1967).

<sup>5</sup> Rattner published a few articles on Renwick, which, prior to this study, have become the standard reference on Renwick. See Selma Rattner, "Renwick's Church for Blacks," *Historic Preservation* 24 (July-Sept. 1972): 32-35; idem, "James Renwick, Jr." *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* (New York: Macmillan, 1982); idem, "James Renwick: Genteel purveyor of castles and cathedrals," *Preservation News* 25 (1985): 11.

<sup>6</sup> Selma Rattner Research Papers on James Renwick, 1865-2001, Department of Archives and Drawings, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University (hereafter cited as Rattner Papers).

<sup>7</sup> The most noteworthy project is the Smallpox Hospital on New York City's Roosevelt Island, which has remained in ruin the building's abandonment in 1955. The ruinous structure has provided artists, architects, and preservationists a case study for ideas concerning adaptive reuse, especially in view of the recent rejuvenation of Roosevelt Island and completion of the Louis Kahn-designed Four Freedoms Park on the southern tip of the island in 2012.

Other buildings have also been appropriated successfully for various purposes. For example, St. Ann's Episcopal Church in Brooklyn is now part of the campus of the Packer Collegiate Institute. Similarly, Greyston (William E. Dodge, Jr. Estate) has taken up numerous identities, including a conference center for Columbia University's Teacher's College and a Buddhist retreat, before once again becoming a private residence.

many of these developments are commendable, consideration of Renwick and his work has failed to recapture the attention of academics, rather than preservationists.

### ***Methodology and Outline***

The endeavor of rehabilitating Renwick in the history of American architecture is both academically necessary and advantageously timely, particularly considering the current preservation projects associated with his extant buildings. However, the following study will not evolve in the Vasarian or bibliographic mode, with which art and architectural historians have been dealing for centuries. Rather, it places the artist into the cultural circumstances of his time and attempts to examine his body of work and its impact on the contemporary architectural scene. The following chapters will show that many of Renwick's institutional designs were as much (and sometimes more so) architectural and systematic failures as they were representations of innovation and originality. Here, one can apply the observations of Carla Yanni on the natural history museum to many of Renwick's institutions: "Most of these buildings were the architectural processes of multifarious committees, and as a result the buildings communicate ambiguously or ineffectually."<sup>8</sup> Yet in other cases, Renwick's design choices, which were often unprecedented in American architecture, enhanced the buildings' hermeneutics and transformed the way Americans viewed their commonest institutional spaces.

The organization of this dissertation follows a familiar methodological mode, structured around specific building types and institutions that comprise the Renwick's most important work. Following the paradigm adopted by such invaluable publications as

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<sup>8</sup> Carla Yanni, *Nature's Museums: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 3.

Nikolaus Pevsner's *A History of Building Types* (1976) and Stern, Mellins, and Fishman's *New York 1880: Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age* (1999), each chapter of this dissertation concentrates on a single institutional type, including its architectural and societal precedents and implications.<sup>9</sup> In order to present the fullest narrative of Renwick's contributions, various methodologies and histories are discussed that help to contextualize the buildings and advance the appreciation of the architect beyond concerns of style and form.

The first chapter of this dissertation presents a comprehensive survey of Renwick's career. Particular attention is given to the architect's upbringing within Knickerbocker society, the impact of his father's standing and interests on the young Renwick, and his early works as engineer and practicing architect. The usefulness of this chapter lies in the exposition of the overall trajectory of Renwick's career and the evocation of his lesser-known works against more canonical buildings. Therefore, in discussing various residential, commercial, and educational projects, in addition to more monumental buildings, this survey represents the first expansive treatment of the architect and his prolific career.

Chapter 2 concentrates on Renwick's design for St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, indeed his most iconic building. It is argued here that Renwick, by designing the Catholic cathedral in America's most important metropolis, gave architectural image to the community of Catholics in New York, a group that began as a population of immigrants and slowly rose to prominence within the religious fabric of the city and country at large. The major theme of this chapter is the fervent movement of anti-

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<sup>9</sup>Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman. *New York 1880: Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1999).

Catholicism with which American Catholics and its leaders had to deal throughout the nineteenth century. The primary protagonist of this narrative is Archbishop John Hughes, who became the most vocal apologist for Catholics in and around the city and the eventual patron of St. Patrick's. While this discussion involves the only example of sacred architecture in the expository chapters, which initially may not adhere to the definition of an institution, the mechanisms behind and implications of Renwick's work at St. Patrick's Cathedral, particularly his relationship with Hughes, echo those of his museum and welfare buildings discussed in the following chapter.

The next chapter examines Renwick's museum designs, which include the Smithsonian Institution and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, both in Washington, D.C. These two institutions, while seemingly dissimilar in purpose and function, reflect the nineteenth-century American approach to the practice of collection as an embodiment of a fledgling notion of cultural imperialism. Stylistically, both buildings manifest their primary mission—the Smithsonian as the first American museum of natural history and the Corcoran as the national public art gallery. The Smithsonian famously displays Renwick's interpretation of the Norman Romanesque, which can be read to symbolize the centuries-long tradition of collecting as exemplified in the Old World and its respective institutions, such as the *Wunderkammer*, or “Cabinet of Curiosity.” The Corcoran Gallery of Art is among the first buildings in America to feature the Second Empire style, born in imperial Paris in the mid-nineteenth century and popularized in America by Renwick himself. It is argued that the imperial style undermines the purported mission of the gallery as a public institution, rather more closely associating the museum with its powerful patron, W. W. Corcoran.

The final expository chapter discusses Renwick's work on Blackwell's Island (later renamed Welfare Island and known today as Roosevelt Island), New York City, where he designed multiple institutions dedicated to health and welfare. These buildings and their forms provide architectural paradigms for various developments in the ways society was dealing with issues related to disease and destitution. In these projects, which include the Smallpox Hospital, Workhouse, and Charity Hospital, one finds the spectrum of treatment and care defining nineteenth-century approaches to medicine and reform; the transition from the menacing isolation of the Smallpox Hospital to the technologically innovative and palatial Charity Hospital demonstrates both Renwick's architectural fluency and ability to embody social values in the built form.

The conclusion briefly addresses Renwick's legacy on the architectural and institutional landscape of America, especially through consideration of Bertram Goodhue, his most famous apprentice, as well as his successor firm, Renwick, Aspinwall, and Owen. At the end of Renwick's life, the architectural scene in America and abroad was experiencing major changes, primarily through the rising dominance of the Beaux-Arts approach to design and the proliferation of what historians deem "academic eclecticism," of which Goodhue himself was a major figure.<sup>10</sup> The basis for the stylistic diversity, appropriations of the past, and appreciation for specific institutional programs that are commonly said to have developed in the architecture of the last decades of the nineteenth century appear in the production of Renwick and the buildings at the center of

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<sup>10</sup> The use of the term "eclectic" to describe periods of American architecture is as ubiquitous as it is ambiguous; various scholars have attempted to qualify the term and define it chronologically in a few seminal studies of American architecture. For example, Carroll L. V. Meeks, "Picturesque Eclecticism," *The Art Bulletin* 33 (1950): 226-35; idem, "Creative Eclecticism," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 12 (1953): 15-18; Walter C. Kidney, *The Architecture of Choice: Eclecticism in America, 1880-1930* (New York: George Braziller, 1974); Richard Guy Wilson, *The American Renaissance: 1876-1917* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1979), 12-15; Richard W. Longstreth, "Academic Eclecticism in American Architecture," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17 (1982): 55-82.

this study. Therefore, Renwick and his prolific career will emerge fundamental not only to American trends in architecture, but also to the formation of architectural legacies of numerous institutions that play a major role in the social, religious, and cultural climate of America in the nineteenth century and beyond.

## CHAPTER 1

### *An Architectural Eclectic:* A Survey of the Career of James Renwick, Jr.

#### *James Renwick, Sr.: A Life of Intellectual Pursuits*

A complete narrative of the early life of James Renwick, Jr. must begin with a consideration of the life of his father, James Renwick, Sr., who was the most influential figure in the young architect's life.<sup>1</sup> As noted below, Renwick, Sr. was the greatest champion of his son's architectural interests and talents, and often was instrumental in securing eminent clients for the fledgling architect. Admittedly, however, the life of the elder Renwick is far more eventful in terms of biography and the "American experience."<sup>2</sup> Curiously, moreover, there is considerably more biographical information on Renwick, Sr. than there is on his son. Like modern scholars, family members too found it difficult to describe Renwick, Jr., whose uncle, Charles Wilkes, amusingly wrote, "Of James there is little to be said; I do not think he is at all popular [...]."<sup>3</sup>

James Renwick, Sr. attended Columbia College (now, Columbia University), a prestigious institution even in the nineteenth century, from which he graduated in 1807. In the years following his graduation, he worked in his father's trans-Atlantic steamboat

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<sup>1</sup> For purposes of convenience and brevity, generational suffixes will only be included when referring to James Renwick, Sr. Therefore, any use of "James," "Renwick," or "James Renwick" (without an adjectival qualification or generational suffix) implicitly refers to James Renwick, Jr.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Cantor, 2. Here the author writes, somewhat vaguely, that Renwick, Sr. was "not only a man of his times, but was also a mirror of the developing conception of the nature of the American experience. In his lifetime, he traversed the stages of cultural development normally assigned to several generations."

<sup>3</sup> William James Morgan, et al., eds., *The Autobiography of Rear Admiral Charles Wilkes, U.S. Navy 1798-1877* (Washington, D.C.: Naval History Division, Dept. of the Navy, 1978), 725.

business and obtained a Master's degree from Columbia in 1810.<sup>4</sup> Early indications of his sophistication and intellect emerged immediately after gaining a teaching appointment in Natural Philosophy at Columbia.<sup>5</sup> In 1813, Renwick, Sr. presented preliminary drawings for the proposed rebuilding of Columbia College (figs. 2, 3, 4).<sup>6</sup> As Placzek duly notes, Renwick, Sr.'s designs represent one of the first, albeit unrealized, incarnations of the Gothic Revival and one of the first group plans for a college campus in America.<sup>7</sup> Clearly a fantastical rendition of King's College Chapel at Cambridge, the design indicates Renwick, Sr.'s architectural erudition and engagement with both historical and modern trends, a characteristic also prominent in his son's architecture. Renwick, Sr.'s broad interests and intellectual production became manifest in numerous other forms in later years; in fact, his curriculum vitae is quite exceptional. He contributed articles to various cultural, political, and academic publications, such as the *The Whig Review*<sup>8</sup> and *The American Quarterly Review*, and wrote biographies of Alexander Hamilton, Robert Fulton, and DeWitt Clinton, among others.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> According to Cantor, Renwick Sr.'s father, William Renwick, who settled in America in 1783, founded the first packet line between New York and Liverpool, earning him a great fortune. William traveled between New York and England considerably; Renwick, Sr., in fact, was born in Liverpool. See Cantor, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Renwick, Sr. became full professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy (which today would be known as physics) at Columbia in 1820 and retired from teaching in 1853, when he was named the first Professor Emeritus at Columbia College. He began his teaching career in 1811 as a temporary replacement for his uncle, Professor Kemp, who fell ill and was unable to teach. Cantor notes that Renwick Sr.'s return to academia was a result of the failure of his business ventures and his desperate need for income. According to a letter from Henry Brevoort to Irving in April 1820, the Renwicks were living with Margaret's father and James's prospects for employment were "hopeless." See George S. Hellman, ed., *Letters of Henry Brevoort to Washington Irving, Together with Other Unpublished Brevoort Papers* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1918), 122.

<sup>6</sup> Adolf Placzek, "Design for Columbia College, 1813," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 11 (1952): 22-23.

<sup>7</sup> Placzek, 23.

<sup>8</sup> James Renwick, Sr., especially early in his professional career, exhibited particular rapport with the philosophy of the Whigs. One author links James's appointment to survey the northeastern boundaries of the United States for the government with the Whig victory of 1840, which "assured a new interest in national expansion and renewed efforts at extending and defining territorial boundaries." See Cantor, 7.

<sup>9</sup> McKenna, "Vassar College," 34; Humphrey, 10; Cantor, 4 n. 7.

Renwick, Sr. was also a proficient scholar and published numerous articles and books in his academic fields, including the seminal and greatly accessible *Elements of Mechanics*.<sup>10</sup> While his writings in engineering and popular science emerged from his education and professorship at Columbia, his contribution to the intellectual and literary circles of the east coast were the product of his familial and social connections. These relations, in turn, assured Renwick, Jr.'s upbringing in the “Knickerbocker establishment,”<sup>11</sup> an appropriate qualification given the Renwick Sr.'s close friendship with Washington Irving, who, in his satirical *History of New York*, coined the popular moniker.<sup>12</sup>

Most information on Renwick, Sr. arrives through the diaries or correspondences of his family members and colleagues, including the historically rich letters between Irving and Henry Brevoort, Renwick, Sr.'s brother-in-law.<sup>13</sup> From 1815 to 1816, Renwick, Sr. travelled through England and Scotland with Irving, which complemented the scientist's lifelong passion in the arts. Of critical importance is a series of watercolors and sketches he executed while visiting some of Britain's most famous sites and imagining the effect of others (fig. 5).<sup>14</sup> The detailed and picturesque manner in which the watercolors are painted, which resemble similar images by Turner and others, indicates

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<sup>10</sup> Cantor, 8-9, 9 n. 17. Here, the author lists James's major scientific publications and contributions. Translated: Lallemand's *Treatise on Artillery* (1820); Edited: Parke's *Rudiments of Chemistry* (1824), Lardner's *Popular Lectures on the Steam Engine* (1828), Brinton's *Mechanics* (1830), and Daniell's *Chemical Philosophy* (1840); Authored: *Outlines of Natural Philosophy* (1822), *Treatise on the Steam Engine* (1830), *Syllabus on Lectures on Chemistry* (1831), *Elements of Mechanics* (1832), *Outline of Geology* (1838), *First Principles in Chemistry* (1838), *First Principles of Chemistry* (1840), *Applications of the Science of Mechanics to Practical Purposes* (1840), and *First Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1844).

<sup>11</sup> Cantor, 5.

<sup>12</sup> In 1809, under the pseudonym “Diedrich Knickerbocker,” Irving published *A History of New-York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*, a satirical local history of New York and the end result of an extensive marketing hoax initiated by the author himself.

<sup>13</sup> In 1816, Renwick Sr. married Margaret Anne Brevoort.

<sup>14</sup> This collection of watercolors and sketches is currently housed in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Columbia University.

the artistic talent and interest of the elder Renwick. Certainly, these scenes would have provided the younger Renwick a virtual tour of Old World architecture and an invaluable alternative to the formal design training the architect lacked.

***James Renwick, Jr.: An American and Architectural Aristocrat***

James Renwick, Jr.'s early life followed a similar trajectory as that of his father. Born in 1818,<sup>15</sup> Renwick was raised during a period of economic uncertainty within his family, yet graduated from Columbia in 1836.<sup>16</sup> Although his father's social connections and his later marriage to shipping heiress Anna Lloyd Aspinwall in 1851<sup>17</sup> would provide the architect major patrons from New York's aristocracy, his intellect and successes at Columbia guaranteed immediate employment as construction engineer on the Erie Railroad, which would ignite an interest in design as detailed below.

His disposition towards and regard by others, especially in professional circles, however, often proved to be the opposite of those of his father. While contemporaries of Renwick, Sr. admired his personality and generosity (e.g., as Washington Irving sincerely wrote of the elder Renwick, "the more I know of him, the more I find reason to value and

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<sup>15</sup> Renwick was the second of three sons of Margaret and James Renwick. His brothers, Henry Brevoort and Edward Sabine, both enjoyed successful careers as engineers.

<sup>16</sup> The age at which Renwick entered Columbia differs in accounts of his life. Rattner, in her entry on Renwick in *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, writes the architect enrolled "at the customary age" of twelve; Cantor and McKenna ("Vassar College"), however, agree that Renwick was fourteen. It is almost certain that the former is correct. In Edward Sabine Renwick's memoirs (1889), the architect's brother chronicles his matriculation into Columbia at the age of twelve, thus confirming Rattner's above claim.

Renwick also lost a year of college due to an eye injury suffered in his father's laboratory. Renwick's early education included a wide array of subjects, including English, geography, and classical and modern languages; at Columbia, he specialized more thoroughly in practical and philosophical sciences. In 1836 he delivered his thesis on "The Benefits Conferred upon Mankind by Philosophy" and earned a Master's degree in 1839. See Rattner, "James Renwick, Jr.," 541; Cantor, 10, 10 n. 21.

<sup>17</sup> One must not confuse Anna Lloyd Aspinwall Renwick with her mother, Anna Lloyd Aspinwall, who has the same name.

admire”),<sup>18</sup> certain characterizations of Renwick, Jr. are less flattering. In a vividly loquacious passage, George Templeton Strong (who was a classmate of Renwick) remarked, “[Renwick, Jr.’s] reputation is close and contracted in Money Matters” and defined the young designer as “that most windy of all bags of conceit and coxombry that ever dubbed themselves Architect,” who “vulgarizes and pollutes every glorious idea and form of the successive eras of Christian art that he travesties and tampers with, as a sacrifice to the stolidity of building committees and his own love of fat jobs and profitable contracts.”<sup>19</sup>

Other descriptions confirm Strong’s criticisms of Renwick’s design choices and execution, yet such blatant personal attacks appear unique to Strong’s opinions. One must also note Strong’s contempt for Renwick, Sr., which exhibited little delicacy or concern. For example, in a eulogy composed by Strong following the death of his former teacher, the lawyer sarcastically remarked that “Professor Renwick’s funeral was largely attended by *ancient New Yorkers*” (emphasis added); Strong adds one final affront to the deceased’s aspect:

[...] it’s said that with characterist self-reliance (or self-sufficiency?) he decided his doctors did not understand their business, dismissed them, and treated himself on philosophical principles [...], for the questions in nature, art, and science on which Professor Jemmy Renwick did not feel entitled to speak with absolute authority are few and insignificant.<sup>20</sup>

In examining his entire career as architect and the historical particularities of individual commissions, dispersed among typical complaints concerning budget deficits,

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<sup>18</sup> Washington Irving, *The Letters of Irving Washington to Henry Brevoort*, ed. George S. Hellman, vol. 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1915), 131.

<sup>19</sup> Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds., *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, vol. 1, *Young Man in New York, 1835-1849* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1952), 292.

<sup>20</sup> Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds., *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, vol. 3, *The Civil War, 1860-1865* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1952), 288.

procurement of materials, organization of workers, etc., Renwick exhibited a commendable personal and professional disposition. The historian then must always question the veracity of the critical characterizations of Renwick, who was often portrayed as “exceedingly obliging” or “incompetent” and lacking professional judgment or technical knowledge. As most scholars have showed, both implicitly or explicitly, Renwick managed and conquered such unfortunate underestimations and concerns throughout his entire career, which confidently can be characterized as one of the most prolific and successful in nineteenth-century American architecture.

### ***Renwick’s Early Designs: Architectural Experimentation***

The image of Renwick as an inept professional, whose inadequacy belies his father’s pursuits, misrepresents the actuality of Renwick’s early career. Many scholars, in fact, do not even recognize Renwick’s designs prior to his work on Grace Church.<sup>21</sup> Notwithstanding this historiographical trend, Renwick’s earliest production was crucial for his development and maturation as designer. Working as second assistant for the New York’s Croton Aqueduct (at the time, one of the most advanced water systems in the country), the appointment of which arrived after his father brought him onto the payroll of the United States Boundary Commission,<sup>22</sup> Renwick supervised the construction of a distributing reservoir at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street in 1842 (figs. 6, 7; now the site of Bryant Park and Carrère and Hasting’s monumental New York Public Library); although Renwick himself was probably not the sole designer, undated watercolor

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Pierson writes, “there is no specific evidence that [Renwick] had engaged in any professional architectural activity before [the design of Grace Church].” See William H. Pierson, Jr., *American Buildings and Their Architects*, vol. 2, *Technology and the Picturesque, The Corporate and the Early Gothic Styles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 216.

<sup>22</sup> Hafertepe, 30.

elevations and cross-sections appear in the Metropolitan Museum sketchbook (figs. 8, 9).<sup>23</sup> The reservoir superstructure, which featured a stripped version of an Egyptian Revival temple, was absolutely monumental and certainly represented an engineering accomplishment in mid-nineteenth-century New York.

The first project designed by Renwick alone was a fountain reservoir in New York's Bowling Green, also part of the Croton water system (fig. 10). Completed during June 1843, Renwick's design featured a picturesque fountain that involved more technical achievement than architectural creativity. Despite its advanced engineering, the fountain became immediately notorious for its rambling composition. George Templeton Strong expressed characteristic criticism for Renwick's design:

As for the great pile of stones in the Bowling Green, it's the most calamitous failure that ever a public-spirited attempt at getting up something ornamental eventuated in. In the first place, it's a monstrosity that Renwick must have conceived in the inspiration of a nightmare—so hideous that the people who got up the subscription to build it are talking of another subscription to pull it down [...].<sup>24</sup>

Edgar Allen Poe composed an equally slanderous ekphrasis of the fountain in the first entry of his expose "Doings of Gotham" (May 1844):

[The fountain] at the Bowling-Green is an absurdity—and is it for this reason that it has been pronounced sublime? The idea, you know,—the original conception was rusticity—Nature, in short. The water was designed to fall and flow naturally, over natural rocks. And how has this design been carried into execution? By piling some hundred nearly

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<sup>23</sup> Sketchbook of Architectural Drawings and Watercolors, Department of Drawings and Prints, Metropolitan Museum of Art. For a more technical description of the aqueduct and reservoir, including various drawings, see Fayette Bartholomew Tower, *Illustrations of the Croton Aqueduct* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1843).

<sup>24</sup> Nevins and Thomas, eds., *Young Man in New York, 1835-1849*, 211; Cantor, 11-12. Indeed, the fountain underwent renovations in 1850 "to present a more inviting aspect at rustic beauty." See *New York Evening Post*, 4 May 1850.

rectangular cubes of stone, into *one* nearly rectangular cube. The whole has much the air of a small country jail in a hard thunder shower.<sup>25</sup>

An article in *The Broadway Journal* published in 1845 further describes the fountain as “decidedly bad” and a “burlesque of nature,” noting specifically the deer who famously frequented the fountain as if they had “forgotten their forest-home.”<sup>26</sup>

Renwick’s Bowling Green fountain, despite the aforementioned criticism, in fact anticipated later architectural and urban developments in New York. Some descriptions, including Poe’s cited above, highlight the picturesque qualities of the fountain and its overall effects; thus, one can consider Renwick’s design as forestalling projects like Olmsted and Vaux’s Greensward Plan of 1857, which would eventually become Central Park. For example, an article in *The New World* shortly after the fountain was built describes the poetics of the water, certainly affected by Renwick’s expertise in engineering:

It is impossible to describe the pleasing effects produced by the many colored light brilliantly reflected upon the snowy spray, rising in a massy column, and falling in ever-changing yet graceful curves upon the rocky pile, and from thence, gliding off in glittering cascades into the grass encircled basin.<sup>27</sup>

The article in *The Broadway Journal* cited above, furthermore, characterizes the Bowling Green fountain as “a strong effort as ‘*Rus in urbe*,’” thereby denoting the design an aspect of the countryside in the populated city and claiming a similar effect as Olmsted and Vaux’s more famous park.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Philip Lopate, ed., *Writing New York: A Literary Anthology*, 93. Poe’s passage was originally published on 14 May 1844 in the *Columbia Spy*, a Philadelphia newspaper, as part of the first of a series of letters on New York City.

<sup>26</sup> “Broadway,” *Broadway Journal*, 26 April 1845, 259. Interestingly, when this article was published, Edgar Allen Poe owned the journal and had full editorial control of its content. It is possible, then, that Poe was the author of the anonymously composed article cited here.

<sup>27</sup> “Illuminated Fountains,” *The New World*, 2 Sept. 1843, 277.

<sup>28</sup> “Broadway,” 259.

Notwithstanding the longevity and successfulness of his work as aqueduct assistant, Renwick's emergence into the architectural scene of New York City, indeed the most promising laboratories for design in mid-nineteenth-century America, arrived almost instantaneously following his early work as engineer. Accordingly, the following surveys Renwick's most important projects and attempts to synthesize his architectural production (Renwick remained active until his death in 1895) and to illuminate certain unrecognized trends and significance in his complete corpus.

Renwick's career, unlike that of his contemporaries, is difficult to categorize into neatly defined stages. He was fluent in a variety of styles, which combined historic precedent with modern sensibilities, and designed an unparalleled number of building types, of which the most prominent are churches, commercial buildings, asylums, and museums. Many of his buildings, furthermore, do not survive, due to the ever-changing fabric of the metropolitan centers in which Renwick worked. Despite the eclecticism of Renwick's corpus, some patterns indeed emerge which add a certain order to his career. Renwick's earliest commissions (excluding those completed as engineer for the Croton Aqueduct) were primarily large churches in medieval revivalist modes in New York City. In this period, which may be dated from 1843 to 1858, Renwick fully embraced the Gothic Revival movement, which originated in early-nineteenth-century England and became the most popular and fashionable approach to building in mid-nineteenth-century America.<sup>29</sup> These commissions established Renwick's reputation as a preeminent architect of Gothic Revival churches, which validated his early production and initiated an eclectic, yet prominent architectural career.

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<sup>29</sup> The implications of the Gothic Revival in America, and Renwick understanding of the movement, forms the methodological basis of the later chapter on St. Patrick's Cathedral.

***Renwick as Medieval Revivalist: From Gothic to Romanesque***

Renwick's first major commission arrived to him through his prominent familial connections. In May 1843, the Brevoorts sold a parcel of their estate (at Broadway and Tenth Street) to Grace Church Episcopal, who then decided to move their parish and build a more monumental church in the midtown location. Henry Brevoort, Jr., the architect's uncle, facilitated the hiring of Renwick, who was only twenty-four years old, despite the myriad of interest by more qualified architects. In terms of patronage and design, the commission represents a major benchmark in Renwick's career, as Grace Church was among the wealthiest Protestant parishes in New York City; one chronicler described the "extravagant prices" for which church members bought the pews of what would eventually become "the fashionable church" of the city.<sup>30</sup>

For this project, construction of which began in October 1843,<sup>31</sup> Renwick designed the exterior of the church in the Flamboyant Gothic mode, a style that originated in France in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and evolved from the English Decorated style (figs. 11, 12). As indicated by the church's intensity of detail (the Flamboyant style is named for its "flame-like" ornament), as well as its linear and vertical emphasis, Renwick exhibited a rather sophisticated understanding of French and English medieval architecture, a combination unprecedented in American design.<sup>32</sup> The church's eclecticism is also evident through the relationship of the exterior to the interior, whose model is York Minster (as illustrated in John Britton's *The History and Antiquities*

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<sup>30</sup> Allan Nevins, ed., *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851*, vol. 2 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1927), 754.

<sup>31</sup> The cornerstone was laid for Grace Church on 30 Oct. 1843 in a rather portentous manner, when the stone fell from its support, "scattering the mortar in all directions over the clergy and laity without distinction." Further catastrophe occurred when Renwick's head mason, A. O. Price, was killed by an explosion (dynamite was often used in the sculpting process). See Stewart, 152-56.

<sup>32</sup> Rattner, "James Renwick, Jr.," 541-42.

of the *Metropolitan Church of York*, which Renwick owned), thus fusing two distinct precedents of Gothic design (fig. 13).<sup>33</sup>

In adopting a version of the Gothic Revival mode, Renwick needed to design Grace Church in view of Richard Upjohn's Trinity Church (whose cornerstone was laid in June 1841; fig. 14), often noted as an early paradigm for medieval revivalism in America. A comparison between the two edifices, which is nearly unavoidable for the architectural historian, presents an important narrative on the development of the Gothic Revival and the impact of the Ecclesiology movement in American architecture. Both contemporary observers and modern scholars have described Grace Church as the more dynamic and expressive counterpoint to Upjohn's more academic Trinity Church.<sup>34</sup> The materials of each church similarly offered different architectural expressions—Trinity Church was constructed from brownstone, Grace Church from white marble. The indebtedness of both churches to Pugin, however, cannot be ignored; an illustration of an archetypal Christian church from Pugin's *True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* provided the model for either church (fig. 15).<sup>35</sup> While Upjohn's design presents a simplified and more restrained version of Pugin's church (including the omission of the chancel), Renwick's church explodes from its unique location, exhibiting a prominent (and better incorporated) tower and cruciform plan, probably the first

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<sup>33</sup> For a list of architectural books owned by Renwick and his firm, see Humphrey, "The Churches of James Renwick, Jr.," 143-46, Cantor, 217-20. The Drawings and Prints Department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art contains a copy of Britton's *The History and Antiquities of the Metropolitan Church of York...* inscribed "J. Renwick, jr.," which was sold as part of the library of Joseph Breck and W. W. Renwick in 1935.

<sup>34</sup> Phoebe B. Stanton, *The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture: An Episode in Taste, 1840-1856* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), 65.

<sup>35</sup> Augustus W. N. Pugin, *True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture: Set Forth in Two Lectures Delivered at St. Marie's, Oscott* (London: John Weale, 1841), 50.

example of which in America.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, as one modern commentator has summarized the church's design and its relationship with its setting, "It is all in the tower, which is set perfectly to take advantage of the bend."<sup>37</sup>

The uniqueness and monumentality of Grace Church within the American architectural landscape furnished immediate renown for Renwick. In his obituary of Renwick, Bertram Goodhue (who apprenticed in Renwick's studio) declared Grace Church "a pile so noble that, [...] it still remains, in many respects, the most admired example of [the Gothic's] beautiful style in this country."<sup>38</sup> The effect of Grace Church, claims Goodhue, assures that "the name of James Renwick will go down to history together with Pugin, Scott, and Street, as the foremost of those who [...] harked back to a period when architecture was a living thing warm and glowing with the sincerity of the Middle Age[s]."<sup>39</sup>

Loth and Sadler, Jr., in their survey of the Gothic Revival in America, moreover, claim that "with youthful spontaneity [Renwick] achieved a lively masterpiece in the English taste that would have excited the admiration of Pugin," echoing Goodhue's words above.<sup>40</sup> Similar judgments emerge from contemporary descriptions, again emphasizing the accomplishment of Renwick's first major design. Philip Hone, wealthy businessman and mayor of New York from 1826 to 1827, recorded in his diary near the

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<sup>36</sup> Stanton, *Gothic Revival*, 61-68. Regarding its advantageous location, Grace Church is situated on Broadway at a point where the prominent avenue bends northwestward, anticipating its connection to Union Square.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Goldberger, *The City Observed: New York—A Guide to the Architecture of Manhattan* (New York: Random House, 1979), 70.

<sup>38</sup> Bertram G. Goodhue, "The Late James Renwick," *The Churchman*, 20 July 1895, 77.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Calder Loth and Julius Trousedale Sadler, Jr., *The Only Proper Style: Gothic Architecture in America* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), 66.

completion of the building the status of Grace Church as a landmark of the city and its architectural virtues:

[Grace] is to be the fashionable church, and already its aisles are filled (especially on Sundays after the morning services in other churches) with gay parties of ladies in feathers and “mousseline-delaine dresses,” and dandies with moustaches and high-heeled boots; the lofty arches resound with astute criticisms upon *Gothic architecture* from fair ladies who have had the advantage of foreign travel, and scientific remarks upon acoustics from elderly millionaires who do not hear quite as well as formerly.<sup>41</sup> (emphasis original)

Hone’s exemplary description, however, ignores important issues of Renwick’s church, whose construction and execution involved many problems, which initiated some negative responses from those familiar with its design. In terms of budget, the church was infamously expensive (a trend that continued throughout Renwick’s career), causing Renwick to construct the steeple from wood, rather than the intended stone.<sup>42</sup> Rumors spread that this change, which resulted in what became known as “Renwick’s Toothpick,” was made because the foundation could not support a stone tower.<sup>43</sup>

It is clear, furthermore, that the Flamboyant Gothic and its decorative floridity, complex tracery, and overall extravagance were, for a variety of potential reasons, unsuited for the particular manifestation of the Gothic Revival in America, especially for a Protestant parish.<sup>44</sup> Renwick’s next two commissions indeed reflect the trend adopted

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<sup>41</sup> Nevins, ed., 754.

<sup>42</sup> The original estimated cost of Grace Church was \$57,685. Primarily due to construction delays probably caused by the workmen, the final cost was over \$75,000. Stewart, 129-31, 159-63; Hafertepe, 32-33.

<sup>43</sup> As Hafertepe notes, this rumor, in fact, was so widespread that the parish itself published a letter in order to set straight the matter at hand to the general public.

<sup>44</sup> Cantor suggests that the Flamboyant style “proved unpalatable to American taste” in the nineteenth century. He quotes a passage from Everand M. Upjohn’s biography of his great-grandfather, Richard Upjohn, who, according to this seminal study, abandoned the Perpendicular style because “the newer taste represents a growth of feeling that the older forms of the Gothic are somehow purer and more natural—a favorite term at that time—than the last and therefore decadent phase of the style.” See Everand M. Upjohn, *Richard Upjohn: Architect and Churchman* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 65. In addition to these philosophical arguments, other factors for the turn towards more restrained Gothic

by other Gothic Revivalists in appropriating earlier medieval idioms for design inspiration. In 1846 (when Grace Church was still unfinished), Renwick began the designs of two other churches, which evoke equally romantic images and display a less derivative approach to medieval revivalist architecture.

After the completion of Trinity Church, Upjohn began to embrace fully the English parish church revival. In contrast, Renwick, after Grace Church, looked to different medieval sources and expressions for his next commissions.<sup>45</sup> Calvary Episcopal Church, begun in March 1846 on the northeast corner of Park Avenue and Twenty-first Street, marks the first of Renwick's more inventive church designs (fig. 16). Boasting a rich cultural history, including its depiction in a painting by American impressionist Childe Hassam (fig. 17) and serving as the local parish for the Roosevelt family, Calvary Church, according to Humphrey, is the first church by Renwick without a specific historical model.<sup>46</sup> Constructed of local brownstone and originally featuring two towering spires, the tripartite elevation demonstrates a subtle, yet sophisticated rendition of the Early English/Lancet Gothic style (fig. 18).<sup>47</sup> The articulation of surface at Calvary Church is accomplished through manipulation of the structure (e.g., massing, composition, harmonic facade) rather than the application of Flamboyant detail as at Grace Church, thereby reflecting Renwick's growing fluency with medieval revival forms.

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modes include the assurance of economic efficiency and, consequently, a greater possibility for "truthfulness" of material and fulfillment of the Ruskinian ideal.

<sup>45</sup> Stanton, *Gothic Revival*, 69-70.

<sup>46</sup> Humphrey, 30; Cantor, 18.

<sup>47</sup> The spires, added after the main building was finished, were constructed of wood and later removed in the twentieth century because of structural deterioration. In 1867, Renwick added the adjacent theater building (known as the "Renwick Gem"), which now houses classrooms.

The stylistic trajectory of Renwick's early New York churches culminated in the Church of the Puritans, begun in September 1846 on Fifteenth Street at Union Square (figs. 19, 20). The Church of the Puritans (demolished and replaced in 1869 by John Kellum's cast-iron Tiffany and Co. store) is among Renwick's most archaeologically based designs and is a perfect paradigm of the "round style," as discussed by Meeks in his article on the Romanesque Revival before H. H. Richardson.<sup>48</sup> Renwick designed the Church of the Puritans in the style nineteenth-century architects and critics deemed "late Norman or Lombard," which he would later use in the most monumental sense in the final design for the Smithsonian Institution. While both contemporary and modern commentators claim the church an "image of picturesque and studied asymmetry" (primarily because of its asymmetrical towers), for example, one should also detect the strict rationality of the structure, especially its harmonic, tripartite facade and its simple massing. Various models for the design of the Church of the Puritans have been proposed, including, somewhat vaguely, the Romanesque churches of Germany, which were featured in Thomas Hope's *Historical Essay on Architecture*.<sup>49</sup> While the front gable of Renwick's facade reflects similar features in the churches illustrated in Hope's study, a more accurate comparison, however, are the Norman churches of France, for example the famous Abbey Church of St. Denis (west end, 1135-40; fig. 21).<sup>50</sup> This association is significant for it shows that Renwick was fluent in the historic forms of the Romanesque before finalizing his design for the Smithsonian Institution, which often is credited as the progenitor of the Romanesque Revival in America.

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<sup>48</sup> Carroll L. V. Meeks, "Romanesque Before Richardson," *The Art Bulletin* 35 (1953): 17-33.

<sup>49</sup> Hafertepe, 34-35.

<sup>50</sup> Indeed, Humphrey identified the similarities between Renwick's facade and that of St. Denis. See Humphrey, 24-25. McKenna reproduces Humphrey's original observations. See McKenna, "Vassar College," 37.

In the final years of the 1840s and first few years of the following decade, Renwick recycled variants of the Gothic idiom in other, more minor church designs. Like the denomination of Calvary, most of Renwick's ecclesiastical clients in this period, according to Rattner, were theologically conservative; thus, one may conclude, that the Gothic, whose revival was considered in both architectural and theological terms, was more appropriate for these patrons. This group of churches includes South Dutch Church (1848-49; demolished; fig. 22) in New York and Second Presbyterian Church (1849-52; destroyed in the Great Fire of 1871) in Chicago.<sup>51</sup> Rattner also places in this group Trinity Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C (1850-51; demolished, 1936; fig. 23), whose design features the original central elevation of Renwick's Gothic Revival entry for the Smithsonian competition.<sup>52</sup>

Although he continued to design churches throughout his career, Renwick started to earn commissions for a variety of building types. Indeed, his fluency in functionally and aesthetically unprecedented buildings is the focus of this dissertation and underlines its entire discussion. It is important to reiterate, nonetheless, that the immediate success of Renwick's earliest design established his reputation among America's architectural elite, despite some of the minor problems he encountered during their construction. Furthermore, Renwick began to adopt a variety of stylistic precedents throughout his career (some of which are discussed more thoroughly below), which certainly enhanced his attraction as architect.

Renwick's next major commission, which in fact he began to contemplate while still in New York, was the design for the Smithsonian Institution Building in Washington,

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<sup>51</sup> Renwick also designed the new Second Presbyterian Church after the fire.

<sup>52</sup> Rattner, "James Renwick, Jr.," 542.

D.C., which ranks among the architect's most famous and enduring designs. The Smithsonian Building, including its institutional history and historiography, is discussed to a greater degree in a later chapter, which provides an original analysis of its function and success within the museum and architectural landscape of nineteenth-century America. It is useful, however, to consider how this project, whose eventful history duly justifies the extensive attention writers have afforded it, fits into Renwick's career.

First, it is crucial to recognize that the Smithsonian was Renwick's first major commission for a civic patron. Previously, the architect was affiliated with religious clients (only Grace Church, Calvary Church, and the Church of the Puritans claim an earlier starting date). As the first secular project, therefore, the Smithsonian provided a perfect counterpoint to Renwick's sacred metropolitan monuments. Second, one may observe that the Smithsonian marks the final extant structure representing Renwick's early experimentations with medieval revivalism. This identification is conveniently evinced by Renwick's two entries in the competition for the Smithsonian project.<sup>53</sup> The adopted entry, as shown in figures 24 and 25, featured a Norman-inspired design, adapting the earlier conception of David Dale Owen and Robert Dale Owen, and was selected for its ornamental restraint, modest materiality, and capable functionality. Renwick's other design, which was rejected by the Smithsonian Building Committee, but would become partially realized in Renwick's aforementioned Trinity Church, exhibited later Gothic elements similar to those the architect used in Grace Church (fig. 26). The differences in Renwick's two designs for the Smithsonian were, for the most part, purely

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<sup>53</sup> Among the thirteen architects who submitted proposals for the Smithsonian, Renwick was the only who provided two separate designs, for the submission rules explicitly called for one from each individual. Renwick also submitted a marbled model of the design that was eventually chosen.

superficial; while differing in ornamental details, the overall conception of the building in plan, elevation, and composition were effectively the same.<sup>54</sup>

Renwick's Decorated Gothic submission for the Smithsonian project may reflect the architect's views in the contemporary architectural debate over style and the supremacy of one historical mode over others. While modern scholars have often misinterpreted the implications of this dialogue, it is worth questioning whether certain patterns emerge either in a single architect's career or the history of a specific building type. Rattner posits that the "sole reason" for the submission of the Gothic design for the Smithsonian was to demonstrate Renwick's belief that "[the Gothic] was the only suitable form for monumental public building," a curious contention considering that some of Renwick's ecclesiastical commissions, such as Grace Church and St. Patrick's Cathedral, confidently exhibit the Gothic mode.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, Rattner admits that Renwick continued to design in an eclectic manner throughout his career not only in his church architecture, but also for commercial buildings, civic monuments, and residential structures.<sup>56</sup> At this point in his career, Renwick's eclecticism was emerging as a prominent framework of design; therefore, for Renwick, the correspondence between style and meaning was indefinite and flexible. Overlooking any theoretical concerns, Renwick was confident in juxtaposing two separate styles in one project or assigning

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<sup>54</sup> The overall conception of the Smithsonian was, in fact, established by Robert Mills, who had designed the Treasury Building and Old Patent Office Building in Washington, D.C. prior to the Smithsonian competition. In the early stages of the formation of the Smithsonian Institution itself, even before the official legislation was drafted, Robert Dale Owen collaborated with Mills to prepare initial designs for the building. Owen's and Mills's design, which featured a "Saxon style," influenced by the medieval architecture of Oxford and Cambridge, established the general composition of the building and assumed its construction in a medieval eclectic mode. See Hafertepe, 6-8, 18-21.

<sup>55</sup> Rattner, "James Renwick, Jr.," 542. While it is unreasonable that Renwick's apparent preference for the Gothic mode in public commissions precludes its use in ecclesiastical buildings, one must take into consideration the architect's eclecticism as the prime mover for design choices, as well as other concerns, such as client, function, and site.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

more than one style to a particular building type. For example, on the cover page of Robert Dale Owen's *Hints on Public Architecture*, a publication that justified the Romanesque over the Gothic for the Smithsonian project, Renwick placed the book's title within an extensively traced Gothic window (fig. 27).

***Back in New York: Renwick After the Smithsonian***

Renwick's career after his selection as architect of the Smithsonian Institution has failed to receive comprehensive examination by modern scholars; therefore, scholarship has adamantly and repeatedly labeled Renwick one of many Gothic Revivalists who define this period in American architectural history. In concentrating on his later work in New York, Renwick's experimentation with a greater variety of historic modes emerges as a major feature of the architect's production.

In 1848, while the Smithsonian was still under construction, Renwick was chosen to design Free Academy, a newly formed institution providing publically controlled and tax-supported education, which would later become the College of the City of New York (figs. 28, 29).<sup>57</sup> Renwick designed a single, rectangular building modeled after a late-medieval German or Low Country town hall—probably the first such model in a Gothic Revival building in America.<sup>58</sup> The building was demolished in 1929 and replaced by a larger, sixteen-story structure designed by Thompson, Holmes, and Converse, now part of the campus of Baruch College.

While contemporary critics praised Free Academy's economy of construction and composition, modern scholars denounce Renwick's design as ornamentally "thin,"

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<sup>57</sup> The history and implications of the Free Academy, as well as a more thorough analysis of Renwick's design, will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

<sup>58</sup> Cantor, 35: "[Free Academy] was probably the first nineteenth-century Gothic Revival building in America to use a model derived from neither ecclesiastical, collegiate, or domestic forms."

brittle,” and “shallow.”<sup>59</sup> One author attributes these qualities to the probability that Free Academy was designed based on Augustus W. N. Pugin’s illustration of the Hôtel de Ville in his seminal *Contrasts: or A Parallel between Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages, and corresponding Buildings of the Present Day showing the Present Decay of Taste* (fig. 30).<sup>60</sup> Notwithstanding the formal similarities and differences between Pugin’s model and Renwick’s realization, Free Academy is significant for it initiated a period of design in Renwick’s career involving non-ecclesiastical commissions, which were tightly composed in order to complement their surroundings within a single city lot, unlike the picturesque composition of the Smithsonian.<sup>61</sup>

In the 1850s, Renwick began to design a number of commercial and residential buildings in New York City, which exponentially increased his architectural production. While these buildings, which include hotels, houses, and business, comprise a large percentage of Renwick’s corpus, a majority has not survived. Nonetheless, an examination of those for which historical evidence exists provides witness for Renwick’s architectural exploration of various modes of design and his continued competency in working within the dense urban fabric of New York. Many of these structures anticipate more famous examples of commercial buildings of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. In fact, Renwick is among the first architects in America to use iron as a fire resistant structural material, a feature usually cited as innovative in the early

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<sup>59</sup> Cantor, 36; McKenna, “Vassar College,” 44 reiterates the thinness and brittleness of Renwick’s work before 1860.

<sup>60</sup> Augustus W. N. Pugin, *Contrasts; or, A Parallel Between the Noble Edifices...Accompanied by appropriate Text* (London, 1836), n.p. Cantor, 36-38.

<sup>61</sup> It is argued here that Free Academy was the predecessor for this period in Renwick’s career, not the first example of this collection, since the school (at Lexington Avenue and Twenty-third Street) was removed from the populated areas of the city, for some argued that its inclusion within areas occupied by private properties would result in the public takeover of the entire area. See Cantor, 27.

skyscrapers of the late-nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup> Among Renwick's most extraordinary uses of iron, albeit purely for ornamental purposes, was in his design for Rhineland Gardens (1854-55; fig. 31), a complex of three-story row houses in lower Manhattan. Although the complex was demolished in 1958, a section of the first-story ironwork was preserved on the exterior of the school building that replaced the apartments.

In this period, Renwick designed several hotels for wealthy clients, which mostly exhibited versions of the Italianate style, at the time a popular branch of medieval revivalism. As Cantor notes, most of Renwick's hotels were situated on corner lots, thus affording the architect two facades to "communicate volumetric solidarity," which the author cites as an indication of Renwick's understanding of the unsuitability of the Italianate style for free-standing structures. While certainly a facade-oriented style, the correlation between the Italianate and its inadequacy for more sculptural compositions is tenuous at best. Nonetheless, Renwick's handling of these sites is evident in the first of these projects, the Clarendon Hotel (1850-51; fig. 32) on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Eighteenth Street at Union Square, which became a fashionable accommodation for famous visitors to the city, such as Charles Dickens and the Prince of Wales. One contemporary review comments on the popularity and success of the hotel: "The Clarendon is a fine large brick building in the Elizabethan style [sic...] and though neither the largest nor most pretending of our new hotels, it is probably one of the most comfortable and elegant."<sup>63</sup> One should note that depictions of the hotel clearly show an Italianate design; the Elizabethan style, which the above passage describes, probably

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<sup>62</sup> Rattner, "James Renwick, Jr.," 544. Renwick also often used iron as a decorative element (e.g., as balcony railings) in his residential designs.

<sup>63</sup> Cantor, 109. Originally from *Putnam's Magazine*, April 1853, 365.

involved the building's details, such as the window tracery on the ground floor and pilasters running up the facade.

When the Clarendon was under construction, Renwick began designing the St. Denis Hotel, at the corner of Broadway and Eleventh Street, across from Grace Church (figs. 33, 34). Although clearly exhibiting the Italianate style, especially in its subtly suggested corner tower feature, the St. Denis featured peculiar, yet extravagant ornamentation and Elizabethan details similar to those at the Clarendon. Described in the article cited above as “a rather outré and dreamy-looking building” and “bizarre and fantastical in the extreme [yet] very far from being unpleasing,”<sup>64</sup> the St. Denis hotel represents one of Renwick's most eccentric early designs, whose eclecticism in ornamentation belies its simplicity in form.

In the 1850s, Renwick also became a prominent architect of urban residences for New York's wealthier population. His first residential project, and one of his most significant, was a Romanesque design for his parents on lower Fifth Avenue on property owned by Renwick's mother, Margaret Brevoort Renwick (fig. 35).<sup>65</sup> As one scholar notes, the Renwick house (which later became known as the “Mark Twain House” after its most famous resident)<sup>66</sup> is among the earliest residences designed in the Romanesque

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<sup>64</sup> *Putnam's Magazine*, April 1853, 365. Curiously, this description claims that the St. Denis lacked an articulated main entrance door. Cantor corroborates this description by suggesting that in the accompanying depiction of the hotel, the door is missing. A close look at the illustration, however, reveals a door (albeit somewhat obscured), situated on the Broadway façade two windows from the corner of the building.

<sup>65</sup> Cantor 104, n. 27. The house, next to which stood the Brevoort Hotel, remained in possession of the Brevoort family until 1933-34.

<sup>66</sup> The Renwick House became the subject of a fierce preservation battle in the 1950s. The justification given by the Greenwich Village Chamber of Commerce for the preservation of the house was its claim as the home of Mark Twain, who rented the residence from 1904-08, and not its significance in the architectural history of New York. Despite efforts to move the house to a nearby site and reuse it as a local historical museum, the building was demolished in 1954. See “Past is Redolent in Twain House,” *New York Times*, 16 Jan. 1954, 9; “Sic Transit Mark Twain,” *New York Times*, 18 Feb. 1954, 33.

style.<sup>67</sup> While borrowing design elements from the Smithsonian, this house is exemplary of Renwick's penchant for juxtaposing distinct styles and design details, including the apposition of round arches (historical) and iron railings (modern).

Renwick's most historically rich residence is the Cruger Mansion for William Douglas and his sister Harriet Douglas Cruger (1853-54; also known as the Douglas Mansion; fig. 36). The Cruger Mansion is Renwick's closest engagement in a formal neoclassical style; in fact, the house is the only design within the architect's corpus described as "Palladian."<sup>68</sup> The combination of classically proportioned Corinthian columns, a two-story loggia, a double exterior staircase, and an overall symmetrical composition evokes (as closely as one would expect for Renwick) the appearance of a late Renaissance Italian villa.

Nineteenth-century observers praised the Cruger Mansion for its elegance and composition. George Templeton Strong, who, as noted above, was always critical of Renwick, wrote, "It is a most stately house, the finest I've every seen, with its grand hall and staircase and ample suite of rooms."<sup>69</sup> Its spaciousness, extravagant grounds, and superlative natural lighting (a common hallmark of Renwick's designs) proved advantageous for the residence's second owner; from 1873 to 1879, the Cruger Mansion served as the home of the Metropolitan Museum of Art before the institution's commission of Calvert Vaux for their first permanent exhibition space.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Rattner, "James Renwick, Jr.," 543.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds., *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, vol. 2, *The Turbulent Fifties, 1850-1859* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1952), 206-7.

<sup>70</sup> *Old Buildings of New York, with Some Notes Regarding Their Origins and Occupants* (New York: Brentano's, 1907), 74; Winifred E Howe. *A History of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with a Chapter on the Early Institutions of Art in New York* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1913), 157-84.

Notwithstanding its unique classical exterior and institutional history, the Cruger Mansion is most significant as the first building by Renwick, and among the first in America, to feature a mansard roof. Although perhaps a curious element on the otherwise “Palladian” residence, the roof’s conservative contour and diminished height suggests it was not a later addition (common for Italianate buildings),<sup>71</sup> but rather a part of the original design. This simple element foreshadows a later phase in Renwick’s career in which the architect became a leading figure in the introduction and dissemination of the Second Empire style in American architecture.

### ***Parisian Exposure: Expanding Taste***

Between 1854 and 1858, there occurred a rapid and unusual decline in Renwick’s architectural production; only three commissions (all in New York City) can be confidently dated to this period. The first two—Fulton Bank and the Bank of the State of New York—are significant in their early place in the history of commercial architecture. The Smallpox Hospital on Roosevelt Island is the third major building from this period and is more thoroughly discussed in a later chapter (fig. 37). Stylistically, Cantor describes the hospital as “English Gothic,” while Rattner deems it “modernized French,” probably referring to the mansard roof, which was added later in the 1904 additions. These divergent descriptions attest to the fact that identifying a single model for any of Renwick’s designs is particularly difficult and, in most cases, devalues the architect’s own contribution. It is interesting to note, nonetheless, that the main facade of the hospital is nearly an exact reproduction of the south entrance of the Smithsonian Institution.

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<sup>71</sup> Cantor, 106 n. 34.

This period is notable for it marks Renwick's first trip to France; it is possible to measure the impact this trip had on Renwick's overall approach to design and to highlight primary evidence for aspects of his itinerary. Firstly, there exists a document signed by Renwick himself and dated October 1862 entitled "Report of Architect on Heating College," which refers to the architect's early designs for Vassar College (1860-65).<sup>72</sup> In this report, Renwick mentions that he visited Lariboisière Hospital in Paris and examined the complex's utility systems, on which he would later model those of Vassar College. The hospital, built by Pierre Gauthier and completed in 1853, also became a precedent for Renwick's conception of Charity Hospital (see below), plans for which were accepted in March of 1858. Therefore, Renwick would have visited Lariboisière Hospital after its completion.

Secondly, it is known that many Americans, including Renwick's most prominent patron, William Wilson Corcoran, attended the Exposition Universelle des produits de l'Agriculture, de l'Industrie et des Beaux-Arts of 1855 in Paris. This exposition was France's response to London's widely successful Great Exhibition of 1851; in fact, as the main exhibition hall, the Paris exposition featured the Palais de l'Industrie, an architectural counterpoint to Paxton's Crystal Palace in London. As souvenirs, many Americans brought back from the fair lithographs of France's ancient, medieval, and modern monuments, which circulated throughout the exposition. The Universal Exposition, then, would have provided Renwick incentive to visit Europe for the first time in his career and would have offered the architect, whose reputation by this time was

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<sup>72</sup> MS., Archives and Special Collections, Vassar College Library. See McKenna, "Vassar College," 41 n. 4.

firmly established, immediate interaction with the architecture of France, both past and present, from which he had gained inspiration for nearly all of his designs.

The above discussion is crucial not only for explaining the curious decline in Renwick's architectural production between 1854 and 1858, but also for laying the foundation for the rest of the architect's career, which experienced drastic transformations after these pivotal years. Here, it is also important to note that in 1858, Renwick promoted Richard Tylden Auchmuty, one of his apprentices, to partner.<sup>73</sup> Later, in 1860, Renwick also admitted into partnership Joseph Sands, about whom little is known. These appointments indicate that Renwick was receiving an increased number of commissions, including a variety of building types in and around New York City.<sup>74</sup>

### ***The Second Empire Style: Napoleonic Paris in American Design***

In 1858, Renwick designed his first of many monuments in the Second Empire style when he was commissioned by New York City's Department of Public Charities and Corrections to design Charity Hospital on Blackwell's Island (fig. 38). While a more thorough analysis of Renwick's Second Empire designs will appear in a later chapter, one must recognize the implications of these works within Renwick's career and his standing

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<sup>73</sup> Richard Tylden Auchmuty (1831-93) was a prominent personality in nineteenth-century New York. Because of his dedicated philanthropy later in his life, Auchmuty was extremely respected throughout society. For example, the first line of his obituary in the *American Architect and Building News* reads, "Every architect, and every one who has the good of his fellow citizens at heart, must mourn the loss of Colonel R. T. Auchmuty [...]"

Auchmuty went to Columbia College, but withdrew in his junior year and subsequently travelled throughout Europe. Upon his return to America, he entered Renwick's studio to study architecture and quickly rose to partner. During the Civil War, Auchmuty (then, an officer) served as colonel by brevet for gallantry at Gettysburg, but was later transferred to War Department because of his ill health. After the war, Auchmuty returned to New York and founded the New York Trade School in 1881, for which he is best known. See *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "Richard Tylden Auchmuty."

<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, many of Renwick's original drawings, including those by his firm, fail to survive; therefore, it is a futile endeavor to attribute specific designs to individual partners. In order to avoid erroneous attributions, this study uses Renwick as primary architect for all of his firm's designs, regardless of his partners at the time.

within the architectural climate of the late-nineteenth century. Furthermore, while the institutional implications of these designs and their impact on the American architectural landscape, including hospitals, museums, and school, are the subject of the later discussion, brief comments on their overall style and evolution are appropriate here.

The defining characteristic of the Second Empire style is the mansard roof (a variation of a hip roof), popularized by French architect François Mansart in the first half of the seventeenth century, after whom the element became known. The German-born, French-trained architect Detlef Lienau is often credited with introducing the mansard roof to the United States, as seen in his Hart M. Schiff House on Fifth Avenue in New York (1850-52).<sup>75</sup> Almost immediately, the mansard roof and its corresponding Parisian details became widespread (or, as one scholar vividly puts it, “broke out like a rash”) in elite residences throughout New York, Boston, and Newport, among other fashionable centers in mid-nineteenth-century America.

Most literature on American architecture cites Gilman and Bryant’s Boston City Hall (1862) as the first major public project to feature the Second Empire style. This claim, however, conspicuously ignores Renwick’s contribution to this narrative, which should consider the New York architect as the catalyst for the popularization of the Second Empire in public and institutional buildings. As noted above, Renwick’s first experimentation with this style appears in the Cruger Mansion (1853-54) as seen in the residence’s truncated mansard roof, which curiously caps the otherwise neoclassical home.

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<sup>75</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 18-19.

Although the building was completed in 1861, Renwick drew initial plans for Charity Hospital in 1858, immediately after returning from overseas.<sup>76</sup> The final design, a three-part complex of local gray stone, was modeled after two important Parisian buildings: Tuileries Palace (begun, 1564; demolished, 1883; fig. 39) and aforementioned Lariboisière Hospital (1846-53), both of which Renwick probably saw while in the French capital. The design and conception of Charity Hospital drastically exceeded its utility, as indicated by the response of the institution's Board of Governors: "[The hospital's] truly magnificent structure presents the appearance of a stately palace. The scale upon which it is built is far beyond the requirements of the class of people that have heretofore occupied the Institution which it was built to replace."<sup>77</sup>

The version of the Second Empire exhibited at Charity Hospital, especially its steeply pitched, squat mansard roof and sterile surface treatment, compares unsuccessfully in terms of embellishment to Renwick's next essay in the Parisian style. In 1859, Renwick earned the commission to design a gallery "Dedicated to Art" from William W. Corcoran, a wealthy banker, philanthropist, and major mover in the social, political, and art scene of mid-nineteenth-century Washington, D.C. (fig. 40) Corcoran intended his gallery, which sits at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Seventeenth Street, to house his personal art collection and be open to the American public, a concept that properly earned the building the designation as the "American Louvre" by a contemporary senator.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Rattner, "James Renwick, Jr., 544-45.

<sup>77</sup> Rosalie Thorne McKenna, "James Renwick, Jr. and the Second Empire Style in the United States," *Magazine of Art* 44 (March 1951): 100.

<sup>78</sup> This designation was offered by Senator Charles Sumner during the opening ceremony of the gallery. See William Wilson Corcoran, *A Grandfather's Legacy; Containing a Sketch of His Life...* (Washington, D.C.: Henry Polkinhorn, 1879), 536.

Renwick's design for the Corcoran Gallery, whose construction was not completed until after the Civil War,<sup>79</sup> was noted for its "Roman [design] as modified by the French architects in stories high and capped by a central curved dome on top of which was a guard-rail of cast zinc fleurs-de-lis."<sup>80</sup> The gallery's extravagant ornamentation, including extensive polychromy (of Belleville freestone), explicit references to its patron and function, and statues of major figures in the history of art executed by Moses Ezekiel (installed in 1884), embellish its essentially simple composition and plan. McKenna, whose article on Renwick's Second Empire designs remains the only dedicated treatment of this aspect of the architect's career, is somewhat critical of the gallery: "There may have been a slight kinship with the Louvre of the Hôtel de Ville, but the building is more a pastiche of French and Italian vocabularies, significant because of its early date [in Renwick's essays on the Second Empire]."<sup>81</sup>

Renwick's first two experimentations in the Second Empire style—Charity Hospital and the Corcoran Gallery—represent opposite ends of the spectrum defining the first phase of his Parisian-inspired designs. The austere and superficial composition of Charity Hospital opposes the Corcoran's luxurious and seemingly applied decoration. In the early 1860s, however, Renwick initiated his most mature essay in the Second Empire style, the main academic building for Vassar College (figs. 41, 42). As noted above, along with the Smithsonian, Vassar College represents the only building in Renwick's

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<sup>79</sup> Construction on the Corcoran Gallery began in 1859. In 1861, nearing completion, the building was seized by the United States Government and used as the Department of the Quartermaster General during the Civil War. In 1869, following the war, the gallery was given back to Corcoran, and converted back to its intended function according to Renwick's original designs. It was completed in 1871 and opened to the public in 1874.

<sup>80</sup> McKenna, "Second Empire," 99-100. Quoted from a contemporary magazine, which the author fails to cite.

<sup>81</sup> McKenna, "Second Empire," 100.

corpus that has attracted monographic study, although it admittedly has not received nearly as much recognition as the architect's Romanesque Revival masterpiece.<sup>82</sup>

Renwick's original presentation drawing of Vassar College featured a monumental complex which, if executed, would have rivaled any of the works of Mansart, Visconti, or Lefuel that served as models for America's own Second Empire designs. The building as constructed, however, retains a certain stateliness and elegance found in neither Charity Hospital nor the Corcoran Gallery. It is clear that by 1860 Renwick had fully internalized the architectural tenets of the Second Empire style that he encountered during his trip to Paris in the 1850s. Thus, Vassar College combines the composition unity of Charity Hospital with the attentiveness to detail as seen at the Corcoran Gallery into one of the most sophisticated monuments of the Second Empire in America; its paradigmatic value, indeed, equals that of Grace Church or the Smithsonian Institution.

The three projects surveyed here represent the first phase of Renwick's Second Empire designs, the totality of which can be categorized into two halves, separated by the years of the Civil War. Interestingly, of Renwick's Second Empire monuments that functioned for the longest time, all are from his antebellum period—Charity Hospital, the Corcoran Gallery, and Vassar College (only the latter has maintained its original function continuously).<sup>83</sup> The most refined of Renwick's designs showing sensibility with modern

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<sup>82</sup> The most thorough study of Renwick's work at Vassar College is still Rosalie Thorne McKenna's 1949 master's thesis, "A Study of the Architecture of the Main Building and Landscaping of Vassar College, 1860-1870," which the author completed while a student at Vassar. While containing a good discussion on Matthew Vassar's patronage of the college, its design history, and its intended landscape (a discussion of the latter of which constitutes the entire second half of the thesis), the study is colored by an architectural and academic admiration for Vassar College, which, at times, unfortunately affects its intentions of objectivity.

<sup>83</sup> McKenna was the first to point out this pattern. However, she condenses Renwick's Second Empire production to only six buildings—three prewar and three postwar. In doing so, she neglects

French taste, however, was Albemarle Hotel in New York (1860; demolished; fig. 43), which drastically differs from the monumental designs discussed above.

The Albemarle Hotel, commissioned by T. S. Kinney, exhibits striking similarities with Hausmann's apartment buildings of Second Empire Paris. The building was situated around Madison Square, which was one of the most upscale residential neighborhoods in late-nineteenth-century New York; the construction of Renwick's Albemarle Hotel and William Washburn's Fifth Avenue Hotel (1857) established the area as a fashionable residential neighborhood.<sup>84</sup> That Renwick reserved his most Parisian design for the stylish area is significant, for it implies the architect understood the appropriateness of style as it relates to a building's function and surroundings.

In the design of the Albemarle Hotel, Renwick rounded the corner of the building, thus suggesting a continuous facade between Twenty-fourth Street and Broadway. The hotel's varied fenestration, furthermore, undermines any focal point to the facades; Renwick's use of pedimented windows one bay from both the corner and the edge of the adjacent building frames the entire structure and differentiates it from its surroundings. The gracefulness and integrity of Albemarle Hotel corroborates Schuyler's review of this section of Broadway, which featured "a combination of marble palaces rarely seen, and the result is consequently splendid, without any individual building claiming especial architectural merit."<sup>85</sup>

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Renwick's other important essays in the style and their individual details, including the Cruger Mansion and the Albemarle Hotel. The Albemarle, in fact, does not survive, thus marking an exception to her contention that Renwick's prewar Second Empire designs survive because they are "better buildings" than their postwar counterparts. It is also important to note that at the time of the publication of McKenna's article, Charity Hospital was still in use (the institution closed in 1957, six years after McKenna's article).

<sup>84</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 518-21.

<sup>85</sup> Montgomery Schuyler, "Buildings on Broadway," *New York World*, 24 Sept. 1871, 3.

One scholar has deemed Renwick's later Second Empire designs, all of which were designed at points between 1867 and 1869, as the architect's "postwar atrocities";<sup>86</sup> their eccentricities in design and composition, indeed, reflect the conspicuous climate characterizing American culture from the 1860s to the early 1880s. Perfectly representing the trend was the competition and building history of the Old Post Office in New York, beginning in 1867. Renwick and his partner, Joseph Sands, were "selected" among five winners to collaborate on the design of the new structure, which would be built on the southern tip of City Hall Park at Park Row and Broadway (fig. 44).<sup>87</sup>

It is impossible to ascertain Renwick's specific contribution to the design collaboration, the result of which was, in fact, modified by Alfred B. Mullett, who is credited as architect for the actual building. The project's final rendition, however, symbolized the architectural corpulence of later Second Empire designs in America; indeed, as one anonymous critic wrote, the Post Office offered a warning that New York architects, including Renwick himself, failed to heed:

We must discard the City Hall and the grounds about it [which included the Post Office] as our standard of magnificence, and indulge ourselves in a breadth of space and a height and dignity of architectural composition which may appear absurd and extravagant to uncultivated eyes.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> McKenna, "Second Empire," 101.

<sup>87</sup> The competition history for the Post Office is rather unique. Although the 52 design entries were criticized by the *Times* as "wanting in originality and appositeness," five firms were awarded the commission—John Correja, Richard Morris Hunt, Napoleon LeBrun, Schulze and Schoen, and Renwick and Sands. The awkward amalgamation of architects, headed by Hunt, was further criticized by the press; even before final designs were published, an article in the *New York Daily Tribune* wrote, "The new Post-Office is to add another monster of ugliness to those we already have, and, what is worse, it has chosen at the same time the most inconvenient and the most conspicuous place in the whole city to air its ugliness in. Situated at the end of City Hall Park, it will be a boil on the end of a man's nose." See Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 133-38 for a good architectural history of the New York Post Office.

<sup>88</sup> Richard Morris Hunt, *Designs for the Gateways of the Southern Entrances to The Central Park* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1866), 20-21.

This awareness of the implications of the Second Empire style will emerge as a critical theme in a later discussion of this dissertation.

While collaborating with his colleagues on the Post Office, Renwick began to design Booth Theater, on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Twenty-third Street (figs. 45, 46).<sup>89</sup> In opposition to McKenna's critique of the sensibilities of Renwick's postwar Second Empire designs, Booth Theater exhibited an exquisite, yet still tasteful rendition of the Parisian style, which ultimately prompted the playhouse's immediate popularity within the artistic crowd of New York.<sup>90</sup> Like the Corcoran Gallery, Booth Theater was intended as a symbol of the "True, the Beautiful and Good" in Art, according to a letter written by Edwin Booth, the famous Shakespearean and patron of the theater.<sup>91</sup>

Booth Theater included both an architecturally restrained commercial building facing Sixth Avenue and the main theater building on Twenty-third Street (the construction of which exceeded one million dollars).<sup>92</sup> Like the plays for which the theater was built, Renwick's design was the subject of critiques and reviews from a myriad of sources; importantly, however, the building's contribution to theater architecture in New York and its overall uniqueness in conception were duly noted in contemporary writings. Schuyler described Booth Theater as "unquestionably one of the handsomest [theaters]—and if we consider the difficulties of the case—one of the most

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<sup>89</sup> For a comprehensive bibliography of Booth Theater, including contemporary and modern descriptions, see Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 665 n. 16.

<sup>90</sup> In his review, Schuyler noted that for the opening performance of *Romeo and Juliet* the theater was "well filled." He added, "I'm glad of this and hope it may last, for it this theater goes on as it has begun, it will be a humanizing and educating influence."

The institution, because of the fickle economy of the 1870s, however, did not continue as Schuyler had hoped as it went through a series of direction changes and renovations, and ultimately was converted to a department store in 1883; most of its interior furniture was given to New Park Theater.

<sup>91</sup> Otis Skinner, *The Last Tragedian: Booth Tells His Own Story* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1939), 149.

<sup>92</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 665.

skillful and ingenious ever erected in this city.”<sup>93</sup> In 1881, Schuyler reiterated this praise when he stated that the theater was “one of the most carefully studied and effective pieces of Renaissance [architecture] in New York.”<sup>94</sup> Even George Templeton Strong, who seemed to criticize any endeavor of the Renwick family, praised the theater as a “very handsome building, within and without.”<sup>95</sup>

Although considered one of the “architectural jewels”<sup>96</sup> and “artistic gems”<sup>97</sup> of New York, Booth Theater ignited certain negative assessments by theatergoers and critics alike. First, the composition of the theater complex was questioned by Schuyler as an “incoherent jumble of openings of all sizes and shapes, thrown together as if by accident, and in themselves of the most uncouth and ungainly forms.”<sup>98</sup> While Renwick employed the most modern and fashionable architectural idiom for his design of this new institution, its greater implications, according to Schuyler, symbolized a disturbing trend in architecture:

[...] it is obviously absurd that an American theater should be covered with antiquities which have no relation to its purpose, and no meaning to us to-day from whom it is built. [...] Aesthetic scholarship is good, excellent of execution is good, but they are only helps to a real artist to express what is within himself. If he have no idea of his own to realize, it does not help him nor us to galvanize the corpses of a bygone world. [...] Why paint Juno and Minerva on our walls, when we no longer know or care what they were, or what they symbolized? [...] We conclude then that though the new theater is a splendid triumph of upholstery and mechanical contrivance, it is not, in any degree a work of art.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Montgomery Schuyler, “Opening of Booth’s Theater,” *New York World*, 4 Feb. 1869, 5.

<sup>94</sup> Montgomery Schuyler, “Recent Building in New York—I,” *American Architecture and Building News* 9, April 9, 1881, 176-77.

<sup>95</sup> Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds., *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, vol. 4, *Post-War Years, 1865-1875* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1952), 241.

<sup>96</sup> “New York Illustrated—No. 2,” *Appletons’ Journal* 1, 12 June 1869, 6.

<sup>97</sup> John W. Kennion, *The Architects’ and Builders’ Guide*, vol. 2 (New York: Fitzpatrick and Hunter, 1868), 21.

<sup>98</sup> Schuyler, “Buildings on Broadway.”

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

Despite Schuyler's convictions, Booth Theater presents a perfect paradigm in the exploitation of the Second Empire for urban monuments of social and artistic display. One can compare Renwick's theater to the Palais Garnier, Napoleon III's grand opera house, finished in 1875. While stylistically different, both buildings provide places of performance, in which the actors and musicians played equally important roles as the patrons and spectators. Additionally, both represent the permanence of these performances within their respective public spheres. Perhaps describing Renwick's exterior as a "costume, which revealed neither structure nor interior arrangement,"<sup>100</sup> then, is a most fitting legacy to one of the architect's most popular designs.

As Booth Theater was being finalized, Renwick began construction on the Young Men's Christian Association Headquarters, which comprises the architect's final major Second Empire design (figs. 47, 48). Functionally, the YMCA combined elements from the various institutions that patronized Renwick in the previous decades. The unique program of the YMCA, which Renwick would skillfully incorporate in his design, was summarized nicely in the annual report of the YMCA in the year of constructing its new urban headquarters: "The edifice which was to rise upon that spot was not an eleemosynary institution; it was not a charity, not a hospital, not a college, not a church, and yet it combined almost all the ideas which were represented by such buildings."<sup>101</sup>

The history of the YMCA possesses its own bibliography and cannot be discussed in any length here. The design of the YMCA headquarters, however, attests to Renwick's acceptance of urban monumentality and expressivity evident in the architectural landscape of New York in the 1870s and 1880s. The overall design of the YMCA, while

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<sup>100</sup> Cantor, 150.

<sup>101</sup> "Historical Sketch of the Building of the Association," in *Annual Report of the Young Men's Christian Association of the City of New York* (New York, 1870), 56.

considered part of Renwick's experimentation with the Second Empire, is often noted for its amalgamation of French, Victorian, and Italian Renaissance vocabulary. The headquarters' unorthodox exterior foreshadowed its extravagant interiors, which, as noted above, featured a multitude of spaces and functionality. Some of the spaces included reading rooms and parlors, a gymnasium, bowling alley, baths, artist studios, concert hall, and art gallery. Its largest rooms included a two-story lecture hall capable of holding between 1,575 and 1,650 people, and a three-story library capable of housing 12,000 volumes.<sup>102</sup>

As will be discussed more thoroughly later in this study, Renwick ceased to embrace the Second Empire as the defining idiom for his architecture. Throughout his eleven-year experimentation with the Parisian style, Renwick continuously vacillated between a pure and restrained rendition and an extravagant and, perhaps, pretentious version of the fashionable style. Lest historical details overshadow greater implications, it is important to reiterate that, while the Second Empire became the most widespread style in the United States from the mid-1850s to the 1870s, and directed the design of a variety of building types, Renwick's early introduction of and contributions to this significant trend must be emphasized. Indeed, this assessment only highlights the purpose of this survey that Renwick's professional production presents a persona far more complicated than merely an untrained and derivative Gothic Revivalist.

### ***St. Patrick's Cathedral: New York City's Catholic Icon***

Renwick's adoption of the architectural eclecticism of the Middle Ages, which indeed is the defining characteristic of his early career, found its greatest culmination in

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<sup>102</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 228-29.

his design for St. Patrick's Cathedral (1858-79; figs. 49, 50), home of the Roman Catholic diocese of New York City.<sup>103</sup> Along with the Smithsonian Institution Building, St. Patrick's is undoubtedly Renwick's most famous and recognizable design, especially to the causal audience. Furthermore, the architecture of the cathedral confirmed that Renwick's Gothic Revival designs could exist independently from the Ecclesiology Movement in America. While the cathedral's location in midtown Manhattan offers the cathedral a prominent position among New York's most architecturally rich areas, it is important to remember that the site at the time of construction was much less populated than its current form. In fact, an early history of the cathedral described the location "as much as wilderness as the site of the old St. Patrick's was in 1808."<sup>104</sup>

The selection of Renwick as architect for the Catholic cathedral is somewhat curious since, despite his reputation at this point in his career, almost all of his previous church designs were for Protestant denominations and parishes. In 1853, Renwick had designed St. Stephen's Church on Twenty-third Street between Lexington and Third Avenue for New York's wealthiest Catholic parish (fig. 51). The church, which features a German Romanesque (or, Rundbogenstil), brownstone exterior, however, was not an appropriate precedent for the cathedral of New York's Catholic community, which accounted for nearly half of New York City's population.<sup>105</sup> For St. Patrick's Cathedral, Renwick invented an idealized Decorated Gothic cathedral, drawing from French, German, and English precedents, thus culminating his earlier experimentation with later

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<sup>103</sup> For a comprehensive bibliography of contemporary and modern accounts of St. Patrick's, see Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 314 n. 91.

<sup>104</sup> Rev. John M. Farley, D.D., *History of St. Patrick's Cathedral* (New York: Society for the Propagation of the Faith, 1908), 127. Indeed, directly across from St. Patrick's main facade is the famous Atlas statue and Rockefeller Center, among New York City's most popular attractions for locals and visitors, alike. Interestingly, Bishop Hughes, the main patron of St. Patrick's correctly envisioned that the location of the cathedral would someday be "the heart of the city."

<sup>105</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 314.

medieval forms.<sup>106</sup> Although arguably the “high point of the early school of Victorian archaeological Gothic”<sup>107</sup> and Renwick’s most advanced accomplishment in the Gothic Revival, the design of St. Patrick’s Cathedral was anachronistic both in architectural fashion and in comparison to the architect’s other projects at this point in his career. Nonetheless, during construction, the cathedral was widely praised as “perhaps the most gorgeous ecclesiastical edifice on this continent.”<sup>108</sup>

Although Renwick had complete control of the design, including all interior furnishings and chapels, as well as later additions to the church, one modern scholar has described St. Patrick’s Cathedral as “the greatest disappointment of [Renwick’s] professional career,” calling the completed building “a parody of his original concept.”<sup>109</sup> She cites the elimination of the massive crossing tower in favor of a two-tower facade and the use of plaster and wood-lathe nave vaults instead of the proposed masonry elements, thereby rendering useless the buttresses, which were completed before the change in materials.<sup>110</sup> It is certainly valid that these design modifications (implemented for economic reasons) emphatically changed the overall composition and effect of the urban cathedral and brought into question the “truthfulness” of its structure in a certain Ruskinian mode; however, the monumental cathedral, which took over two decades to complete (including the additions of the archbishop’s residence and rectory), represents

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<sup>106</sup> As Rattner, “James Renwick, Jr.,” 545 notes, Renwick cited the cathedrals of Reims, Amiens, and Cologne as models for the exterior, and the cathedrals of Yorkminster, Exeter, and Westminster for the interior.

<sup>107</sup> Cantor, 113. While his observation is noteworthy, albeit somewhat loaded, Cantor fails to recognize the English and German elements of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, calling it a “puristic French Gothic structure.” Loth and Sadler, Jr. and others, acknowledge as the primary source St. Clotilde, a major Gothic Revival church in Paris, begun in 1846 by the architect F. C. Gau. According to these authors, St. Clotilde was a popular model for Catholic churches in America. See Loth and Sadler, Jr., 66.

<sup>108</sup> “An Architectural Ramble,” *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* 6 (1870): 1. Although written anonymously, this article was probably authored by architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler.

<sup>109</sup> Rattner, “James Renwick, Jr.,” 544-45.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 545.

the first Gothic Revival project comparable to its contemporaneous counterparts in Europe and, in vision and intent, to the great cathedrals of the Middle Ages.<sup>111</sup>

St. Patrick's Cathedral evoked a variety of responses throughout its construction and after its completion. Contemporary observers marveled at the scale of the project and its Catholic connotations, unequivocally comparing it with its Old World counterparts. As Stern, Mellins, and Fishman note, however, the cathedral provided philosophical fodder for New York's Protestant community. For example, recalling similar arguments of his Reformation predecessors, journalist Clarence Cook scolded Renwick and his Catholic patrons: "Certainly as matters stand the Roman cathedral is a reproach to Protestant bodies. For the Roman cathedral will be built not of the superfluity of wealth, but for the most part out of the offerings of poverty."<sup>112</sup>

Critics also denounced design details, thus reflecting the aforementioned modern claim that the cathedral represents Renwick's most disappointing project. For example, the "anonymous" author cited above (again, probably Schuyler) bemoaned the "unnecessary projections" of the side buttresses, which apparently prevented a proper view of the side elevations.<sup>113</sup> The critic continues by noting, "There is consequently no point of view from which a spectator can take in at a glance the detached beauties of any two fronts together." Although the buttresses were certainly a point of contention for many, one must also consider that, while not as built up as today, the cathedral's urban setting prevented a panoramic presentation of the monument.

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<sup>111</sup> Loth and Sadler, Jr., 67.

<sup>112</sup> "A Protestant Cathedral," *New York World*, 9 Nov. 1873, 4.

<sup>113</sup> "Historical Sketch of the Building of the Association," 56.

A more particular review, furthermore, appeared in an 1878 editorial in the *New York Daily Tribune*, which referred specifically to the materiality and execution of details throughout the cathedral:

The exterior is unfortunately heavy, ill-digested, and made ineffective by the multiplication of petty parts [...] The materials of which the Cathedral is built is a very mistaken one to have employed for a style that depends so much as this on sculpture, and tracery, and delicate mouldings. This so-called marble is really not a marble at all, but only a very coarse limestone, and it utterly refuses to be carved or moulded with delicacy or take kindly to shadow.<sup>114</sup>

Indeed, these critiques echo certain modern observations. In addition to one scholar's judgment cited above, another twentieth-century critic has described St. Patrick's as "rather stuffy and dry" and indication that "the Gothic Revival [has] grown too self-assured, too successful, too proud to prove itself."<sup>115</sup>

The construction of St. Patrick's Cathedral offered New York's Catholic community a level of prestige equal to their growing numbers, thereby resulting in an explosion of Catholic architectural patronage throughout the city. Renwick, indeed, benefitted further from this increase; in 1869, his firm was commissioned to build a Catholic Male Asylum and Orphanage, just north of St. Patrick's Cathedral (fig. 52). The typical Gothic Revival structure was praised as "one of the most perfect and satisfactory buildings in this style of architecture that has ever been erected in New York" and "a simple but charming Gothic edifice."<sup>116</sup>

### ***After St. Patrick's: Eclecticism in Church Design***

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<sup>114</sup> "The New St. Patrick's," *New York Daily Tribune*, 23 Oct. 1878, 5.

<sup>115</sup> Goldberger, 163.

<sup>116</sup> "An Architectural Ramble," 1-2 and Montgomery Schuyler, "Our City Architecture," *New York World*, 1 Oct. 1871, 6-7.

Almost all of Renwick's church designs after St. Patrick's feature less academic designs and even more experimentation with and juxtaposition of historic vocabularies. The Church of the Covenant (1863-65; fig. 53), built for a newly founded liberal branch of Presbyterians, presents a gable-roofed, Romanesque building with subtle Gothic details and a prominent tower of unusual proportion. The overall composition of the Church of the Covenant, furthermore, foreshadows the heavily massed churches that would populate New York City and other major urban centers in the next decade and after.

In direct contrast to the picturesque Church of the Covenant is St. Ann's Episcopal Church in Brooklyn Heights (1867-69; fig. 54).<sup>117</sup> St. Ann's, described as "combining Gothic Revival correctness with Ruskinian passion," is Renwick's most definitive essay in this mode of High Victorian Gothic popular in England in the mid- to late-nineteenth century.<sup>118</sup> The interior boasted iron columns with naturalistic capitals, while the exterior, the building's most stunning aspect, featured a dynamic display of polychromy, verticality, and volume. One modern scholar, however, has criticized the building's bulk and its detraction from the church's overall liveliness.<sup>119</sup> It appears that Renwick was dealing with the same problems he encountered with Free Academy concerning the restraints of the urban plot on which the structure was constructed.

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<sup>117</sup> For contemporary descriptions of the church, see "Our Architectural Progress," *New York Times*, 5 April 1868, 3; "New Churches in Brooklyn," *New York Times*, 9 August 1869, 8; "St. Ann's Church," *New York Times*, 21 Oct. 1869, 2.

This church must not be confused with St. Ann and the Holy Trinity designed by Minard LaFever from 1844 to 1848 also in the Brooklyn Heights neighborhood. The parish of the Holy Trinity that occupied the building closed in 1957 and the parish of St. Ann (for whom Renwick's church was designed) moved into LaFever's church in 1969. Renwick's building is now part of the campus of the Packer Collegiate Institute. Also interesting is the fact that the parish itself was named after Ann Ayscough Sands (1761-1851), the wife of Joshua Sands and patron of the original church.

<sup>118</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 875.

<sup>119</sup> Rattner, "James Renwick, Jr.," 546.

Along with St. Patrick's Cathedral, Renwick's most monumental church design was St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church on Madison Avenue and Forty-fourth Street (1872-76, fig. 55).<sup>120</sup> St. Bartholomew's is the most faithful example in Renwick's corpus of the architect's engagement with the style of Tuscan/Lombard Romanesque. Indeed, many praised the church for the luxuriance afforded by the wealth of its congregation—it became known as the “Vanderbilt church” after its most prominent benefactor.<sup>121</sup> The eclecticism and lavishness made St. Bartholomew's the most popular Episcopalian place of worship in New York and was the only representative of Renwick's firm at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876.<sup>122</sup> Renwick's monumental design remained untouched until 1902 when Stanford White added an entrance featuring portals inspired by those of the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard. The central, south, and north bronze doors were sculpted in the workshops of Daniel Chester French, Herbert Adams, and Philip Mertiny, respectively. In 1916, Bertram Goodhue, who began his career as an apprentice in Renwick's firm, designed the new church in a Byzantine Revival mode; while Stanford White's portals were reused in Goodhue's design, no element of Renwick's structure was kept.

Perhaps Renwick's most accomplished and well-received design among contemporary and modern observers alike is All Saints' Roman Catholic Church on Madison Avenue and One-hundred Twenty-ninth Street (fig. 56).<sup>123</sup> Unfortunately, because of financially related delays, the church and rectory were not completed until

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<sup>120</sup> For a list of contemporary sources on St. Bartholomew's, see Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 297 n. 38.

<sup>121</sup> Rattner, “James Renwick, Jr.,” 545; Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 297.

<sup>122</sup> Rattner, “James Renwick, Jr.,” 545.

<sup>123</sup> Montgomery Schuyler, “Italian Gothic in New York,” *Architectural Record* 26 (July 1909): 47-48; Humphrey, 73-75, plate 28.

1894 from designs Renwick made in 1875 and later refined by his nephew, William W. Renwick.<sup>124</sup> All Saints' Church has been described a more graceful version of St. Ann's Church, in the former's more delicate materiality and execution of detail. The rectory, furthermore, presents another version of Renwick's interpretation of Ruskin's Victorian Gothic.<sup>125</sup>

### *Country Cottages and Picturesque Palaces*

In addition to the Renwick House and the Cruger Mansion, Renwick continued to design domestic buildings throughout his career, many of which were located outside of metropolitan New York. Indeed, as the newly discovered virtues of suburban living contrasted sharply and consciously with the grind of working and residing in Manhattan, so Renwick's country designs antithesized his more monumental and academic works in the urban center. These designs, which constitute another forgotten aspect of the architect's career, featured a variety of form and style and often were individualized according to client, site, and environment.<sup>126</sup> Of those whose attribution to Renwick is certain, a few are worthy of consideration.

In the early 1850s, Renwick designed two Gothic Revival country houses: Martinstow, a bucolic cottage for Peter Ames in West Haven, Connecticut (1851; fig. 57) and Longstreet Castle, a massive twenty-four-room estate for clothing merchant Col. Cornelius Tyler Longstreet in Syracuse, New York (1852-55; demolished, 1953; fig. 58). Martinstow exhibited Renwick's picturesque sensibilities through its asymmetrical composition, pointed detailing, and intimate architectural elements. Longstreet Castle, on

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<sup>124</sup> Rattner, "James Renwick, Jr.," 546; Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 811.

<sup>125</sup> "All Saints' Church Rectory, One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, New York," *Building* 10 (Jan. 1889): 21, plate.

<sup>126</sup> Rattner, "James Renwick, Jr.," 547.

the other hand, was modeled after a Norman English castle (supposedly built by the ancestors of the patron's wife) and featured an extravagant collection of furniture and adjacent structures (one of which was built only to house a bowling alley).<sup>127</sup> Only twelve years after its completion, Longstreet Castle was sold to another wealthy local after the original owner complained of the home's leaky roofs, poor lighting, and isolated location.<sup>128</sup>

Beginning in the early 1860s, Renwick and his firm received further commissions for country and suburban estates, many of which were on a scale equal to more famous summer "cottages" of the northeastern elite. During this period, Renwick was among the first architects to build in Riverdale, New York, a newly established elite suburb on the Hudson River.<sup>129</sup> In 1863, he designed Riverdale Presbyterian Church, a typical Gothic Revival parish church, two blocks from Upjohn's Christ Church of 1865.<sup>130</sup> In the same year, Renwick designed a country estate, including a residence and gatehouse, in Riverdale for William Early Dodge, Jr., a wealthy merchant and relative of a copper-mining magnate.<sup>131</sup> The home, called Greyston after its gray granite stone, presents a

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid; Peter B. Volmes, ed., *Mantled in Norman garb the Castle stands...* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Journalism Alumni Association, 1953). The home was built of brick, which was sanded to resemble gray stone. Henry C. Allewelt and Sons of Syracuse designed the interior decorations, which were praised as incredibly lavish and extravagant.

<sup>128</sup> Col. Longstreet sold the home to Alfonso Chester Yates in 1867 for \$30,000 (the home was then known as Yates Castle). In 1905, Syracuse University purchased the castle and used it as a classroom building until its demolition in 1953.

<sup>129</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 968. The history of Riverdale (which, today, is part of the Bronx) represents an important chapter in the development of the New York suburb. In 1852, Riverdale was created when five businessmen bought 500 acres of land to develop an ideal residential suburb following the completion of the Hudson River Railroad. Later, in 1874, F. L. Olmsted proposed a plan to maintain the area's picturesque character, which saved the mostly undeveloped land from demolition to extend Manhattan's grid plan.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.; Barbaralee Diamonstein, *The Landmarks of New York II* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 142.

<sup>131</sup> William E. Dodge, Jr. and Renwick had a strong professional relationship. Dodge, Jr. helped Renwick earn the commission for the Riverdale Presbyterian Church, of which Dodge was a founder. In 1869, Dodge, Jr. (as head of the building committee) hired Renwick to design the New York City headquarters of the Young Men's Christian Association (William E. Dodge, Sr. was a founder of the

typical Downingesque villa, albeit much more tightly composed than Martinstow (figs. 59, 60). Its design combined Tudor ornamentation with picturesque sensibility; its location and verandas provided commanding views of the Hudson River. The original asymmetry of the house, as well as some of the Gothic detailing, cannot be fully appreciated due to later additions to the building.<sup>132</sup> Despite the building's modifications, its reverence towards the English countryside tradition is thoroughly apparent in its overall composition and represents one of Renwick's most pastoral designs.

Renwick's most unique residential project, and his only essay in the Queen Anne style, was his design for the country estate of Almy and Frederick Gallatin. The Gallatins were Renwick's closest friends and provided the architect unlimited resources to construct their East Hampton estate, which they called Breezy Lawn, begun in 1877 (figs. 61, 62, 63).<sup>133</sup> For their summer home, the Gallatins chose East Hampton, Long Island as the location, with exhibited none of the "rigid social protocol of Newport or Tuxedo Park" and later became a place of recreation and relaxation for Renwick himself.<sup>134</sup> The villa, which was relatively small according to the conventions of elite retreats, was framed in wood and decorated with painted shingles. Renwick's characteristic eclecticism emerges in the discordant elements, which provide a jarring variety to the otherwise simple Shingle style home.

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association). Finally, in 1870 Renwick designed the Manhattan residence of Dodge, Jr.'s cousin, D. Willis James.

<sup>132</sup> In 1892, Renwick's firm enlarged the residence; later additions were made throughout the twentieth century. The villa stayed within the Dodge family until 1961 when it was given to Columbia University Teacher's College and used as a conference center. In 1980, it became a Buddhist retreat until returning to private hands in 1988, where it remains today.

The gatehouse was property of the Dodge family until 1977 when the land was subdivided and sold to various private residences. The structure itself is now owned by the Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation, who gained the property in 1999.

<sup>133</sup> Robert B. Mackay, Anthony K. Baker, and Carol A. Traynor, eds., *Long Island Country Houses and Their Architects, 1860-1940* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1997), 373.

<sup>134</sup> Rattner, "James Renwick, Jr.," 547, Mackay, Baker, and Traynor, eds., 373.

The massive turrets and awkward articulation of the mansard roof and crest rail appear as architectural leftovers from Renwick's experience in Washington and New York, where such variety was ubiquitous. It is interesting that in one of the more polished drawings for Breezy Lawn, as shown in figure **Figure 63**, Renwick seemed to have added these elements afterwards as they are drawn in pencil, rather than the ink of the rest of the drawing. While Rattner suggests that the stylistic eclecticism of the house was a direct reference to the Swiss and French ancestry of Frederick and Almy, respectively, the playfulness with which Renwick treated the design attests to the actual function of the estate and a reflection of the relaxed nature of its setting.

### ***Commercial Palaces and Iron Experimentation***

Whereas Renwick's suburban and country estates exhibit the architect at his most informal, spontaneous, and flexible, his commercial designs involve a slightly more restrained approach for a more conservative clientele. Evidence for these buildings, most of which date to the 1870s and later, is extremely scarce and few have survived the rapid evolution of New York's commercial climate; therefore, in modern scholarship there has been little discussion of these buildings and their place in Renwick's career.

Renwick's contribution to the commercial landscape of New York is difficult to reconstruct in its entirety; however, the economic circumstances surrounding the buildings' patronage can be understood in order to contextualize the sudden explosion of commercial construction in the architect's career. While Jacksonian economic policies of the 1850s certainly ignited a high degree of economic prosperity in America, it was not until the post-Civil War period that the economies, industries, and wealth of major urban centers flourished. New York, as today, became the country's commercial and financial

capital, thus evolving into the metropolitan mecca of its counterparts, both at home and abroad.<sup>135</sup>

Renwick's architectural production naturally reflected the economic circumstances of the areas in which he worked. Significantly, the 1860s were perhaps his most prolific period, during which his designs dealt with burgeoning sectors on society, primarily in New York. Of particular importance were his commercial buildings, which constitute the most literal manifestation of the post-war economic boom. It is interesting to note, moreover, that some of Renwick's commercial buildings (or, at least, those for which we have sufficient documentation) were, in fact, commissioned during the Depression of 1873-79. It seems, however, that architectural patronage in New York and other urban centers was unaffected by this depression; it may be possible, then, to claim that building activity actually increased due to the growing gap between the rich and the poor. Nonetheless, the economic circumstances of post-war New York, which are inherently linked to the Gilded Age, are indeed the prime factor in the introduction of commercial designs in Renwick's architectural corpus.

In his commercial designs, Renwick adopted newer systems of structural support related to the advancement of the modern office building in New York, particularly the use of cast iron. The Smithsonian Institution Building, in fact, is the first known use of a brick-arch, iron-beam floor in America, thus crediting Renwick with an important forerunner in iron construction.<sup>136</sup> Like most of his colleagues, Renwick probably became aware of the structural and ornamental virtues of iron construction through its

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<sup>135</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 13-16 contains invaluable contemporary commentaries on the rise of New York's economic status. The authors later state that "in 1865 New York was growing at a faster rate than any other major city in the world."

<sup>136</sup> Sarah Bradford Landau and Carl W. Condit, *Rise of the New York Skyscraper, 1865-1913* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 22.

exploitation in the artistic and industrial expositions of Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, particularly The Great Exhibition of 1851 in London and the aforementioned Exposition Universelle of 1855 in Paris.

New York architects, while still attempting to maintain a balance between historic influence and technological innovation, began to push the limits of structure through the use of iron as building material. One of the primary advantages of iron, which led to its widespread use in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, was its fireproof capability. Among the most ubiquitous of these buildings were banks, which littered the architectural fabric of downtown New York.<sup>137</sup> As a 1855 article on contemporary bank architecture duly noted, “The best fire-proof buildings in this country are constructed wholly of iron, or of brick or stone, with iron beams and columns, properly framed and held together by rods built into the walls.”<sup>138</sup>

In their study of the evolution of the skyscraper in New York, Landau and Condit cite Renwick’s Bank of the State of New York (1855-56; fig. 64) on William Street and Exchange Place as an early example of this new building type. For this building, Renwick designed a modern commercial palazzo (as these buildings were called at the time), faced in Westchester marble and featuring brick bearing walls. His extended tripartite elevation, furthermore, was revolutionary, for it indicated internal function and would become a paradigm that later architects would follow. Renwick skillfully took advantage of the bank’s fortuitous corner lot in sculpting his unique facade—a majority of banks, and other commercial buildings for that matter, exhibited only a single facade.<sup>139</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>137</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 448.

<sup>138</sup> “Bank Architecture in New-York,” *Bankers’ Magazine*, Feb. 1855, 582-83.

<sup>139</sup> “The New Banking House of the Bank of New York,” *New York Times*, 26 March 1858, 4: “[There] is no one banking-house in the whole city that can be taken as a perfect specimen of any particular

one contemporary writer praised Renwick's design: "The architect has arranged the windows in a very artistic manner, avoiding the mean appearance which some of the large buildings in the city present of innumerable small windows, separated by narrow piers [...]." <sup>140</sup> At the time, Renwick's Bank of the State of New York was certainly among the most modern monuments of business in New York.

The economic evolution of New York included the rapid rise of consumerism and new industrial innovations, which, in turn, required the creation of new building types, including department stores, office buildings, and showrooms. Renwick's contributions to this important trend were widely praised by architectural critics. For example, the architect's Wheeler and Wilson Office and Salesroom (1874) on Fourteenth Street presented a palatial place of business, despite being constructed at the peak of the Panic of 1873. An 1874 article in the *New York Daily Graphic* on the sewing machine manufacturer's new "industrial palace" idealistically imparts a certain existential virtue to the company's commission and Renwick's design:

The Aristocracy of Idleness in the Old World monopolizes the splendors of art. In the New World the artist and artisan clasp hands, and the Aristocracy of Industry claims and tributes of genius and wealth...But why such an expenditure of money on decoration? Why not give it to the poor when want presses so sorely? Answer: Charity is best dispensed as wages earned; far better than given as alms. Now that business is depressed, the wealthy might set the wheels of industry and commerce if they would pursue the improvements needed in all directions. The money which Wheeler & Wilson have thus expended is largely a gift to the public. The whole city is enriched by improvements that all enjoy...The business facilities of Paris cannot be compared to those of New York, and yet the former city is the cynosure of the world. <sup>141</sup>

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style in architecture, nor of construction, because there is not one that has the advantage of exhibiting more than two sides, and the greater number of these have but one front." Renwick emphasized the main façade, however, through the use of two entry stairs and the placement of a sculpted head of Mercury (the symbol of money-lending) above the main door.

<sup>140</sup> "Recent Bank Architecture in New-York," *Bankers' Magazine*, February 1856, 600.

<sup>141</sup> "Wheeler and Wilson's New Industrial Palace," *New York Daily Graphic*, 29 Dec. 1874, 427.

As this eloquent passage proves, like most of his designs, Renwick's Wheeler and Wilson's building served as a powerful symbol for ideas, philosophies, and cultural distinctions far beyond concerns of architectural structure, material, and composition.

Later in the decade, as the depression was beginning to wane, Renwick secured the opportunity to expand and redesign the New York Stock Exchange on Broad Street in lower Manhattan.<sup>142</sup> The first purpose-built home of the Exchange was designed by John Kellum, who merely presented a copy of his Ball, Black and Co. Store design for the financial institution's headquarters.<sup>143</sup> Kellum's design, however, established a Renaissance Revival idiom for the Exchange, with which Renwick would have to work for his later expansion and remodel. In 1879, when the Exchange sought to increase its trading space, Renwick replaced Kellum's reserved palazzo-like structure with an ostentatious and mannered mixture of late-Renaissance and Second Empire styling (fig. 65). The architect somewhat maintained the composition of Kellum's Broad Street façade and its classically pedimented entrance and partitioned levels. Montgomery Schuyler

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<sup>142</sup> In 1901, the New York Stock Exchange moved to their current location at 18 Broad Street (between Wall Street and Exchange) and selected the neoclassical design of George B. Post out of a competition of eight architects.

<sup>143</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 458. John Kellum was the most prolific nineteenth-century architect of cast-iron commercial buildings in New York City. He designed one of the first monumental department stores for A.T. Stewart and Co. (1862-70), located on Broadway next to Renwick's Grace Church. He is also noted for designing The Mutual Life Insurance Building (1863-65), the Alexander T. Stewart house (1864-69), and the New York County Courthouse (1862-76, finished by Leopold Eidlitz), the latter of which became known as the "Tweed Courthouse" for its affiliation with the corrupt political bosses of Tammany Hall.

Furthermore, Kellum's Ball, Black and Co. Store, on which his Stock Exchange was based, was in fact widely praised by critics. An article in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* in 1860 described the design as "among the most massive and richly artistic buildings" and believed "no other building in the whole length of Broadway to equal it." See "Ball, Black and Co.'s New Marble Store," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 6 Oct. 1860, 313. See also Winston Weisman, "Commercial Palaces of New York, 1845-1875," *The Art Bulletin* 36 (1954): 295-96.

It should also be noted that Cantor (163; Plate XXIXb), in his thesis of 1967, incorrectly attributes the first exchange building to Griffith Thomas. Nowhere else does this misattribution appear.

duly noted the restrictions of the existing site and building, as well as Renwick's manipulation of these elements:

Mr. Renwick has not taken the monumental view of the problem [i.e., the single elevation] present, so far as the exterior is concerned. In this, so considering his limitations, he is very likely right. His street front, which is very nearly completed, is a piece of very florid Renaissance executed in coarse white marble.<sup>144</sup>

The result of the remodel, however, presented an awkward amalgamation of details characteristic of Renwick's (and others') post-war Second Empire designs (indeed, one may deem Renwick's Exchange Second Empire due to its contracted mansard roof).

The architectural and functional heart of Renwick's Exchange was the main trading room, whose extravagance echoes the building's exterior, yet is executed in a more mature manner (fig. 66). One modern scholar has even labeled the space "one of city's great rooms [of the nineteenth century]."<sup>145</sup> The entire project, however, was not exempt from the penetrating reviews typical of contemporary architectural critics, especially during the Gilded Age. Indeed, in the article cited above, Schuyler assigns the New York Stock Exchange as representative of the abuses of architecture in this era of excess:

[The Stock Exchange] contains a great many things, and they are not ill combined, but the design does not go beyond pretentious commonplace, and is everywhere overloaded. The general character attained is a certain ostentation of costliness, which very possibly expresses well enough the temper of the body for which the place is built, but by no means does justice to Mr. Renwick's abilities.<sup>146</sup>

One should note the contrasting interpretations between Schuyler's critique of the Stock Exchange and the analysis of Renwick's Wheeler and Wilson's Office and Salesroom

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<sup>144</sup> McKenna, "Second Empire," 101.

<sup>145</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 460.

<sup>146</sup> McKenna, "Second Empire," 101.

cited above. Whereas the earlier office building symbolized the virtues of capitalism and the ethos of the American business environment, the Stock Exchange embodied the mistreatment of the past and the philistine philosophies of finance and the erratic economy.

While the New York Stock Exchange exhibited little confidence and cohesion in design, Renwick's design for the Potter Building at 808 Broadway (1888; fig. 67, also see fig. 12) presented a focused work attentive both to its historicity and to its surroundings.<sup>147</sup> The building featured a relatively simple box-like composition with superficially applied Gothic detailing. The ornamentation's relation to the construction overall, especially the interlacing arches under the cornice and the applied, non-functional buttresses, is somewhat curious. It is clear, however, that Renwick was deferring to his own adjacent Grace Church Parsonage (1846; fig. 68), which maintained the Flamboyant Gothic idiom of its church, in adopting Gothic forms for the office building. A letter written by Orlando Potter, the building's patron, to the rector of Grace Church indeed indicates the requirement of the building to submit to the design of the adjacent church:

I do not ask or expect that the Church shall surrender in any degree or to any extent its absolute control of the light from its own property. The building of this wall according to the plan suggested by Mr. Renwick, will require only the consent on the part of the vestry that the small projections shown upon the plan on the south side of the wall be extended, by corbeling out, over the line upon the land of the church, these projections, the arch informs me, need be but very slight, and only sufficient to give the proper architecture effect to the wall. [...] The wall, if built, is to be

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<sup>147</sup> This building is usually referred to by its address to avoid confusion with the Potter Building of 1883-85, designed by Norris Gibson Starkweather. Orlando Potter, a lawyer and former congressman, was the patron of both buildings.

built so as to be in entire harmony with the architecture of the church, of brick of such colour as Mr. Renwick shall direct.<sup>148</sup>

The Potter Building was unique in New York's commercial landscape for its historic elements, for, as the *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* noted, it is "the first Gothic store building of any size or important that has been erected in [New York]."<sup>149</sup>

### ***Towards Retirement***

In the 1880s and the first half of the next decade (before his death in 1895), Renwick's personal contributions to his firm's commissions decreased substantially, signaled by the addition of new personnel to his firm. In 1881, a year after Joseph Sands died, William H. Russell (1854-1907), Renwick's great-nephew, became partner, followed in 1884 by James L. Aspinwall (1854-1936), a distant cousin of Renwick's wife, as third partner.<sup>150</sup> In 1890, Russell left the firm to join Charles W. Clinton in partnership and Renwick's nephew, William W. Renwick (1864-1933), replaced him as partner.<sup>151</sup> Russell's departure must have come after the completion of the firm's contributions to Franklin Smith's *Design and Prospectus for the National Gallery of History and Art* (discussed more thoroughly in a subsequent chapter), since he is listed as a partner in the publication.

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<sup>148</sup> Orlando Potter to Rev. William R. Huntington D.D., Rector and the Wardens and Vestrymen of Grace Church, 15 April 1887; Rattner Papers, box 28, fol. 22,

<sup>149</sup> "Recent Attempts at Gothic," *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* 40 (1887): 1505. Weisman lists a few Gothic precedents for Renwick's design. However, as the author duly writes, "neither Romanesque nor Gothic achieved the popularity in the commercial field which they had met in church architecture." See Weisman, 295.

<sup>150</sup> Cantor erroneously claims that Aspinwall was Renwick's first nephew. On the dates of the appointment of Aspinwall and Russell as partners, Rattner maintains both were promoted in 1883. See Cantor, 166; Rattner, "James Renwick, Jr.," 548.

<sup>151</sup> William H. Russell studied architecture at Columbia College and entered the office of Renwick in 1878. He is best known for his work with Clinton on late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century office buildings in New York. He died in Europe in 1907. See Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Co., 1956), s.v. "William H. Russell."

In this period, the firm earned few major commissions, all of which are still extant with the exception of All Saints' Church. Most of the firm's work dealt with additions to prior projects, including the Rectory and Bishop's Residence (1882-83, fig. 69) and spires (1885-88) of St. Patrick's Cathedral. In 1887, while on vacation, Renwick reconstructed and enlarged the Roman Catholic Cathedral in St. Augustine, Florida after the church was destroyed by fire. While rebuilding the church in its original Mission Revival style, Renwick designed a monumental, six-story tower in the Georgian idiom, echoing the entrance of the original building (fig. 70).<sup>152</sup> Renwick's cathedral, certainly his most unusual design for both its style and place, paid respect to the site's past and exhibited its history in the most creative, yet reserved manner.

In 1889, Renwick's firm submitted an entry for the competition to design the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. The Episcopal Bishop of New York, Henry C. Potter, called for construction of a "people's church," responding directly to the completion of St. Patrick's; the initiation and construction of St. John the Divine would involve a massive architectural undertaking and included dozens of design submissions, both invited and unsolicited.<sup>153</sup> Renwick and his firm (then, Renwick, Aspinwall, and Russell) were among those invited; their design featured a monumental church reminiscent of Renwick's work at St. Patrick's Cathedral, and also included a massive dome over the crossing in a certain Italian Gothic style (fig. 71). Ultimately,

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<sup>152</sup> Rattner, "James Renwick, Jr.," 547.

<sup>153</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 334-38. For the quoted description, see Bishop H. C. Potter, "Letter to the Citizens of New York," in "A Great Cathedral Plan," *New York Daily Tribune*, 2 June 1887, 1. Interestingly, Bertram Goodhue, one of Renwick's apprentices and among the most important late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century architects, submitted his own design for St. John the Divine, which featured a Romanesque-inspired design with Richardsonian details.

Renwick and his firm were not chosen, probably because of their design's conservatism and Catholic connotations, as well as the architect's advanced age.<sup>154</sup>

### *Renwick and the American Renaissance*

The academicism accompanying what critics and scholars have broadly deemed the American Renaissance effectively brought an end to Renwick's career and diminished the impact of his work on the architectural community.<sup>155</sup> His fluency and flexibility in design, which enhanced his reputation among colleague and clients, as well as his eclectic approach to design, which increased as his career evolved, would not compete with the disciplined and authoritative approaches of the Beaux-Arts movement, which dominated the practice of architecture in the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century, and still exerts influence over students and professionals in the twenty-first century.

Interestingly, Renwick's final project, which unsurprisingly went unrealized, represents a forgotten foreshadow of the White City of Chicago's World Columbian Exposition of 1893, indeed the movement's great triumph in the popular and artistic culture of America. In 1890, Renwick and his partners (Aspinwall and Russell) provided architectural plans to Franklin W. Smith, a wealthy merchant, philanthropist, art enthusiast, and amateur architect from Boston, for his proposal for a National Gallery of History and Art in Washington, D.C.—a “National Necessity” according the Smith. In order to propagate his plan, Smith printed a proposal (or, what the author calls “the

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<sup>154</sup> The design of Heins and LaFarge was chosen and construction on their Byzantine-Romanesque church began in 1892. In 1907, however, after Heins's death and LaFarge's dismissal, Ralph Adams Cram was hired to remodel and finish the church in the Gothic Revival style. The church infamously remains unfinished.

<sup>155</sup> For sources on the American Renaissance and its implications, see above Introduction, n. 10.

imaginative consummation of what modern philosophy would name a mental evolution”)<sup>156</sup> and presented a series of lectures around the country, one of which Renwick attended in St. Augustine, Florida.<sup>156</sup> The proposals executed by Renwick and his firm, which took six months to complete, featured a monumental city composed of architectural elements and reproductions from virtually every period and place of history (figs. 72, 73). Its focal point was a reproduction of the Parthenon, one-and-a-half times the size of the Athenian original.

The overall plan of the museum, intended to cover about seventy acres, predominately exhibited a neoclassical vocabulary (despite its incorporation of non-European and non-Western monuments) and is completely axial and symmetrical in composition, similar to Burnham’s White City. In fact, previous exhibitions, particularly London’s Great Exhibition of 1851, provided a major impetus and model for White’s idea, thus affecting its similarities with contemporary exhibition grounds. Whether Renwick himself had any significant input in the designs of the National Gallery beyond the initial decision to collaborate with Smith is impossible to ascertain. It is probably the case that the architect, who was in his seventies and whose firm was large enough to accommodate such a massive project, contributed little to the design or method behind its composition. Nevertheless, the illustrations prove that, like most of his designs, Renwick exhibited the proclivity and willingness to embrace and adapt the most popular trends in architecture.

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<sup>156</sup> Franklin W. Smith, *Design and Prospectus for the National Gallery of History and Art* (Washington, D.C.: Gibson Bros., 1890).

## CHAPTER 2

### ***“For the Dignity of Our Ancient and Glorious Catholic Name”*:<sup>1</sup> Renwick and Archbishop Hughes at St. Patrick’s Cathedral**

#### ***Introduction***

In one of the earliest historical accounts of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, the Reverend John M. Farley, D.D. designated the monument as “proof that the Catholics of New York, in the nineteenth century, are animated by the same spirit that, in the ages of faith, reared the sacred structures that have excited the admiration and wonder of cultivated and uncultivated minds for centuries.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the cathedral, begun by Renwick in the 1850s, remains both a symbol of American Catholicism and a paradigm for Gothic Revival architecture in the United States.<sup>3</sup> The acclaim given to the daring design by clergymen and laity alike, however, ignores the underlining historical situation of its patronage and role in the religious dialogues of nineteenth-century New York.

St. Patrick’s Cathedral represents Renwick’s architectural masterpiece in both design and influence. Its current location in midtown Manhattan provides the church a lasting legacy and affords its visitors insight into one of America’s foremost sacred

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<sup>1</sup> The quotation is extracted from a circular distributed by Archbishop Hughes in 1858, following his sermon given at the cornerstone ceremony, for the purpose of encouraging subscriptions for the construction project. For the text of both the sermon and the circular, see Lawrence Kehoe, ed., *Complete Works of the Most Rev. John Hughes, D.D., Archbishop of New York. Comprising His Sermons, Letters, Lectures, Speeches, Etc.*, vol. 2 (London: Richardson and Son, 1866), 270.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. John M. Farley, D.D., *History of St. Patrick’s Cathedral* (New York: Society for the Propagation of the Faith, 1908), 16.

<sup>3</sup> Initial thoughts to construct a new Roman Catholic cathedral began in 1850, when New York became an archdiocese. As discussed below, the site was acquired in 1852; a year later, Renwick was hired and began preliminary plans for the design. The chronology is corroborated in an 1858 *New York Times* article describing the cornerstone ceremony, in which it is stated that the cathedral “has been in constant study for upwards of eight years,” which would correspond to 1850.

monuments.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, St. Patrick's Cathedral is only one of two Renwick designs for which the historian has adequate archival material in the form of preparatory and presentation drawings (the implications of which are discussed below). However, despite, or perhaps because of, the uninterrupted designation of the building as the cathedral of New York, the treatment of St. Patrick's Cathedral in secondary sources lacks scholarly substance; like its topographical situation, consideration of the cathedral remains overshadowed by that of New York's more modern monuments.

In modern scholarship, the construction of St. Patrick's Cathedral is usually considered a major moment in the Gothic Revival movement in America, an architectural period that boasts an extensive historiography. Despite the cathedral's monumental presence, however, such studies mainly note its French derivation as a convenient counterpart to the more numerous designs of English aspect. The indifferent treatment afforded to St. Patrick's Cathedral is a result of the historical precedence given to the Ecclesiological Movement, which preferred the English Decorated style for Gothic Revival churches and monuments, and its affect on American architects and patrons. Even in Renwick's own corpus, then, Grace Church, presents a more appropriate scholarly subject than St. Patrick's Cathedral, despite the latter's greater cultural significance.

The only acute academic discussion of the cathedral, furthermore, arrives as a chapter in the second volume of William Pierson Jr.'s formative *American Buildings and Their Architects*, on which the architectural analysis of this study heavily relies. While both penetrating and paramount, this study is focused in scope on the process of design

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<sup>4</sup> The advantageous location of St. Patrick's Cathedral is a more recent phenomenon, since the area known today as midtown was not as densely populated in the mid- to late-nineteenth century.

and actual execution of the cathedral, with little attention given to issue of patronage, politics, and religion. It will become clear, however, that the cathedral cannot be described purely in formal architectural terms. The following discussion, then, offers a recontextualization of St. Patrick's Cathedral into the architectural and cultural framework of mid-nineteenth-century America. More specifically, the historical situation of New York City provides the setting in which this analysis can most effectively proceed.

Most treatment of St. Patrick's Cathedral in scholarship describes it as an exemplar of the Gothic Revival and ignores its religious identity as a Catholic monument. Thus, it is important to consider the tradition of the Catholic cathedral in America, in terms of patronage and architecture; the overt Catholicity of the cathedral must be reemphasized in order to recapture fully the building's role in the religious climate of New York. After a brief discussion of the Catholic cathedral in the history of American architecture, Renwick's genius at providing an appropriate, and in many ways unconventional, institutional design will emerge as complementary to the stylistic character of the cathedral, thereby confirming the description cited at the beginning of this chapter.

Furthermore, this discussion deals as much with patronage as it does with design. While Renwick is duly prominent in this chapter, its main protagonist is Archbishop John Hughes (known as "Dagger" John by contemporaries), who was the leading champion of Catholic causes in New York and the fiercest crusader against anti-Catholic and nativist movements at the time. The second part of this chapter surveys the anti-Catholic movement in New York, which arrived at national prominence in the 1850s and affected

hatred and suspicion towards Catholics. The correlation between the construction of St. Patrick's Cathedral and the decades of attacks, both physical and intellectual, on the Catholic communities of major American metropolises, especially New York City, cannot be ignored and progresses the discussion and appreciation of the cathedral beyond simple considerations of design.

The goals of this chapter are manifold, especially within the overall scope of the dissertation. First, it strengthens the characteristic of Renwick as a cultivated and, in many respects, scholarly architect—a description suggested in the previous chapter. Second, by examining the history of the patronage of St. Patrick's Cathedral, this chapter reveals Renwick's perceptiveness of the iconic instrumentality of his design in establishing architectural identity to the Catholic community in nineteenth-century New York. Third, it reveals the penchant for collaboration, especially with a powerful patron, exhibited by Renwick, a characteristic the architect perfected throughout his prolific career.

### ***Catholic Identity in America***

The following explores how Renwick's and Hughes's vision for St. Patrick's Cathedral both embodied and solidified New York's Catholic community and became a symbol in stone for the group's cultural identity. It can become difficult to reconstruct, or even argue for, a specific group consciousness for a body of immigrants, especially given the diverse current of American life. Tenuous terms and theories like 'Americanism,' identity politics,' and 'ethnicity,' even in this particular study, potentially may overshadow historical methods and conclusions. However, for the nineteenth-century

American Catholic, especially those who emigrated from the Old World, one can consider these concepts, albeit only through a carefully focused lens.

The numerous immigrants who formed the majority of the Catholic faithful in America, despite their diverse backgrounds, encountered similar challenges in their goal of acculturation into American society. While each Catholic-immigrant community, whether Irish, German, or otherwise, often lived according to the customs and mores of its Old World home, the American church and its embodiments, including the church building itself, became a solidifying force. In addition, as a major scholar of American Catholicism has noted, “Anti-Catholicism sharpened the lines of group-consciousness” for Catholic immigrants.<sup>5</sup>

An important issue in the collective identity of the Catholic immigrant is the phenomenon of an urban Catholicism, which correlates strongly to the growing popularity of the church in nineteenth-century America. Accordingly, New York City and its diverse communities of Catholics play a major role in the following discussion. The consideration of individual parishes, both Irish and German, is beyond the scope of this project and has been treated effectively in previous studies. The urban fabric of New York, particularly its Catholic threads, must provide the backdrop for a full appreciation of what Renwick and Hughes achieved at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, especially since the daily life of most Catholics in the city revolved around the local parish community.

### ***The Architecture of the Catholic Cathedral in America***

In *The Gothic Quest*, Ralph Adams Cram lamented the collective architecture of existing Catholic cathedrals in America, noting how “the Roman Catholic church in our

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<sup>5</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York’s Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 4.

country is represented [...] by the most inartistic and unpardonable structures,” describing the buildings as “shapeless,” “monstrous,” and “crude” amongst countless other pejoratives.<sup>6</sup> In many cities, however, Cram’s famous anecdote that the Catholic need only hunt for the “barest, commonest red brick and granite structure” to find his or her cathedral would have proven to be untrue. At the time of Cram’s writings, many of the original cathedrals of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, while smaller than their descendants, were perfectly acceptable architectural specimens and usually served their needs well for decades.

Echoing Cram’s complaint, William Pierson, Jr., in his aforementioned examination of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, argues that at the time of the church’s reconstruction “the cathedral, as a building type, had never been a significant part of the American scene.”<sup>7</sup> This statement is somewhat misleading and ignores the historical condition of Catholicism and Catholic architecture in the United States. Like the situation describing the church’s original foundations in the first centuries CE, the need for monumental architecture was less immediate when the Catholic population in the United States numbered far less than that of its counterparts. Most Catholic churches in the late-eighteenth century and first decades of the nineteenth century were smaller buildings; some, in fact, were redundant Protestant churches converted for Catholic use.

Pierson’s assertion better reflects the historiographical tradition rather than the architectural situation.<sup>8</sup> However, the historian of American architecture easily recognizes Benjamin Henry Latrobe’s design for the cathedral of Baltimore (the Basilica

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<sup>6</sup> Ralph Adams Cram, *The Gothic Quest* (New York: Baker and Taylor co., 1907), 237ff.

<sup>7</sup> Pierson, Jr., *Technology and the Picturesque*, 209.

<sup>8</sup> Kevin F. Decker too identifies the neglect of Roman Catholic architecture in scholarly research. See Kevin F. Decker, “Grand and Godly Proportions: Roman Catholic Cathedral Churches of the Northeast, 1840-1900” (Ph.D. diss., University at Albany-State University of New York, 2000), x.

of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary), begun in 1806, as a definitive moment in the history of American architecture and a testimony to the association of neoclassicism with religious freedom as perceived by prominent patrons like Thomas Jefferson and Carroll. The cathedral's role in the proliferation of an appropriately American interpretation of the classical idiom for the republic's earliest buildings has been well established.<sup>9</sup> It is unnecessary here to narrate completely the familiar history of the commission relating Bishop Carroll's adoption of Latrobe's neoclassical version over the first proposal, which featured a nostalgic and massive Gothic church (figs. 74, 75).<sup>10</sup> The implications of Latrobe's essay in medieval revival architecture characterizing his Gothic submission, nonetheless, cannot be fully ignored for the present discussion. Some scholars have placed tremendous importance on this unfulfilled vision for the architectural scene in America:

Had Latrobe's Gothic Baltimore Cathedral been built, it would have fulfilled a deep ambition for its designer, been the first Gothic cathedral since the Middle Ages, and might have advanced the revival of the Gothic for ecclesiastical use by more than a quarter of a century.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> A standard discussion of the cathedral project appears in Talbot Hamlin's seminal biography of the architect. See Talbot Hamlin, *Benjamin Henry Latrobe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 222-54. Other informative discussions of Baltimore Cathedral can be found in volume 1 of Pierson's *American Buildings and Their Architects* and, more recently, Matthew Gallegos's dissertation "Domus dei Americana, 1789-1850: Challenges to the Roman Catholic Imagination in Building the City of God in America." See William H. Pierson, Jr., *American Buildings and Their Architects*, vol. 1, *The Colonial and Neoclassical Styles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 360-72; Matthew Gallegos, *Domus dei Americana, 1789-1850: Challenges to the Roman Catholic Imagination in Building the City of God in America?* (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2002), 134ff.

<sup>10</sup> There is disagreement among scholars on which design Latrobe himself preferred. Matthew Gallegos claims that the architect believed the Gothic version (which Latrobe called his "first design") better befitted the cathedral. See Gallegos, 147. According to Hamlin, however, Latrobe showed no preference for it over the neoclassical submission, or vice versa, noting the unique advantages of either design. See Hamlin, *Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, 236-237. Hamlin suggests that Latrobe may have "felt a deep relief" when the Roman design was chosen. Latrobe executed his Gothic design primarily from his own sketches completed while in Europe. Thus, the compromises he was forced to include in his Gothic design prevented a complete invocation of the spirituality of the medieval idiom.

<sup>11</sup> Loth and Sadler, Jr., 29.

Latrobe, then, can be credited as the first to suggest to the American Catholic church the architectural mode that would become a major paradigm of its architectural tradition, whose climax lay with Renwick's cathedral in New York.

The association between Gothic architecture and its later revival with Catholicism was a major intellectual issue in both Europe and America in the nineteenth century. The primary stimuli for the debate were the designs and publications of Augustus W. N. Pugin (1812-52), the outspoken convert to Roman Catholicism, who considered himself "as the scholar and representative of those Glorious Catholic architects who lived in antient [sic] days."<sup>12</sup> His thesis that Gothic architecture was inherently linked with Roman Catholicism and a pre-Protestant age informed all his literary and architectural pursuits. His *Contrasts; or, A Parallel Between the Noble Edifices*, originally published in 1834, argued for the decline in architecture following, and caused by, the Reformation and the proliferation of Protestantism. Notwithstanding the soundness of his logic, Pugin argued further for the primacy of Gothic, or "pointed," architecture in his *True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* of 1841.

Pugin's idealistic vision of the Catholic Middle Ages, whose architecture reflected a purity in spirit and religiosity, impacted the popularization of the Gothic Revival in America, especially as it pertained to Catholic architecture and architects. Although not motivated by religious concerns, as one of the leading practitioners of the Gothic Revival in America, Renwick continued the legacy of Pugin, especially in the former's earlier church designs. While Upjohn and his affiliation with the Protestant community steered his later designs away from the theories of the English architect, Renwick remained versed in Pugin's ideas for decades. Renwick's most Puginesque

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<sup>12</sup> Phoebe B. Stanton, *Pugin* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 11.

building—Oak Hill Cemetery Chapel in Georgetown—was constructed in 1850, only two years before the first designs for St. Patrick’s Cathedral were drawn (fig. 76).<sup>13</sup>

Given the influence of Pugin’s discourses on American architects, the historical correlation between the ascent of Catholicism and the Gothic Revival in America is critical and has been identified in numerous studies. Its acceptance, however, has obscured the actual architectural circumstances, analysis of which results in unexpected discoveries. By 1853 (as Renwick was beginning to formulate the design for St. Patrick’s Cathedral), over twenty Catholic cathedrals had been in use by various dioceses across the United States. As noted above, before 1840, many of these edifices were not built specifically as cathedrals and, save for a few examples, were not as monumental as their civic counterparts. Stylistically, furthermore, their appearances differed greatly and usually adhered to fashionable modes of construction; indeed, Catholic patrons and architects in the United States were slow to adopt Pugin’s polemics.

Surprisingly, of the approximately two-dozen cathedrals mentioned, roughly half were designed in some iteration of the neoclassical style, the other half in the Gothic Revival idiom. Even after the Gothic Revival emerged as the preferred style, Catholic patrons and their architects continued to construct neoclassical cathedrals. The most prominent example is the Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul in Philadelphia, the fourth cathedral in the city, designed by noted neoclassicists Napoleon Lebrun and John Notman in 1846. Their Renaissance Revival cathedral, which emphatically eschewed the growing

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<sup>13</sup> Stanton curiously suggests that Renwick may have visited Pugin’s buildings, especially considering the similarities of Oak Hill Chapel with illustrations in Pugin’s publications. There is no evidence, however, that any visitation occurred prior to 1850. Renwick may have seen Pugin’s churches in subsequent trips overseas in the 1860s and 1870s, by which time his religious architectural production had waned.

popularity of the Gothic Revival, was certainly the stylistic heir to Latrobe's earlier construction in Baltimore.

Catholic churches constructed in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries were often designed by Protestant architects, who were usually better trained and more capable in the early American architectural tradition. For example, the Catholic community of Boston commissioned Charles Bulfinch to design its first dedicated church. Completed in 1803, the Church of the Holy Cross featured Bulfinch's "traditional neoclassicism,"<sup>14</sup> thereby harmonizing its appearance within the architectural fabric of early-nineteenth-century Boston. Its design featured an ambiguous fusion of English Baroque and Italian Renaissance church architecture, the latter of which was rare in Bulfinch's corpus.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, like Hughes, the patrons of the Bostonian church valued architectural acumen over religious affiliation. Unlike the situation in New York, however, Bulfinch's church represented an accord between the Catholic and Protestant communities of Boston. As the architect himself submitted the design without asking a fee, the church became a symbol of the relationship between the two denominations; one-fifth of the donations supporting the church's construction were from Protestants.<sup>16</sup>

A common question that arises when discussing Renwick's design for St. Patrick's Cathedral asks why the architect, a Protestant with only superficial connection to the Catholic church, gained such a prestigious commission for New York's Catholic

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<sup>14</sup> Pierson, Jr., *Colonial and Neoclassical Styles*, 240-285.

<sup>15</sup> As Kirker notes, Bulfinch's only other religious edifice to feature Roman Renaissance elements is New North Church (now St. Stephen's Church), 1802-04. See Harold Kirker, *The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 162.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 161. Decker, however, notes that Protestant donations to Catholic cathedral projects were common in later commissions, citing the desire for political support of Protestant politicians from Catholic voters as a main motivation. Some of the early donations for the rebuilding of St. Patrick's Cathedral, in fact, came from non-Catholics who were sympathetic to the Catholic cause in New York. The overall number of non-Catholic supporters of St. Patrick's Cathedral, however, was far less than that of Boston's Church of the Holy Cross. See Decker, 51.

community. Since there is no direct evidence why Renwick was chosen over his equally, or perhaps more, qualified colleagues, one must look beyond religious identity to provide a suitable answer to this question.<sup>17</sup> Like Renwick, the majority of major church architects on the east coast belonged to the Protestant church; in some cases, their religiosity and devoutness informed their actual designs and type of commissions.

Renwick's religious persona, however, is more difficult to reconstruct. Although born into the Episcopalian tradition, there are nearly no sources that suggest religion played a major role in Renwick's life. His education in engineering, coupled with his father's profession as a professor of the natural sciences, according to twenty-first century trends, would appear paradoxical to any spiritual sensibilities. However, one must not submit to this oversimplified and often erroneous correlation. At times, Renwick communicated an acceptance for traditional, Christian beliefs. For example, a letter written by the architect to Archbishop Corrigan in 1895 states quite clearly his religious beliefs:

I thank you very much for your kind and sympathetic letter which has done much to console me for the loss of my dear brother and I thank you especially for your kind remembrance of me in your prayers and your blessing which will strengthen me in my future life however long or short it may be, and increase my faith and hope of meeting my dear father and mother and all my beloved family and friends in another and a better state, and make me more earnest to press forward in the hope of attaining the goal of our high calling in Christ Jesus of whose church I am so unworthy a member.

It will be always one of my greatest pleasures to remember my intercourse with yourself and your predecessors, who have always set me so good an example of all that is good and just and true [...].<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Pierson agrees that it is difficult to ascertain how Renwick received the commission. He notes that Renwick's maid may have encouraged him to seek the job; this, however, seems rather anecdotal and holds no historical weight. See Pierson, Jr., *Technology and the Picturesque*, 212 n. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Renwick to Corrigan, 15 Feb. 1895; Rattner Papers, box 4, fol. 40.

While Renwick may have been merely using language appropriate and convenient for correspondence with the leader of New York's Catholic community, his unapologetic evocation of Christian values and beliefs—Christ, the afterlife, prayer—reveals the religiousness of Renwick and his intimate relationship with the bishops of New York.

Nevertheless, if religion were a primary factor in deciding the architect for St. Patrick's Cathedral, the obvious choice would have been Patrick Charles Keely (1816-96), a humble and pious Roman Catholic (he is said to have attended Mass everyday) and arguably the most accomplished church architect in nineteenth-century America.<sup>19</sup> Keely's corpus encompasses roughly 700 buildings, a majority of which are Roman Catholic churches and institutions. His designs, while centered mostly in Boston and Brooklyn (where his office was based), span a wide geographical extent, including New Orleans and Halifax, Nova Scotia.

As an Irishman, Keely built numerous churches for Catholic parishes in dominantly Irish communities. Like Upjohn's aforementioned affiliation with the Episcopal Church, Keely's association with these communities was extremely beneficial to his production and provided an extra layer of meaning for these buildings. It is curious, then, that no evidence exists to demonstrate that Keely was considered for the cathedral commission in New York, since Archbishop Hughes, the patron of the new cathedral, was also born in Ireland and never abandoned his Irish heritage. Furthermore, and more importantly, Irish immigrants composed a large part of the diocese of New York.<sup>20</sup> To a

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<sup>19</sup> The most current discussion of Keely's architect is Kevin Decker's dissertation on nineteenth-century Catholic cathedrals in the northeast United States. He derives much of his information on Keely from Kervick's self-published study, as well as two master's theses written in 1934 and 1952. For a biography of the architect, see Decker, 69ff. and Kervick, 5ff.

<sup>20</sup> Appropriately, three of the first four bishops of New York were Irish-born. Accordingly, the appointment of the French-born Father John Dubois to bishop resulted in great opposition from the Irish community. For brief synopses of the lives of the bishops of New York, see Rev. Msgr. Florence D.

certain extent, hiring Keely would have provided symbolic significance most Catholic patrons in America could not have achieved.

However compatible Keely's religious affiliation and prolific production were to constructing the Catholic cathedral of New York, his typical mode of design was unsuitable for Hughes's vision for the new St. Patrick's. Keely can be credited for standardizing the Catholic use of the Gothic Revival for its cathedral structures. However, Keely worked in the same Gothic Revival mode as Upjohn and, most importantly, Augustus W. N. Pugin who appropriated designs from medieval and later English parish churches. Designing a Puginesque metropolitan cathedral at the scale envisioned by Hughes would have been architecturally questionable, for the English style was characteristic of more intimate church buildings. Additionally, despite the connection with Pugin, a devout Catholic, an English Gothic Revival cathedral would create an observable architectural link with contemporary Protestant churches in New York, particularly Upjohn's Trinity Church and Renwick's Grace Church.

It is possible to posit more specific reasons why Keely was not offered the commission for St. Patrick's Cathedral. The first likelihood concerns Keely's architectural practice in the 1850s. In 1852, a year before Hughes commissioned Renwick to begin preliminary plans for St. Patrick's Cathedral, Keely undertook a myriad of projects, including (but not limited to) the cathedrals of Albany, Louisville, Fall River,

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Cohalan, *A Popular History of the Archdiocese of New York* (Yonkers, N.Y.: United States Catholic Historical Society, 1983). In the appropriate chapter, Cohalan concisely describes the rise of and opposition towards Father John Dubois as bishop, who was selected primarily because the other main candidate, Father Benedict Fenwick, was appointed bishop of Boston one year before. Although Dubois' experience was reputable, especially his relationships with American figures like Patrick Henry and James Monroe.

Although many New York Catholics regretted the appointment of a Frenchman who was not a member of the New York clergy, Dubois accomplished much for the diocese, including the restoration and construction of numerous churches throughout New York and the founding of new parishes and other Catholic institutions. His building activities, therefore, would continue the precedent of architectural patronage that Hughes would follow to the greatest extent at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

and Cleveland. In addition, Keely had begun the construction of the cathedral of Buffalo a year earlier. While the architect himself was not present at the cornerstone ceremonies nor personally oversaw the construction of these cathedrals, it is possible that Keely (through either his own admission or the knowledge of Hughes) was too engaged with these projects to dedicate the appropriate energy to Hughes's monumental vision.

Another plausible explanation involves the professional relationship between the architect and the priest. Hughes was introduced to Keely and his practice during the construction of Brooklyn's Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul in 1842. Although the pastor of the Brooklyn parish, Father Sylvester Malone, commissioned Keely, Hughes initially rejected Keely's design, arguing it would prove too costly for the diocese during a period of financial limitations.<sup>21</sup> As Decker notes, Hughes preferred as architect his brother-in-law, William Rodrigue (who would later assist Renwick), for the cathedral project.<sup>22</sup> While Malone eventually argued successfully in favor of Keely, one wonders whether this administrative disagreement remained with the bishop and ultimately dictated the decision to forgo Keely as architect.<sup>23</sup>

Renwick's previous work, however, was not incompatible to Hughes's role as spokesman for the Irish community in New York. A few years prior to receiving the commission for St. Patrick's Cathedral, in 1848, Renwick was asked to provide a design for a proposed monument to DeWitt Clinton (major of New York City and governor and

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<sup>21</sup> Decker, 70.

<sup>22</sup> William Rodrigue (1800-67), born in Philadelphia, trained in the office of William Strickland and worked on the latter's Second Bank of the United States. In Philadelphia, he designed the Church of St. John the Evangelist, the first church of John Hughes. After marrying Hughes's sister and moving to New York with the priest and his family, Rodrigue designed various institutions and churches in the city for the Catholic church and Hughes.

<sup>23</sup> Despite their professional squabble, Hughes commissioned Keely to design a few minor churches in New York, including St. Bridget and St. Nicholas, both constructed beginning in 1848. See Decker, 72.

senator of New York State) to be erected in Albany. Although decidedly public in nature, this project was intended to commemorate a “distinguished statesman and public benefactor” (in the words of the commission report), who was among the main supporters and protectors of New York’s Irish against nativist opposition. The various dialogues and circumstances describing Clinton’s role in the publications and violence affected by anti-immigrant sensibilities echo to a great degree those surrounding Hughes discussed here. Most importantly, as the primary political engine behind the construction Erie Canal, Clinton proposed that recent Irish immigrants compose a major body of the workforce, thereby becoming the group’s foremost ally in the second and third decade of the nineteenth century.

As per the ultimate desires of the monument commission, which contained New York’s most prominent politicians (including future president Millard Fillmore), Renwick created a civic (rather than a sepulchral) monument.<sup>24</sup> According to Renwick’s description of the approved plan, published as an appendix of the report, the monument would feature a single triumphal arch, on top of which would rise a stepped pyramid supporting a statue of Clinton.<sup>25</sup> The significance of the Clinton Monument in a discussion of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, in addition to the similarities between Clinton

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<sup>24</sup> According to the commission report, in October 1848, Renwick provided three preliminary designs for the monument, including specifications of dimensions, materials, and the cost for each. These designs were an obelisk and colossal statue, a single triumphal arch, and a triple triumphal arch. A large colored drawing in the New-York Historical Society represents the presentation drawing for the single arch. The description written by Renwick of the approved monument differs in many ways from this rendering. The drawing, however, is quite similar to the arch of the Smithsonian’s porch on its north façade. It is possible that Renwick drew directly from the design of the Smithsonian, construction of which began only two years before the Clinton Monumental Commission. There is no evidence that the drawings for the obelisk and triple arch have survived. See *The Clinton Monument* (New York: The Clinton Monument Association of the State of New York, 1848).

<sup>25</sup> *The Clinton Monument*, 25-27. There exist large, colored drawings and plans of a proposed Clinton Monument bearing Renwick’s name in the New-York Historical Society. The monument in the drawings, however, differs from the description of the approved design according to the commission report. The finish and quality of the images suggest they may have been presentation drawings offered during the selection process.

himself and Hughes, involves how Renwick reformulated an historical architectural type with a rich tradition into a purposeful and definitely American monument. Indeed, perhaps influenced by Benjamin Latrobe's earlier corn and tobacco leaf capitals, Renwick included engaged columns and capitals imitating the stalks and ears of Indian corn on the two main fronts of his monument. The frieze of the cornice, furthermore, would contain reliefs of canal boats, horses, and areas of the canal itself commemorating Clinton's great accomplishment, which, as mentioned above, included his patronage of the Irish. The details of the Clinton Monument, therefore, provided Hughes proof of Renwick's architectural talents and, more importantly, ability to manipulate historical modes of design for a specific use and patron.

### ***The Monumental Gothic Facade***

One scholar of American ecclesiastical history groups Latrobe's Cathedral of the Assumption and Renwick's St. Patrick's Cathedral with Notre-Dame Cathedral in Montreal as the three Roman Catholic cathedrals most visited by Protestants in the during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> As exemplified in this statement and others, it is noteworthy that American scholars have recognized the historical implications of the Canadian cathedral, especially concerning its patronage, architect, and design. Indeed, the cathedral of Montreal presents a promising analog for a discussion of St. Patrick's Cathedral. Notre-Dame Cathedral, which replaced an older parish church of the same name, was built by the Sulpicians, a religious society of secular priests, who have played

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<sup>26</sup> Ryan K. Smith, *Gothic Arches, Latin Crosses: Anti-Catholicism and American Church Designs in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 40-41.

a major role in the history of Montreal.<sup>27</sup> The decision to construct a new cathedral in the name of the Virgin was a response to the growing numbers and strength of Catholics in Montreal, and a reaffirmation of the supremacy of the Sulpicians, who had experienced opposition from various religious leaders of the city.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, the patrons wished their new building to become both a monument of French-Canadian Catholicism and a competitor to its contemporaneous counterparts in America and abroad. The commission, thus, provides an appropriate analogy for the circumstances surrounding the construction of St. Patrick's Cathedral discussed in this chapter.

James O'Donnell received the commission due to his acquaintance with prominent members of New York's Catholic community, who themselves were connected to the Montreal lay population. After gaining experience by apprenticing in Dublin,<sup>29</sup> from about 1815 to 1822, O'Donnell contributed to the architectural fabric of New York City, designing a few examples of Federal and Greek Revival architecture in America. In these years, O'Donnell designed the new Bloomingdale Asylum, at the time the preeminent mental hospital in America. Interestingly, in 1816, O'Donnell also submitted a proposal for the renovation of Columbia College; his Gothic Revival vision was certainly influenced by the design submitted by Renwick, Sr. described in the previous chapter.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Franklin Toker, *The Church of Notre-Dame in Montreal: An Architectural History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1970), 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-13.

<sup>29</sup> For an account of O'Donnell's training in Dublin, see Toker, *Notre-Dame*, 23-25.

<sup>30</sup> Franklin Toker, "James O'Donnell: An Irish Georgian in America," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 29 (1970): 136. O'Donnell eventually received the commission to rebuild the campus of Columbia College, but, at the request of the building committee (of which Renwick, Sr. was a member), modified his designs to a more conservative classical mode in keeping with American collegiate precedents.

Despite his Protestant upbringing, O'Donnell was an attractive selection as architect for the new cathedral project in Montreal, for he experimented with various Gothic Revival forms while working in New York, thereby fulfilling the ambitions of Latrobe in Baltimore. Echoing the trajectory of Renwick's early career, O'Donnell's design for Notre-Dame Cathedral marked the summation of his interaction with Gothic Revival church architecture. Through its eclectic display of an Anglo-American religious mode in both exterior and interior elements, O'Donnell's cathedral denotes an experimental, yet unabashed example of the Gothic Revival on the continent.<sup>31</sup> It is interest to note, moreover, that the church to surpass Notre-Dame as the largest in North America was Renwick's St. Patrick's Cathedral.<sup>32</sup>

Notwithstanding its abstruse ancestry, Notre-Dame's decidedly Gothic character established a convenient architectural paradigm for Catholic cathedrals. Indeed, one can consider Renwick's work at St. Patrick's Cathedral as the next major step in the succinct succession of monumental Catholic cathedrals in North America. The most dominating elements of Notre-Dame Cathedral are the two towers crowning the facade (fig. 77). It is

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<sup>31</sup> Franklin Toker discusses the variety of historical and contemporary sources for elements of O'Donnell's design. The plan, consisting of a three aisled composition, with a length twice its width and staircases at its corners, is a common Georgian composition. A report for the building committee states that the plan was directly borrowed from a contemporary New York church, which Toker identifies as Josiah Brady's St. Thomas Church on Broadway and Houston St. (1823-25).

The most striking feature of the interior of the cathedral are the suspended galleries, a common element in early American churches. Unlike his most immediate counterparts, however, O'Donnell designed a more integrated structural and decorative system for the galleries, whose columns travel all the way up to the ceiling level. Toker suggests that O'Donnell may have seen this system in depictions of James Gibbs' St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, London (1724). A majority of O'Donnell's interior was remodeled by Victor Bourgeau in the 1870s and 80s, modifying in many respects the character of O'Donnell's original vision.

The vaulting, furthermore, was inspired by the fan vaulting of late-medieval England, which provided models for numerous nineteenth-century churches in North America. Lastly, although seemingly derived from the facade of Peterborough Minster, England, the tripartite, recessed portico of Notre-Dame's facade was probably adapted from American precedents. Toker cites as the strongest model Latrobe's original design for St. Paul's Church, Alexandria, Virginia (1818).

For a more thorough discussion of the design sequence of Notre-Dame and its immediate heritage, see Toker, *Notre-Dame*, 29-42 and Franklin, "James O'Donnell," 140.

<sup>32</sup> Toker, "James O'Donnell," 139.

important to note that O'Donnell's two previous Gothic Revival churches—Christ Church in New York (1823) and the First Presbyterian Church in Rochester (1824), albeit less monumental in scale, boasted only one frontal tower each. The overall compositions of their facades, furthermore, were greatly more perfunctory than that of the cathedral; interestingly, the fusion of classical and Gothic details, especially the broken pediment supporting the tower, subtly recalls Joseph Mangin's Old St. Patrick's Cathedral, completed in 1815 and ultimately replaced in status by Renwick's later design.

Nonetheless, the primary purpose of Notre-Dame's towers was to provide the most dominant view of the symbolic home of the Catholic church in the Montreal. In order to compensate for the lack of an advantageous viewpoint, the architect concentrated his design on the facade of the cathedral, thereby reducing any three-dimensional monumentality to the building. O'Donnell's two-towered facade, in fact, comprised a relatively uncommon feature in Gothic Revival structures in North America; the commoner translation of the English parish church required a single-tower design. Toker suggests a few precedents for Notre-Dame's two towers, such as Old Notre-Dame in Montreal, Josiah Brady's St. Thomas Church in New York City (1823), and Gothic cathedrals of England.<sup>33</sup> Whether or not O'Donnell had in mind a single source or was merely accentuating the prominence of the cathedral's facade, this aspect of Notre-Dame is significant for providing a historical precedent for Renwick's articulation of the Fifth Avenue facade of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

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<sup>33</sup> Toker erroneously states that Old St. Patrick's Cathedral was one of three American Gothic Revival churches to feature a twin-towered facade. Depictions of the original cathedral before its reconstruction in 1868 indeed show elements that Toker interprets as truncated towers; however, the inclusion of a central tower and the fact that the lateral elements seem to resemble a broken pediment deny the possibility they were intended as towers. See Toker, *Notre-Dame*, 39; Loth and Sadler, Jr., 34 fig.

### *Catholic Architecture in New York*

As the city central to this chapter, the religious and architectural circumstances of New York are greatly important. Until 1808, New York was under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Baltimore, led by Bishop John Carroll. The first Catholic edifice in New York City, St. Peter's Church (on the corner of Barclay and Church Streets) was built in 1785 by the benefaction of King Charles III of Spain. When Baltimore was made an Archiepiscopal See in 1808, New York became one of four new dioceses from the territory originally under Carroll's dominion (Philadelphia, Boston, and Bardstown were the others). The establishment of the Diocese of New York, which comprised all of New York State and parts of New Jersey, necessitated the construction of a second church and cathedral for the newly elevated see.

For the purposes of this study, a distinction must be made between the establishment of parishes and the construction of churches, whereby the former outnumbered the latter. As noted earlier, especially early in his history, the Diocese of New York often reused redundant Protestant churches for newly established parishes.<sup>34</sup> A seminal study on the immigrant church in America claims that one quarter of Catholic parishes in New York City were started in erstwhile Protestant churches.<sup>35</sup> While this trend expanded the Catholic presence in the city, indeed an extremely important consideration, it involves architectural significant beyond the scope of this project. While examining the modifications made to existing churches can enhance one's understanding of the church's development in the city, this study is more concerned with newly

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<sup>34</sup> Dolan notes that by 1865, one in four Catholic parishes had begun in a converted Protestant church. See Dolan, 59.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

constructed buildings, whose style, location, and other issues can be ascertained as a reflection of Catholic identity in New York.

In 1809, the cornerstone for St. Patrick's Cathedral (now, Old St. Patrick's) was laid on Mulberry St. on land used as a graveyard for St. Peter's Church (tombs and gravestones can still be seen in the church's basement).<sup>36</sup> One early chronicler characterized the funereal site as conjuring "suburban loneliness."<sup>37</sup> The original church (fig. 78), which has been modified and rebuilt over time, was designed by Joseph-Francois Mangin, who had worked with John McComb, Jr. on the design and construction of New York City Hall. Old St. Patrick's Cathedral, only six bays long in its original form (Bishop Dubois would extend it nearly forty feet in 1842), represented a design apprehensively stuck between two architectural epochs. The engaged Tuscan columns, frieze, pediments, and balustrade of the main block suggest the classical, while the pointed tracery and frames of the windows and doors, along with the controversial central spire, foreshadow later sacred structures in the Gothic Revival. Stylistically, then, in the design of Old St. Patrick's one finds a subtle transition to the medieval mode of architecture exhibited in Catholic churches in New York.

Expectedly, the primary engine for the explosion of Catholic building activity, which also included other institutions, such as schools and orphanages, were the bishops themselves. While Hughes, as priest, bishop, and, later, archbishop, commanded the greatest rise in building activity in New York, his predecessors established the precedent in architectural patronage. In the 1810s and 1820s, the diocese erected multiple churches

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<sup>36</sup> The idea to construct a new church was suggested by Bishop Carroll and fulfilled in New York by Father Anthony Kohlmann, a Jesuit who oversaw the administration of the diocese when its bishop, Father Concanen, was unable to leave Europe due to the Napoleonic blockades of 1806. The cathedral did not open until 1815 due the effects of the War of 1812 on the finances of the church and city.

<sup>37</sup> Carthy, 1.

outside New York City; few, however, were built within the city's limits. One exception is the Cathedral of St. James in Brooklyn (now destroyed; Brooklyn was part of the Diocese of New York until 1853), whose cornerstone was laid in 1822. St. James, the third purpose-built Catholic church in the city constructed by the diocese, was designed in the Georgian style.

The architectural character of the Diocese of New York by the mid-1840s, furthermore, was far more superior to its makeup even a decade earlier. The stylistic preferences of the Catholic church in New York, however, remained eclectic. Neoclassical and Georgian modes continued to be popular as seen in new foundations and rebuilding projects. For instance, in 1833, Dubois initiated construction of the Church of St. Joseph in Greenwich Village, designed by John Doran in the Greek Revival idiom. Three years later, Bishop Dubois commissioned John R. Haggerty and Thomas Thomas to redesign the Church of St. Peter (originally the first Catholic church in New York), which features a more severe version of an Ionic Greek temple.

Notwithstanding the preference for classical idioms in early-nineteenth-century Catholic churches in New York, the association between Gothic architecture and the Catholicism informed later constructions in the diocese. The appropriation of Gothic elements was not exclusive to the Catholic Church in America, and became an issue of contention between Catholics and Protestants in this country. The emergence of the Gothic as the preferred mode of design for the Catholic church has been said to have "refreshed the links between architecture and tradition," especially in the contentious religious arena of New York.<sup>38</sup> It is important, however, to avoid attributing desperation to the Catholic appropriation of the Gothic as the standard mode. While one scholar has

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<sup>38</sup> Smith, *Gothic Arches*, 92.

suggested that “the Gothic could be employed by *beleaguered* Catholics to *conform* to accepted American tastes as much as to distinguish denominational achievements” (emphasis added), one must not underemphasize agency and volition in the Catholic affiliation with Gothic architecture.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Anti-Catholicism in America and New York***

The rise in building activity by the Catholic church in New York and other American metropolises (especially projects evoking the Gothic Revival) correlates strongly with the rouse of anti-Catholic sentiments in the United States. From the time of British and other European colonization of North America, Catholics have endured deeply rooted prejudices and opposition.<sup>40</sup> The character of anti-Catholicism in America from its foundations as a collection of British colonies manifested itself outside the theological realm. Consistent with the American penchant to politicize any relevant issue, the particular opposition to Catholicism in the colonies and states was most evident in arenas other than church congregations. One scholar has noted that the “Catholic church was never a purely or merely objectionable religious system.”<sup>41</sup> This description, while certainly evocative of the status of the pope in the hierarchy of Catholicism, represents perhaps more accurately the Protestant perception of American Catholicism, rather than the identity Catholics themselves tried to express. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize the underlying engine for virtually all anti-Catholic sentiment throughout the history of America—the penetrating fear of “popery.”

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>40</sup> For a greater discussion on the roots of this prejudice, see Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York: Rinehart and Co., Inc., 1952), 1-31.

<sup>41</sup> William M. Shea, *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 56.

The term “popery,” while literally describing the ceremonies, doctrines, rituals, and hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church, almost immediately after its origin in the sixteenth century assumed a derogatory connotation. Although early Americans never legislated against “popery” as their ancestors had done in England, suspicion towards Catholics and, in the minds of Protestants, their exclusive allegiance to the pope in Rome was firmly established in the popular imagination of Americans. This sentiment was reified in a number of forms and media, some of which must be described here in order to appreciate fully the implications and impact of anti-Catholicism on American culture, including the arts.

The vehicle through which nineteenth-century opposition to “popery” was most vehemently expressed was the political ideology of nativism, whose crusade is often described as uniquely American. This movement, which has existed in America to various degrees since its colonial roots, involves an intense patriotism and, most importantly, a fervent opposition to foreign groups and immigration and their supposed effects on American society and culture. The pinnacle of nativist sentiment in America correlates strongly to nineteenth-century trends in immigration, especially the influx of Irish and German people in New York, Philadelphia, and other urban centers. Nativists were especially concerned with the effect of immigration on established American life; specifically, according to nativists, immigrants were a needless destabilizer to the mercurial economy, especially in the years leading up to and following the Panic of 1837.

Moreover, New York in the middle of the nineteenth century was the primary gateway through which immigrants entered the country. Approximately three-fourths of all immigrants came through New York, the majority of whom were Irish-Catholics

fleeing the conditions of poverty and famine in their homeland.<sup>42</sup> In an addition to economic fears, concerns arose about the psychical health of the immigrant, particularly the Irish, who were essentially famine-stricken paupers when they arrived on American shores. Contemporary descriptions abound with characterizations of immigrants as “social pests,” who “had far better been cast into the deep sea, than [...] to draw their last agonized breath in the streets of New York.”<sup>43</sup>

This situation is particularly significant for this discussion since Hughes, himself an Irish immigrant, not only dealt with these numbers as leader of the Catholic church in New York, but also strongly empathized with immigrants’ struggle to assimilate into an urban environment. In the early- to mid-nineteenth century, Catholicism in America was an urban phenomenon despite the often-rural background of Catholic immigrants. In order to facilitate the process of assimilation, Hughes helped to found various institutions, both religious and non-religious, specifically for Irish and other immigrants, such as the Irish Emigrant Society and the Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank.<sup>44</sup>

Nativism and anti-Catholicism in New York originated decades before Hughes’s arrival as priest and church leader. Opposition to foreign immigration found its roots in the city through the growth of the Tammany Society of New York in the 1780s and 1790s. The political group’s bias against foreigners was concentrated upon Irish-Americans, thereby forestalling any Irish immigrant from running for public office by way of its tremendous clout.<sup>45</sup> The anti-Catholic sentiments of the Tammany Society

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<sup>42</sup> Cohalan, 61ff.

<sup>43</sup> For these descriptions, see Billington, *Protestant Crusade*, 323ff. While institutions like Ellis Island, which offered a systematized process to deal with health concerns, had not yet existed, some cities directed sick immigrants to hospitals immediately after stepping onto shore.

<sup>44</sup> Cohalan, 62.

<sup>45</sup> Ira M. Leonard and Robert D. Parmet, *American Nativism, 1830-1860* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1971), 23.

represented the stated beliefs of powerful politicians at a national level as well. For example, John Adams was particularly perplexed at the rituals of American Catholics. While he considered the Catholic mass aesthetically and sensorially awesome, he bemoaned the canon law and policies of the “Romish clergy” as being framed for the “aggrandizement of their own order” and sympathetic to tyrannical human servitude.<sup>46</sup>

As anti-Catholicism was primarily an urban movement, its arena became the streets and buildings of America’s most prominent cities. Catholic churches and cathedrals, then, were the most tangible targets for opposing sentiments, which occasionally arose in the form of riots and attacks on Catholic communities. Interestingly, in Billington’s magisterial monograph on “the Protestant Crusade” against Catholicism, the author adopts metaphors of violence to describe the various periods of the overall conflict—he often notes that “flames were spread,” while “wars against the immigrant” were waged, in both cases, literally and metaphorically. Nearly all of the violence, furthermore, was directed at Irish, rather than German, parishes. Contemporaries, who attempted to uncover an underlying and believable cause for the selective bigotry, indeed, recognized and commented on this phenomenon. The conspicuous poverty of Irish immigrants and that they were erroneously associated with the English were probably the most immediate causes.

Violence towards Catholic institutions began in the late-1820s and continued in an excited state in numerous events for the next two decades. In 1834, a Protestant mob burned down an Ursuline convent school in Charlestown, Massachusetts (outside Boston)

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<sup>46</sup> John Adams, “Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law,” in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States with A Life of the Author, Notes and Illustrations*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, vol. 3 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1865), 448-64. This essay was originally published as a series of four letters in the *Boston Gazette* in August 1765 and reprinted in other papers thereafter.

as a statement of conviction against the rising Catholic population of the New England city.<sup>47</sup> The conspiratorial nature of nativism, such as its belief that Catholics were trying to remove Protestant versions of the Bible from American education, initiated the most catastrophic attack on Catholic churches in Philadelphia. The Bible Riots of Philadelphia, as they are known, culminated in the burning of the St. Michael's Church, St. Augustine's Church, and the house of the Sisters of Charity, among other buildings, in 1844.<sup>48</sup>

The state of war between Protestants and Catholics in Philadelphia understandably attracted the attention of Catholic leaders in other major urban centers. Most vocal was Hughes himself, who criticized the Catholics of Philadelphia for failing to fulfill their *prima facie* obligation to protect their churches and congregations:

They should have defended their churches since the authorities could not or would not do it for them. We might forbear from harming the intruder into our house until the last, but his first violence to our own church should be promptly and decisively repelled.<sup>49</sup>

When a rumor arose that the nativist rioters were planning to gather in New York's City Hall Park, Hughes emerged as the de facto guardian of the Catholic community, assuming the role of a general against the potential insurgents. Hughes released a special issue of New York's *Freeman's Journal* (a Catholic periodical owned by the bishop) admonishing the Irish in the city from attending the gathering. The bishop also demanded the outgoing mayor to prevent the march. The exchange between the bishop and the

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<sup>47</sup> For a narrative of this event, see Billington, *Protestant Crusade*, 68-76.

<sup>48</sup> Vincent P. Lannie and Bernard C. Diethorn, "For the Honor and Glory of God: The Philadelphia Bible Riots of 1840," *History of Education Quarterly* 8 (1968): 44-106; John R. G. Hassard, *Life of the Most Reverend John Hughes, D.D., First Archbishop of New York* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1866), 275-76; Rev. John Talbot Smith, LL.D., *The Catholic Church in New York: A History of the New York Diocese From Its Establishment in 1808 to the Present Time*, vol. 1 (New York: Hall and Locke, 1905), 146-48.

<sup>49</sup> Hassard, 276; Smith, *Catholic Church*, vol. 1, 147.

mayor as related has become legendary in the history of Catholicism in nineteenth-century New York:

“Are you afraid,” asked the major, “that some of your churches will be burned?”

“No, sir; but I am afraid that some of *yours* will be burned. We [Catholics] can protect our own. I come to warn you for your own good.”

“Do you think, bishop, that your people would attack the procession?”

“I do not; but the Native Americans [i.e., nativists] want to provoke a Catholic riot, and if they can do it in no other way, I believe they would not scruple to attack the procession themselves, for the sake of making it appear that the Catholics has assailed them.”

“What, then, would you have me do?”

“I did not come to tell you what to do. I am a churchman, not the mayor of New York.”<sup>50</sup>

Despite his professed humility, Hughes concluded the conversation by commanding the mayor *exactly* how to avert the potential chaos. The bishop’s warning and advice proved successful; no procession occurred and the churches of New York City were unharmed.

Catholics in New York had experienced similar events prior to the potential riots of 1844. Early appearances of the anti-Catholic movement in the city sought to destroy—in some cases, literally—the burgeoning presence of the Catholic church. In 1824, a group of Orangemen assaulted Catholics living in Greenwich Village. The continued influence of the Protestant organization in Greenwich Village required the protection of St. Joseph’s Church during its construction in 1833.<sup>51</sup> A similar strategy was employed two years later to defend Old St. Patrick’s Cathedral from a possible attack by Protestants.<sup>52</sup> Two years before the construction of St. Joseph’s Church, Protestant protesters burned St. Mary’s Church on Sheriff Street, a former Presbyterian edifice and home of an Irish parish. Although not fully destroyed, the church was rebuilt in 1832 and

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<sup>50</sup> Hassard, 278.

<sup>51</sup> Carthy, 63.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*; Smith, *Catholic Church*, vol. 1, 132.

further renovated by Patrick Keely in the 1860s. Therefore, while the Catholic church in New York and other major cities was raising edifices to accommodate its growing numbers, it was forced to defend the same building from immediate destruction at the hands of its virulent opponents. These urban structures—churches, orphanages, and convents—concurrently became sites of religious practice and social conflict.

In addition to the violence targeting Catholic populations and their buildings, the opposition to American Catholicism and immigration defining nativist beliefs materialized most rationally in printed media. A tentative (as its title indicates) bibliography published in *The Catholic Historical Review* in 1933 lists approximately 500 circulated works of anti-Catholic propaganda from 1800 to 1860, including newspapers and magazines, histories and theses, novels and plays, and reports and documents of anti-Catholic societies.<sup>53</sup> A cursory glimpse of this compilation reveals the astonishing energy with which nativists and other Americans expressed their fear of Catholicism, especially as embodied by the incursion of recent immigrants. While one could spend an entire academic career deconstructing the views contained in the works of this bibliography—which only surveys sixty years of a centuries-long movement—the most emblematic writings must be considered in order to unmask the cultural context of the construction of St. Patrick’s Cathedral.

After a period of relative dormancy in the late 1840s, nativism and its sentiments reemerged with a refreshed vigor and organizational identity in the 1850s. The culmination of this reawakening arrived in the development of the Know-Nothing

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<sup>53</sup> Ray Allen Billington, “Tentative Bibliography of Anti-Catholic Propaganda in the United States (1800-1860),” *The Catholic Historical Review* 18 (1933): 492-513. Billington expanded this bibliography in his later monograph *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism*, esp. 445ff. In this work, the author dedicates an entire chapter to discussing anti-Catholic literature. See Billington, *The Protestant Crusade*, 1-31.

movement, which evolved from a secret society (from where the obscure name of the party was derived) boastfully called the Order of the Star Spangled Banner, whose members referred to themselves as the “Sires of ’76” and identified a colleague in public as “Sam.” A majority of the Sires were extremely patriotic, yet respectful towards their fellow citizens, acting solely through political platforms and tickets. The ultimate failure of the Know-Nothing party to pass any productive legislation, thereby affecting the loss of support of the American public, provided an opportunity for Catholic immigrant communities and patrons to assert their presence through more monumental and permanent means.

### ***The Arrival of John Hughes***

In the 1850s, nearly nine out of ten Catholics were foreign-born and in the first year of the decade, over 220,000 Irish Catholics immigrated to New York. While the Catholic church in the city was beginning to find an architectural identity through the construction of various parish churches and institutions, the influx of faithful along with the evolution of the nativist and anti-Catholic movements necessitated a strong voice to represent the growing Catholic population. Auspiciously for Catholics, especially those of Irish birth, this need corresponded with the rise of John Joseph Hughes as leader of the church in New York.

One cannot adequately encapsulate the character and career of Hughes in a single scholarly study. His epic charisma and stature thoroughly colored his reputation in the minds of both contemporaries and historians. Early in his career, Hughes earned the nickname “Dagger John” not only for the dagger-like cross prefacing his signature (a common practice by bishops), but also for his piercing personality. At the age of 40 he

was described as looking “more like a well-tailored fighter than a clergyman,”<sup>54</sup> while a contemporary art critic and opponent of the church deemed Hughes “a manly man, a gentleman in all his intercourse with gentleman.”<sup>55</sup> It is unsurprising, then, that the first biography of Hughes published in 1866 (two years after his death) eschews objectivity in favor of adulation by carefully selecting and even manipulating primary source material.<sup>56</sup>

Like many of the other protagonists in this dissertation, Hughes’s life encompassed a definitely American experience. Although an emigrant from Ireland, Hughes received his religious training at Mount St. Mary’s College in Emmitsburg, Maryland (after several unsuccessful admission attempts and employment as the school’s gardener) and served as a young seminarian in the Diocese of Philadelphia.<sup>57</sup> In 1837, Hughes became coadjutor bishop of New York under Bishop Dubois and succeeded his mentor as bishop of New York in 1842. When New York was elevated to an archdiocese in 1850, Hughes became its first archbishop, a title he would carry until his death in 1864.

Having experienced Catholic life, as both layman and priest, in central Pennsylvania, Maryland, Philadelphia, and eventually New York, Hughes was well prepared for the religious and political conflicts he would encounter throughout his legendary career. While controversy and debate characterized a major part of his career in America (and greatly informed his work at the new St. Patrick’s Cathedral), Hughes’s

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<sup>54</sup> Richard Shaw, *Dagger John: The Unquiet Life and Times of Archbishop John Hughes of New York* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 123.

<sup>55</sup> Clarence Cook, “The New Catholic Cathedral in New York,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Feb. 1879, 174.

<sup>56</sup> See Hassard. This was also noted by Shaw, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Mount St. Mary’s College was founded by Father John Dubois in 1805. It should not be confused with St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore.

upbringing in Ireland involved similar religious wrongdoings. For instance, during the burial of his sister, Mary, the priest leading the funeral process was forbidden to enter the cemetery because of anti-Catholic laws, leading him to bless a handful of earth so that a layman could throw in on the coffin in the grave on his behalf.<sup>58</sup> As leader of the Catholic church in New York, Hughes reflected upon the religious conditions of his childhood in Ireland:

Being of a pensive and reflective character of mind, the consequences of [my Catholicism] became painful. [...] I could not, then or now, exchange my religious privileges and hopes as a Catholic for all the power, all the honors, all the glory (as it is sometimes called), or all the wealth of the British Empire. [...These circumstances] left a sting in my memory which it has cost me much to remove.<sup>59</sup>

Clearly, Hughes's childhood experiences impacted his character as an adult. While religious prejudice impelled the Hughes family to immigrate to America, the underlying hatred of British, nativist, and anti-Catholic support would result in great consequences, especially in the architectural arena, and provide a point of empathy for his fellow Irish Catholics in the New World.

Since his training at Mount St. Mary's College, Hughes was involved in numerous debates on the virtues of Catholicism. Some of these controversies were taken up involuntarily, others thrust upon him. As church official, Hughes assumed the role of apologist in the most historical and literal sense of word.<sup>60</sup> The first major debate in which Hughes participated—and the first arranged debate between a Catholic and

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<sup>58</sup> Hassard, 17.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 18. Originally from an unpublished letter to the editor of Dublin's *Freeman's Journal*, 11 Dec. 1861.

<sup>60</sup> For example, in 1829, in response to the founding of the paper *The Protestant*, Hughes submitted false, anti-Catholic correspondences under the pseudonym "Cramner," which the paper willingly published. See Shea 211; Hassard, 105-9. Earlier, in 1827, Hughes founded the Catholic Tract Society in Philadelphia "for the sole purpose of defending Catholicism and attacking Protestantism." See Billington, *Protestant Crusade*, 47; Hassard, 77-78.

Protestant<sup>61</sup>—involved an intelligent and mutual mediation with the Presbyterian Reverend John Breckenridge in 1833, whose letters were widely published in contemporary Catholic and Protestant newspapers and periodicals. The volume and substance of the epistolary exchange between Hughes and Breckenridge was remarkable. The participants together agreed to guidelines to follow in their discussion in order to ensure effective correspondence and to maintain decorum and amiability suitable for religious leaders.<sup>62</sup> This controversy (as the participants called their correspondence) established and validated Hughes’s reputation as a pensive and articulate apologist for American Catholicism—a characteristic that would remain with the priest for the rest of his career. The nature of Hughes’s defense of Catholicism against Protestant opposition, however, would become fiercer as his position within the church grew more prominent.

While a bishop and, later, archbishop in New York, Hughes continued to strengthen the standing of the Catholic church against Protestant opposition. Indeed, Hughes recognized and, to some, exploited the ability of the anti-Catholic movement to mobilize and solidify Catholics in New York. In 1858, he suggested to a fellow church leader that “in some respects [nativists’] violence was very serviceable to the Catholic cause” and understood that the former “tended powerfully to unite Catholics.”<sup>63</sup> Years earlier, responding to the proliferation of the Know-Nothing party and its anti-Catholic message, in a church circular dated December 15, 1853, the archbishop directed the faithful how to deal with individuals of such sentiment in their communities, insisting on peaceful tolerance rather than violent reaction:

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<sup>61</sup> Billington, *Protestant Crusade*, 62

<sup>62</sup> *Controversy Between Rev. Messrs. Hughes and Breckenridge, on the subject “Is the Protestant Religion the Religion of Christ?”* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Eugene Cumiskey, [1834]), vi-1.

<sup>63</sup> Hughes to Prefect, 23 March 1858. Quoted in Dolan, 162. Original in the Archives of the University of Notre Dame, *Scrittura*, vol. 18, fol. 525, no. 1417.

Let every man who chooses to preach in the public streets, preach as often and as long as he will. But as for you, dear brethren, shun the space in which his voice can be heard, lest, owing to human infirmity, a reasonable and just indignation might tempt any one of you to exhibit symptoms of impatience or resentment, which would be a signal to your enemies, in consequence of which the laws and rules of peace and good order might be violated.<sup>64</sup>

In one of Hughes's many evocations of American values—the same values his opponents claimed Catholicism undermined—the archbishop spoke collectively to each Catholic of New York not to “degrade yourself one iota below the highest grade of American citizenship.”<sup>65</sup>

Hughes's polemics provided an intellectual complement to the acceleration in building activity by the Catholic in New York as previously described. If the preliminary debates, including the conversation with Rev. Breckenridge, correspond to the earlier church constructions (e.g., St. Peter's Church, St. Joseph's Church), then the literary equivalent to the construction of the new cathedral is *Kirwan Unmasked*, six letters directed at the diatribes of Nicholas Murray, a Presbyterian minister in New Jersey and former member of the Catholic church. Earlier in 1848, Murray penned a series of open letters to Hughes in the *New York Observer* (a popular conduit for Protestant writers) under the pseudonym “Kirwan.”<sup>66</sup> Murray would eventually publish two more series, but only after he was revealed as author did Hughes directly reference Murray's letters.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Kehoe, vol. 2, 721.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> The pseudonym Kirwan refers to Walter Blake Kirwan, an eighteenth-century Catholic priest and convert to the Church of Ireland. See Shea, 123 n. 2.

<sup>67</sup> As noted, Hughes initially refused to respond to Kirwan's letters. Instead, he published nine letters in the *Freeman's Journal* entitled “On the Importance of Being in Communion with Christ's One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, Addressed to a Private Reasoner.” Of course, the unidentified target of this series was Kirwan.

Nicholas Murray also wrote a fourth series of letters directed at Roger Taney, the Catholic Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Taney, a Jacksonian Democrat, administered the oath of office to President Lincoln and was greatly involved in the politics of slavery before the Civil War. The landmark decision of

The intellectual rigor with which Hughes engaged in this debate, indeed, echoes the confidence and monumentality of Renwick's design for the cathedral. However, as one scholar notes, the debate exemplifies "the dysfunction threaded throughout the evangelical [i.e., Protestant]-Catholic controversy."<sup>68</sup> This ineffectiveness was highly weighted towards Murray's rhetoric, which Hughes portrayed as exhibiting "mental nudity." Whether Hughes emerged from the debate as victor remains uncertain. Some emphasize his characteristically unwavering attack on Murray as Kirwan, while others note contemporary summarizations of the debate that point out Hughes's rhetorical mistakes and weaknesses. His message to Catholics, however, was clear. In explicitly evoking Murray's supposed fraudulence—"So long as you wore a mask, which no honest man need ever wear in a free country like this," the series begins—Hughes assured his audience (whether Murray himself or the general Catholic reader) that the Catholic church "has a mother's heart" and that all opposition, of which Murray's letters were the epitome, cannot undermine the foundations of the American Catholicism.

The culmination of Hughes's declamations against his enemies came in the form of an oration entitled "The Decline of Protestantism and its Causes" given in November 1850 in Old St. Patrick's Cathedral. This lecture provided the perfect segue into his concentration on the rebuilding of the cathedral, indeed the most personal goal of the archbishop. When plans for construction were in their final stages, Hughes had earned the respect his achievements commanded even in the minds of his most powerful detractors. The most exemplary, in *Harper's Weekly*, a periodical owned by the Harper brothers,

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the Taney Court ruled against African American citizenship in the case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, an opinion that became a major stimulus for the war. For further discussion on Taney and his contributions (or lack thereof) to American Catholicism, see James Edmund Roohan, *American Catholics and the Social Question, 1865-1900* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 44-47.

<sup>68</sup> Shea, 216.

who were staunch voices in the anti-Catholic movement, characterized Hughes as a man who “awes into silence any serious opposition” and “stands forward as the conspicuous mark for whatever arrows or assaults may be launched against the cause which he defends.”<sup>69</sup>

### ***Planning, Designing, and Constructing the Cathedral***

According to a *New York Times* article (discussed more thoroughly below), St. Patrick’s Cathedral by 1858 was in “constant study for upwards of eight years.” Marking the project’s conception in 1850, then, is convenient for it is also the year New York was raised to an archdiocese and Hughes gave his powerful oration on the “Decline of Protestantism.” From 1852 to 1858, Renwick developed the design with the assistance of William Rodrigue, Hughes’s brother-in-law, who probably advised Renwick on aspects related to Catholic ritual and furniture.<sup>70</sup> The two architects also collaborated on St. Patrick’s Chancery, construction of which began in 1858, at 266 Mulberry Street (fig. 79; now (now, St. Michael’s Russian Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite).<sup>71</sup> While Renwick executed signed drawings for the cathedral prior to the cornerstone ceremony, the names of both architects first appear on a contract dated March 5, 1859, which provided each architect \$2,500 per year for eight years. Therefore, the intended completion date was 1867.

Like most grand projects begun in the mid-nineteenth-century, construction of the cathedral ceased in the years leading up to and during the Civil War. Construction was stopped in 1860 due to a lack of funds, while the war and the death of Hughes in 1864

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<sup>69</sup> “The Most Reverend John Hughes, D.D., Archbishop of New York,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 26 June 1858.

<sup>70</sup> It is unclear exactly what aspects of the cathedral design Rodrigue contributed.

<sup>71</sup> The building now belongs to St. Michael Russian Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite.

prevented resumption of the project. Construction resumed in 1865 under the guidance of Archbishop McCloskey, who contracted William Joyce to supervise the project.<sup>72</sup> As noted below, the cathedral, still unfinished yet operable, was officially consecrated in 1879 by Archbishop Corrigan. In the two-decade span between the laying of the cornerstone and the consecration, Renwick was neither continually present at the site nor contractually in charge of the project. Although he was always credited with the design of the cathedral, even in the later years of the nineteenth century when construction continued on various elements, for this discussion it is important to regard the earlier schemes as more authoritative and representative of Renwick's original vision, even as they gradually evolved.<sup>73</sup>

While Renwick's design of the cathedral crystalized the Catholic cause in New York, the choice of location reflected the project's institutional importance. The land on Fifth Avenue between Fiftieth and Fifty-first Streets was originally purchased by Father Kohlmann in 1810 for his New York Literary Institute, a Jesuit boarding school for Catholic and non-Catholic boys alike. The site, located "four small miles from the city" according to early-nineteenth century sources, eventually fell into the joint ownership of the parish of St. Peter and the parish of St. Patrick; the two together intended to use the site as a cemetery.<sup>74</sup> When the trustees of the cathedral bought St. Peter's portion of the deed and when Hughes returned the northeast corner (which was given to St. John's

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<sup>72</sup> Pierson, Jr., *Technology and the Picturesque*, 214.

<sup>73</sup> Renwick was introduced by Cardinal McCloskey as architect of the cathedral at a private dinner following the dedication ceremony. See "An Imposing Ceremonial: Blessing of the New Roman Catholic Cathedral," *New York Times*, 26 May 1879, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Cohalan, 26, 80. The New York Literary Institute originally was located on Mulberry St. After moving to the Fifth Avenue site, it was closed in 1813; the building then was used as a temporary residence by exiled French Trappist monks.

On the land transaction, the trustees of both parishes purchased the site from private hands (who had bought it from the church in the 1821) in 1829. The plans to use the site as cemetery were quickly abandoned when the land was revealed as unsuitable for this purpose.

Church in 1842) to St. Patrick's parish, the site of the new building, after some financial maneuvering, was finally established.

The speed with which the site was secured for the cathedral incited characteristic suspicion from New York's Protestant community. An early-twentieth-century account resolutely, and certainly with hyperbole regarding its statistics, reports the skepticism:

It is remarkable with what tenacity an erroneous impression will keep possession of the public mind. It is doubtless the firm belief of nine-tenths of the Protestant community, that the valuable blocks of land were, in some mysterious and indescribable way, obtained as a gift or grant, without consideration, or at least without full consideration, from the city government.<sup>75</sup>

Additionally, American art critic Clarence Cook, in an 1879 article discussing the cathedral construction, claims that “the city was jockeyed out of the finest site on the island by a crafty and unscrupulous priest [Hughes] playing upon the political hopes and fears of as base a lot of men as ever got the government of a great city into their power.”<sup>76</sup> To Cook, the procurement of the land—which he complained was obtained for a mere dollar—was proof of a Catholic conspiracy to acquire “all the highest points of land on which to build their churches.”<sup>77</sup> Notwithstanding the alleged illegality surrounding the acquisition of the site, Hughes certainly would have appreciated the value of the uptown location within the religious fabric of New York, as many Protestant parishes were continuing to relocate northward as they began to do in the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>78</sup> It is clear that Hughes, even before selecting Renwick as architect, focused his vision on both the present and future, and was intent at providing the most prominent staging for his new cathedral. Indeed, Hughes justified the centrality of the site as

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<sup>75</sup> Farley, 12-13.

<sup>76</sup> Cook, *Atlantic Monthly*, 173.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>78</sup> Dolan, 59.

reflecting “not as New York was then was, but as New York was to be and is so rapidly becoming.”<sup>79</sup>

Hughes’s preference for a site outside of the built fabric of mid-nineteenth-century New York offered the patron and his architect some advantages. Constructing the cathedral on land away from any competing buildings afforded the design complete primacy in the area.<sup>80</sup> As seen in figures 80 and 81, views published before the consecration in 1879, displaying a completed cathedral (including the spires, which were not completed until 1888), show the spectacular views of the building from the undeveloped surrounding land (it is important to note that even in 1865 streets above Forty-second Street were still unpaved).<sup>81</sup> In ways the modern visitors cannot repeat, New Yorkers, presumably of all denominations or religions, congregate around all sides of the cathedral, evoking a more pastoral and pristine environment reminiscent of epochs past. In order to maximize the cathedral’s dominance over its surroundings, then, Renwick emphasized the verticality of his design through the spired towers of the facade. While the design precedents for these features are discussed below, it is important to recollect the complaint cited above in reference to the topography of the cathedral block. Indeed, even though it was ultimately compromised, Renwick’s original vision was well suited as a symbol Hughes’s ambition for the cathedral.

It is unclear how or why Renwick ultimately received the commission to design the new cathedral. Like nearly all of Renwick’s projects, there is virtually no evidence

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<sup>79</sup> New York Archdiocesan Archives, Extracts of Minutes and Resolves of Trustees of St. Patrick’s, 2 Oct. 1856.

<sup>80</sup> Matthew Gallegos points to Carlo Borromeo’s *Instructiones fabricate et supellectilis ecclesiasticae* (1577) as the first publication to prescribe that churches should be built in prominent locations within a city. Borromeo’s publication was known and read by Catholic patrons in America, including Archbishop Carroll. See Gallegos, 150.

<sup>81</sup> Dolan, 15. Also see Wilson, ed. *Memorial History of New York*, vol. 3, 518.

concerning the genesis of the design of St. Patrick's Cathedral. Only one early (yet undatable) drawing exists for scholars to appreciate this phase of design (fig. 82); the earliest indication of Renwick's original design, furthermore, appears in a description published in the *New York Times* in an article about the laying of the cornerstone on 15 August 1858.<sup>82</sup> It is important to consider this description to ensure a complete understanding of the design and construction process of the cathedral given the lack of visual evidence.

As apparent in many of his Gothic Revival designs, Renwick's appropriation of the medieval idiom differed from that of his colleagues and predecessors. As Pierson writes, "Renwick seems for the most part to have remained aloof from the Ecclesiastical movement."<sup>83</sup> In other words, his inspiration came from more continental sources, rather than English antecedents characteristic of Pugin's methods and adopted by later Gothic Revivalists in America and abroad. The most operative period for the design of the cathedral comprised the Renwick's trip to France in 1855, which offered the architect intimate interaction with France's Gothic architecture and, more importantly, the Gothic Revival additions to and renovations of the area's medieval monuments. William Pierson, Jr. presented the first and most persuasive argument for the impact of Renwick's interaction with the Gothic cathedrals of Paris and nearby cities on the design for the American cathedral. Pierson's analysis is critical for it offers an important narrative of Renwick's intent to complement the architect's literary description cited above before

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<sup>82</sup> Pierson, Jr. *Technology and the Picturesque*, 220-21, fig. 141. Pierson previously recognized this document, which features two similar side elevations, as representing perhaps the first indication of Renwick's thoughts on St. Patrick's Cathedral. Since there is no provenance for this drawing, which is part of the Renwick architectural drawings and papers collection in the Department of Drawings and Archives at Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, it is uncertain why this sketch is included with the other drawings for St. Patrick's Cathedral in the collection.

<sup>83</sup> Pierson, Jr., *Technology and the Picturesque*, 215.

significant changes affected the building as executed. Pierson suggests as major influences on Renwick's overall approach to the design Viollet-le-Duc's restoration of Notre-Dame de Paris (initiated in the 1840s during the July Monarchy and completed during the Second Empire), which reinvigorated the cathedral in the restorer's own vision, however powerful the guise of objective preservation endured.

More important than the restoration of Paris cathedral, moreover, was the completion of Cologne Cathedral, which continued the legacy established by the cathedrals of Chartres and Amiens, among others, and exhibits some of the most impressive Rayonnant details in Europe (fig. 83). The restoration and completion of Cologne Cathedral, motivated by the revived interest in medievalism in the nineteenth century, began in 1823, but did not receive appropriate funding until 1842, at which time the construction of the nave commenced.<sup>84</sup> While Pierson concedes that there is no indication Renwick's travelled outside of France and into Germany, the author is "absolutely certain that [Renwick] was very much aware of what was going on [in Cologne]."<sup>85</sup> While such confidence should be questioned for its methodological delicacy, the similarities between the nineteenth-century additions to Cologne Cathedral and Renwick's vision for St. Patrick's cannot be ignored and certainly corroborate Pierson's claim.

Cologne Cathedral offered a European model for the two-towered facade of St. Patrick's Cathedral, indeed its most characteristic and dominate feature. This type of façade is typical of High Gothic cathedrals in France and their descendants in Germany

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 226. The rebuilding campaign was led by the Central Cathedral Building Society of 1842 (*Central [Zentral]-Dombau-Verein zu Köln von 1842*), founded for the purpose of completing the cathedral. Interestingly, this effort was sponsored by the Protestant Prussian Empire, rather than the Catholic church.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 224. The author also notes that the reconstruction was published in contemporary French architectural literature, which Renwick could have read given his fluency in French.

and elsewhere. In contrast, English Gothic cathedrals often featured tower-less screen facades; when corner towers appeared in English examples, moreover, they were usually flat roofed. Few, if any, American churches or cathedrals featured more than one towers, whether on the facade or elsewhere in the design. Until construction resumed in the mid-nineteenth century, the south tower of Cologne Cathedral terminated before the springing of the spire, while construction of the north tower had not yet begun. When Renwick was in France, work was beginning on a number of Gothic Revival churches, whose two-towered facades were directly influenced by the reconstruction campaign at Cologne, including the Basilica of Ste. Clotilde in Paris, designed by F. C. Gau of Cologne (fig. 84). It is probable that Renwick appreciated Cologne's facade treatment through Gau's work in Paris.

Pierson assigns great evidentiary importance on the 1856 diary entries of George Strong, whose critiques of Renwick's works were usually vicious, yet remain informative for the modern historian. In comparing Strong's early description of the design with what was eventually constructed, it is clear that Renwick imagined a larger cathedral in harmony with Hughes's own vision for the site as "a glorious example and edification, not only to the people of New York, but also to the whole United States and the whole Catholic world," as the archbishop professed in following the laying of the cathedral's cornerstone.<sup>86</sup> However, although Pierson states confidently that these entries "were obviously written by an informed and interested observer," Strong writes, "I forgot the precise figures, but I think its alleged length is six hundred eighty feet!!!"<sup>87</sup> Since

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<sup>86</sup> This quote is taken from a circular distrusted by Hughes for the purpose of encouraging subscriptions for the construction project. See Kehoe, ed., vol. 2, 270.

<sup>87</sup> Nevins and Thomas, eds., *The Turbulent Fifties, 1850-1859*, 310.

Renwick's description published two years later cites the length at 328 feet (less than half of Strong's number), one must question the veracity of Strong's brief note.<sup>88</sup>

Moreover, the certainty with which Strong and, by extension, Pierson place on the supposed structural framework of St. Patrick's Cathedral necessitates an immediate examination. Unlike his earlier entry, Strong's description written in March 13, 1857 (a year and a half before the cornerstone ceremony) relates his experience with Renwick's designs (presumably the architect's finished drawings):

Anderson took me yesterday to see the designs for the Roman Catholic Cathedral on Fifth Avenue. Very ambitious; scale very grand indeed—likely to be effective. Cheap ornamentation in iron; the mullions, mouldings, pillars, open work spires all iron [...] Will surely rack itself to pieces by expansion and contraction of its incongruous materials within five years after it's finished.<sup>89</sup>

Combined with the entry of 1856, which surmises that the cathedral will be “a combination of Cologne Cathedral and the Crystal Palace” through its use of iron, Strong's later observation (regardless of how he ascertained the information) suggests Renwick was contemplating, and even beginning to execute, a technologically advanced building cloaked in an historical (i.e. Gothic/Gothic Revival) exterior.<sup>90</sup>

Renwick probably encountered modern examples in iron architecture through a variety of related sources. While Renwick would have known of London's most famous Crystal Palace of 1851, the architect certainly saw a similar structure at the 1853 Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations in New York.<sup>91</sup> Interestingly, New York's

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<sup>88</sup> Pierson chooses to ignore the professed hearsay of Strong's entry of 18 November 1856, which begin, “Verplanck tells me that Dr. Ives tells him that Bishop [sic] Hughes is about beginning his grand *duomo* so long talked of [...]” Clearly, then, Strong's dimensions derived from tertiary information, which he himself admitted to have forgotten. Curiously, Pierson notes the secondary aspect of Strong's claims in his discussion of the entry of 13 March 1857 concerning the iron structure of the cathedral.

<sup>89</sup> Nevins and Thomas, eds., *The Turbulent Fifties, 1850-1859*, 328.

<sup>90</sup> Pierson, Jr., *Technology and the Picturesque*, 231-33.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

Crystal Palace, designed by Georg Carstensen and Karl Gildemeister, was located immediately next to the Croton Distributing Reservoir, designed in part by Renwick himself. Whereas the New York Crystal Palace offered Renwick an initial glimpse into the potential of an iron structural system at a monumental scale, the Palais de l'Industrie at the 1855 Exposition Universelle in Paris, which Renwick attended with Corcoran, provided another model in iron construction as the designs for St. Patrick's were evolving.<sup>92</sup> Strong's claim concerning the iron framework of the cathedral proves even more reliable when considering Renwick's other designs in the 1850s. The architect was extremely current in the use of structural and decorative iron in his buildings of this period as described in the previous chapter, such as Rhineland Gardens (1854-55) and the Bank of the State of New York (1855).

It is possible to conclude why Renwick ultimately abandoned iron as a major structural material. By the time of the cornerstone ceremony, according to his own report, the architect had settled on a masonry support system, including the vaults themselves and the exterior buttresses.<sup>93</sup> Renwick's original design also may have included iron trusses over the stone vaulting. The final execution of the vaulting, beginning in 1875, featured a lath and plaster ceiling, consistent with earlier treatments of church vaulting in America.<sup>94</sup> Ultimately, the retrogression from iron to stone to plaster was an unfortunate consequence of cost. However, to the nineteenth-century American Catholic, whose typical church experience involved much humbler structures, the vaults—over 100 feet

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<sup>92</sup> Pierson mentions the Galerie des Machines in Paris as the iron and glass structure, which Renwick would have seen in 1855. This building, however, was the centerpiece of the 1889 Exposition Universelle.

<sup>93</sup> "Great Catholic Ceremony: Laying of the Corner-Stone of the New St. Patrick's Cathedral," *New York Times*, 16 Aug. 1858, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Pierson, Jr., *Technology and the Picturesque*, 245.

high—regardless of the “truthfulness” of their material, would have invoked a religious experience unlike anything he or she had previously encountered.<sup>95</sup>

Treatment of the interior of the cathedral traditionally has submitted to observations about the exterior. When considered together with the facade, however, Renwick’s interior reveals the historical eclecticism of his design.<sup>96</sup> Renwick adopted a more scholastic approach in formulated his interior design, as he appropriated the English Gothic mode he would have known only through literary sources. Because of the narrowness of the city block, Renwick eschewed the verticality of continental interiors (which would have resulted in an unproportional height to width ratio and a structurally precarious system of vaulting) in favor of a gentler interior space.<sup>97</sup> Subtly derived from the interior of York Minster and Winchester Cathedral, the interior of St. Patrick’s Cathedral respected the historicity and individuality of the medieval precedents from which the architect drew, while simultaneously, and at a rather early date, reflected the desire of American architects to find an identity for their own architectural practices and achievements (figs. 85, 86).<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> More astute observers regretted the plaster details of the cathedral. A writer for the *New York Times*, in an article published a week before the dedication in 1879, cried that the awareness of the plaster capitals was “painful” and suggests that Renwick could have placed uncarved stone blocks on the columns to be finished when funds permitted. Only if the “sham capitals” were temporary solutions, according to the writer, could these elements be justified. See “The Catholic Cathedral: Preparing for Its Dedication,” *New York Times*, 18 May 1879, 10.

<sup>96</sup> Renwick originally intended the view towards the altar to be as direct possible, preferring temporary seats “in the manner of French and Italian churches” rather than permanent pews, which were later added to the interior as they could be rented to raise capital for the cathedral.

<sup>97</sup> Pierson, Jr., *Technology and the Picturesque*, 254-57.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 257-261. Renwick would have been familiar with the architecture of York minster through his own copy of John Britton’s *The History and Antiquities of the Metropolitan Church of York*, published in 1819. Similarly, he would have known Winchester Cathedral through Britton’s *The Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain*, published in five volumes from 1807-26. Although it only can be proved that Renwick owned a copy of the former, he probably would have had access to the latter in some form.

Pierson also notes that designs for various English churches were exhibited at the 1855 Paris Exposition and subsequently published in the 1855 volume of *Annales archéologiques*. Although he provides no citation for the former claim, it is possible these offered Renwick another resource with which to appreciate the English Gothic.

In returning to the exterior, the cathedral was designed to include an east end that could compete compositionally with the monumental facade (fig. 87).<sup>99</sup> Since Hughes originally requested Renwick design the bishop's and clergy's residences on the same block (which, curiously, Renwick did not take into account in the first design), Renwick was forced to modify the plan of the east end by squaring off the terminus and removing the aisle, apsidal chapels, thereby losing the effect of the original *chevet* east end (fig. 88). Interestingly, however, in contrast to the exterior, which drew its inspiration from continental sources, the east end, despite its truncation, was always intended to feature a prominent Lady Chapel, an architectural type definitely English in derivation.<sup>100</sup> Before modifying the east end, Renwick designed a well-integrated Lady Chapel, which could be read as an enlarged apsidal chapel (fig. 87). After redesigning the choir area per Hughes's demands, however, the architect envisioned one version of a Lady Chapel that would have both exaggerated the horizontality of the interior and overshadowed the two residences flanking it and added later in the design process. Renwick's ambitious chapel featured a centrally-planned, 400-foot tower to rise from in between the four-story residences (figs. 89, 90). While Pierson ingeniously analyzes this element as a harbinger of the early skyscraper—particularly Cass Gilbert's Gothic Revival Woolworth Building—Renwick's final, yet unexecuted contribution to the design of St. Patrick's distinguishes the cathedral as greater than a hackneyed version of a French medieval cathedral as its place in architectural historiography had often dictated.

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<sup>99</sup> Pierson illustrates a series of elevations and plans executed by Renwick from the Renwick architectural collection at Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library. A recent examination of this collection by the author of this dissertation produced none of these materials.

<sup>100</sup> The lack of funds prevented Renwick and Hughes to construct the Lady Chapel. The existing chapel was completed in 1900 by architect Charles T. Matthews and is one of the most stunning features of the current cathedral.

When appreciating the ultimate design for St. Patrick's Cathedral after its decades-long construction, it becomes clear why many have considered the church the magnum opus of Renwick's prolific career. Formally, Renwick achieved a remarkable and unprecedented feat in the American architectural tradition by designing a cathedral over two-and-a-half times larger than Baltimore Cathedral (previously the largest Catholic cathedral in the United States) within the confines of an urban lot. Furthermore, in merging a variety of medieval forms into a unified whole, Renwick successfully avoided any nationalistic associations that may follow the zealous appropriation of a single architectural precedent—a commendable accomplishment considering the primacy of the stylistic debates dominating architectural circles in the mid-nineteenth century.

***St. Patrick's Cathedral and the Anxiety of Influence***

A decade after the dedication of St. Patrick's Cathedral, another major religious leader of New York embarked on a similar project to overshadow Hughes' duomo on Fifth Avenue. Details of the commission and the designs of the competition submissions and execution (as initially executed) reveal a striking similarity to the architectural narrative described regarding St. Patrick's Cathedral. To reuse the literary analogy suggested above, the later project suffered from a strong anxiety of influence resulting in one of the most tedious and disappointing architectural endeavors in the rich history of New York.

Reviving the earlier activities of his uncle, Bishop Henry C. Potter initiated the construction of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, which would become largest

cathedral in New York and among the largest in the world.<sup>101</sup> In 1887, Bishop Potter composed a well-published (in both contemporary newspapers and modern sources) letter defining his intentions and entreating support for his vision for the cathedral. In this composition, Potter indirectly invokes the religious and cultural abundance his predecessors like Hughes sought to ensure for future generations:

Never before in [New York's] history was there so cordial an interest in its prosperity and greatness [...] But great moral and spiritual ideas need to find expression and embodiment in visible institutions and structures, and it is these which have been in all ages the nurseries of faith and of reverence for the unseen.<sup>102</sup>

Throughout the letter, Potter, perhaps purposefully, never directly refers to St. Patrick's Cathedral. His claim, however, that "for the erection of such a building worthy of a great city, [...] the time would seem to have arrived" seems a somewhat sardonic comment on the Catholic cathedral. Moreover, Potter wished to construct a "people's church," a designation some scholars note as representing the "ideal of unifying a population made remarkably diverse through years of immigration."<sup>103</sup> Here, one cannot ignore the commonality in motivation between the Episcopalian bishop and the Catholic archbishop.

The initiation and construction of St. John the Divine would involve a massive architectural undertaking and included sixty-eight design submissions, both invited and unsolicited.<sup>104</sup> Renwick and his firm (then, Renwick, Aspinwall and Russell) were among

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<sup>101</sup> Bishop Horatio Potter, Henry's uncle, incorporated the cathedral in 1873; the Panic of 1873, however, prevented appropriate funds from being raised. Interestingly, the original site, chosen by Bishop Horatio Potter, was located between Fifty-seventh and Fifty-ninth Streets on Sixth Avenue, only a few blocks north of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

<sup>102</sup> "New Cathedral Planned," *New York Times*, 2 June 1887, 5.

<sup>103</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 334.

<sup>104</sup> Janet Adams Strong, "The Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York: Design competitions in the shadow of H. H. Richardson, 1889-1891" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1990), 396-400; Andrew S. Dolkart, *Morningside Heights: A History of Its Architecture and Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 41ff; Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 334-38. For the competition, fourteen firms were invited and paid \$500 each for their designs; others were invited, but were not paid.

those invited; their design featured a monumental church reminiscent of the architect's work at St. Patrick's Cathedral, and also included a massive dome over the crossing in a vague Italian Gothic style (fig. 71). At the time of the project's initiation, Renwick was in his early 70s and his professional production expectedly had dropped in numbers significantly; the firm's proposal was not included in the final four selections.<sup>105</sup> Had he gained the commission for the massive church, however, the architect would have held a virtual monopoly on the two most important religious edifices in the city.

Of the invited designs, nearly all included a monumental facade featured, to varying scales, two towers—a significant characteristic considering the few specifics given in the competition guidelines. As noted above, the analogous element at St. Patrick's Cathedral represents one of Renwick's unique contributions to the architectural landscape of the city. Although the precedents for double-towered facade are numerous in the Old World tradition, its appearance in a nineteenth-century church in New York must evoke as a probable model Renwick's Fifth Avenue edifice. Furthermore, the general composition of the proposed designs included an architectural elaboration of the crossing in the form of a dome or another tower. Notwithstanding style or architectural detail, this composition strongly resembles one of Renwick's early conceptions for St. Patrick's Cathedral, which, indeed, featured an octagonal crossing tower and two-spired facade.

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Interestingly, Bertram Goodhue, one of Renwick's apprentices and among the most important late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century church with Richardsonian details.

<sup>105</sup> Age was probably a contributing factor in the selection of the winning architects, especially given the ambition of the project. An 1889 *New York Tribune* article surveying the competition mentioned that several of the finalists "are young. A fact which is of interest, because years of supervision will be necessary when the construction of the Cathedral is once begun, and this could be given only by a man under middle-age-to-day." See "The Cathedral Plans: Gothic and Byzantine Architecture Represented," *New York Daily Tribune*, 20 May 1889, 7.

The design of Heins and LaFarge was chosen and construction on their Byzantine-Romanesque church began in 1892.<sup>106</sup> Their original design included a dominating *westwerk*, featuring two spired towers, and a massive pyramidal crossing tower. According to an article written by George Martin Huss (whose firm, Huss and Buck, also submitted a proposal), the cathedral trustees asked the architects to remove the frontal spires from the design, thereby enhancing the overall effect of the central tower.<sup>107</sup> In response to the eventual changes made by Cram and Ferguson, Huss bemoans the substitution of two spires and a “decapitated” tower (on the existing foundation of Heins and Lafarge) in place of the single tower.<sup>108</sup> Among the justifications for his concern, Huss cites St. Patrick’s Cathedral as the exemplar for the Gothic Revival in New York, whose two spires will provide competition for those of St. John the Divine and “establish a perpetual comparison between the two edifices and lessen the individuality of both.”<sup>109</sup>

The cathedral competition also ignited commentary from critics, as indicated by the numerous editorials and opinions published in architectural and general periodicals. One in particular is interesting for it suggests St. Patrick’s as a potential, or perhaps fallback, model for the Episcopal cathedral. The writer of this article reasons that “Americans would not be worth much if they did not aspire to a national expression in the fine arts, of which architecture is a good branch. Possibly a good imitation like St. Patrick’s is better than a wild, crude piece of originality.”<sup>110</sup> While certainly crucial for a

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<sup>106</sup> In 1907, after Heins’s death and LaFarge’s dismissal, the firm of Cram and Ferguson was hired to remodel and finish the church in the Gothic Revival style. The church infamously remains unfinished.

<sup>107</sup> George Martin Huss, “Should St. John the Divine Have One or Two Spires?” *The Art World* 3 (Oct. 1917): 21.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 22. Interestingly, Huss concedes that his own submission borrowed from the French High Gothic as did Renwick, but was “at least sufficiently different from the modern Gothic of the St. Patrick’s to have resulted in a strong differentiation.”

<sup>110</sup> “The Bishop’s Seat,” *New York Times*, 8 Jan. 1888, 4.

complete appreciation of the eventful history of St. John the Divine, these brief arguments, written by architects associated and critics familiar with the project, suggests that St. Patrick's had already been established as the paradigm for cathedral architecture in the city and was directly impacting the design choices of architects at the end of the century.

***Concluding Remarks: An American Cathedral***

At the ceremony celebrating the dedication of St. Patrick's Cathedral, one encountered a scene unimaginable a few decades earlier.<sup>111</sup> The powerful married with the meager; religious leaders, politicians, and industrialists comingled with the faithful, newspaper illustrators, and even some sparrows ("little fellows, though not on the programme, [who] managed to make themselves a conspicuous feature of the entire proceedings").<sup>112</sup> Most importantly, moreover, Catholics and Protestants praised both the triumph of the Catholic church in New York and the aesthetic impact of Renwick's cathedral. Indeed, according to the *New York Times* writer, "there were, possibly, many non-Catholics of cultured aesthetic tastes more competent to judge the beauties of such a church as St. Patrick's than most Catholics," however "cold admiration" characterized their opinions.<sup>113</sup>

To the leaders of the church, St. Patrick's Cathedral was proof that Catholicism could thrive in the religiously diverse urban arenas of America. The edifice stood "peerless and alone [...] above all your [i.e., non-Catholic] churches" and even evidence

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<sup>111</sup> It should be noted that the cathedral was still unfinished in 1879; construction of the Lady Chapel and west spires, as discussed above, had not yet begun.

<sup>112</sup> "An Imposing Ceremonial: Blessing of the New Roman Catholic Cathedral," *New York Times*, 26 May 1879, 5.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

for the primacy of Catholicism over its competing denominations.<sup>114</sup> The Catholic church in New York no longer was merely composed of humble homes of localized worship or sites of violence and hatred; rather, with St. Patrick's Cathedral, the church could boast a site worthy of celebration, praise, and imitation. By designing for the Catholics of New York an appropriate symbol for their victorious emergence into American society, Renwick brilliantly translated the ambitious desires and intimate beliefs of his patron into a building type replete with a rich architectural and historical tradition.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Constructing Cultural Control:* The Smithsonian Institution and the Corcoran Gallery of Art

#### *Introduction*

Surrounded by the most recognizable and symbolic monuments of America's architectural legacy, including the White House and Capitol Building, rise the Smithsonian Institution and Corcoran Gallery of Art, Renwick's two museum designs. While their prominence in the landscape of Washington, D.C. has diminished, both institutions marked extraordinary moments in the history of nineteenth-century America and eloquently express the dynamic relationship between architecture and the public in the middle of the century. In terms of design, patronage, and function, the Smithsonian and Corcoran remain Renwick's most unique and, at times, allusive works. The Smithsonian Institution Building<sup>1</sup> and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, begun in 1846 and 1859 respectively, represent pivotal points in Renwick's career regarding both style and patronage (figs. 40, 91, 92). As outlined in chapter one, the Smithsonian was the first non-ecclesiastical commission for Renwick, who had previously only designed churches in New York City (excluding his earlier work as engineer). Furthermore, the Smithsonian Institution and its Romanesque Revival design prefigures more recognized trends in American design, such as the ubiquitous Richardsonian Romanesque, popularized by H.

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<sup>1</sup> The original name for Renwick's structure (which today houses the institution's administrative offices and a general visitor's center) was the Smithsonian Institution Building since it encapsulated the entire institution at the time of its construction. Its medieval moniker, "the Castle," duly denotes its unique style and form, and avoids confusion since the appellation "Smithsonian Institution" now refers to the entire complex, which, as of 2012, comprises 19 museums, 9 research centers, and a zoo located in various cities across the country. Henceforth in this study, for the sake of convenience and variety, any use of "the Smithsonian," "the institution," or "the Castle" refers to Renwick's original building unless otherwise qualified.

H. Richardson in the late-nineteenth century and imitated widely throughout the country. The Corcoran Gallery (now appropriately known as the Renwick Gallery) enjoys a similarly leading role in Renwick's career, as it marks the architect's first and most popular essay in the Second Empire style. More importantly, however, the Corcoran was one of the first dedicated public art museums in America, whose patron intended it to become the national gallery for the country.<sup>2</sup>

The institutional histories of the Smithsonian and the Corcoran have informed nearly every study on or mention of each in relevant scholarship; moreover, literature on the history of the Smithsonian understandably outnumbers that on the Corcoran, which still lacks any monographic treatment or specific analyses. Although it is necessary, especially in the case of the Corcoran, to survey the founding of each museum, this study focuses on their museological aspects and architectural importance, thereby better contextualizing their design, function, and significance. While the individual historiographies of these unprecedented Washington institutions will be described separately in this chapter, it is useful here to outline briefly the methodology that will inform the discussion of each building.

### ***Museology and the Nineteenth-Century Museum***

In recent decades, scholars have studied extensively the socio-historical implications of museums both in America and abroad. In applying various methodologies of history, art, and social sciences, they have presented potential frameworks with which to study past museums and, perhaps more importantly, their place in present and future museum landscapes. Discussing Renwick's museums in a similar mode is appropriate for

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<sup>2</sup> The Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, which opened in 1844, was probably the first public art museum in the country.

it allows one to surpass simple conceptions of form and style, which have distorted modern images of Renwick and his contributions to the architectural and cultural fabric of America.

Moreover, numerous scholars have recognized the mid-to-late nineteenth century as paramount to the development of the museum as an academic or cultural monument. Notably, Nikolaus Pevsner, in his seminal *A History of Building Types* (1976), has described this period as an “age of museums” of all types, many of which were unprecedented in the history of the museum. Accordingly, appropriate studies have attempted to synthesize this phenomenon through micro-analyses of a specific museum type (e.g., museums of science, contemporary art galleries) or searching for evolutionary patterns and sources for the most famous and influential institutions (e.g., the rapid construction of major university museums in England). Nineteenth-century museums, however, were not isolated monuments, but rather coexisted within traditional landscapes and often borrowed from established architectural idioms for their design. Thus, in both contemporary and modern descriptions of museums, one finds comparisons between the museum and more recognized building types, such as the church or castle. Alfred Russel Wallace, the prominent British naturalist, noticed the latency of museum design in his informative 1869 article “Museums of the People”: “In designing museums, architects seem to pay little regard to the special purposes they are intended to fulfill. They often adopt the general arrangement of a church, or the immense galleries and lofty halls of a palace.”<sup>3</sup>

Consideration of such observations has directed more recent museum studies, especially in identifying the relationship between the museum and its topographical

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<sup>3</sup> Alfred Russel Wallace, “Museums of the People,” *Macmillian’s Magazine* 19 (1869): 249.

context. More recently, in the historiography of museum studies, as Sophie Forgan has aptly acknowledged, “[scholars] are accustomed to thinking of museums as ritual spaces or worthy monuments, as examples or colonial imitation or metropolitan institutions, as disciplinary structures, or even as ways to reimagine the city.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, museums must be afforded the same historical and methodological acumen as has been offered to other architectural types, for they, like their religious, political, and domestic counterparts, are integral elements in the urban fabric and major factors in shaping cultural identities.

Individuals intimately involved in this development also recognized the significance of this historiographical evolution. For example, two decades after Wallace’s observations noted above, George Brown Goode (assistant secretary of the Smithsonian) categorized the world’s museums into six types in his effort to provide order to the growing number of institutions.<sup>5</sup> In classifying nineteenth-century museums as art museums, historical museums, anthropological museums, natural history museums, technical museums, and commercial museums, Goode, in fact, foregrounded the theoretical discussion in the history of museums in which he himself plays a major role. Furthermore, particularly for this study, it is interesting to note that Renwick’s major museums, the Smithsonian Institution and the Corcoran Art Gallery, represent two of Goode’s classifications—the natural history museum and the art museum, respectively. Therefore, Renwick’s designs can be placed firmly within the museum landscape as imagined by the architect’s own contemporaries and later scholars

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<sup>4</sup> Sophie Forgan, “Building the Museum: Knowledge, Conflict, and the Power of Place,” *Isis* 96, no. 4 (Dec. 2005): 573.

<sup>5</sup> George Brown Goode, *The Principles of Museum Administration* (York: Coultas and Volans, 1895), 22ff.

*Museums as Constructs of Power and Sites of Spectacle*

The following analysis of the Renwick's museums follows a popular methodological paradigm related to the important dynamic between architecture, space, and meaning. The claim that the museum and its manifestation in the nineteenth century and beyond is a societal construct of power has dominated many studies in a strict Foucaultian sense. In fact, the French critic and his fundamental writings are among the commonest influences on museum studies, especially considering the philosopher's interest in the diachronic relationship between institutions and power. Accordingly, Bennett, explicitly referring to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, writes that "the nineteenth century saw [museums'] doors opened to the general public—witnesses whose presence was just as essential to a display of power as had been that of the people before the spectacle of punishment in the eighteenth century."<sup>6</sup> More specifically, Carla Yanni in her study on the Victorian science museum claimed that "[Foucault's influence] caused museum scholars to consider the high political stakes of exhibitions, especially exhibitions that claim an internal logic based on supposed neutrality."<sup>7</sup>

The question remains exactly who wielded this power and on whom they wielded it. In the case of the Smithsonian, arguably the first public museum of any type in America, authority lay with the government and the influential persons involved in the founding of the institution. At the Corcoran Art Gallery, the main authority came from its powerful patron, W. W. Corcoran, whose collection became the foundation for the museum. It is significant that despite the difference in patronage of these institutions (one

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<sup>6</sup> Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (New York: Routledge, 2004), 117.

<sup>7</sup> Yanni, *Nature's Museums*, 8.

patronized by the government, the other by a private citizen) and their public mission, both museums were still directed by elite Americans, whose ideas, imagination, and influence impacted Renwick and his unique designs.

Indeed, the implications of the patronage of the Smithsonian and the Corcoran, and, especially for this study, how their purpose and function affected Renwick's architectural choices must be considered in order to contextualize their existence within their social and cultural environments. Certain critics have deemed the centralization of museums within the elite sphere as a monopoly of culture, often evoking economic imagery in their rhetoric. Notably, Lewis Mumford, the great urban and social historian, in his seminal *The Culture of Cities*, described the museum (as early as the mid-twentieth century) as one of many manifestations of the "acquisitiveness of the sick metropolis."<sup>8</sup> Mumford's observations present the paradoxical nature of the nineteenth-century museum, including those which Renwick designed. While feigning a progressively public purpose, these museums, through their architecture, organization, and patronage, in actuality represented the grasp of culture of the ruling classes over their popular counterparts. It is significant that many nineteenth-century museums continued the architectural paradigm of resembling palatial structures in their design, albeit often on a less monumental scale. Indeed, Mumford recognized this trend by parenthetically stating that "the form of the natural history museum is still largely that of the trophy room of the country house."<sup>9</sup> Mumford summarizes his cynical take on the relation between the museum and the urban elite, unintentionally referencing aspects of the patronage of Renwick's buildings:

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<sup>8</sup> Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1938), 259-65, esp. 263.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

By the patronage of the museums the ruling metropolitan oligarchy of *financiers and officeholders* establish their own claims to culture: more than that, they fix their own standards of taste, morals, and learning as that of their civilization—thus maintaining and stabilizing the favored pattern of acquisitive living.<sup>10</sup> (emphasis added)

The applicability of Mumford’s observations to this study is significant, for they provide a new framework in which to place Renwick’s museum designs.

Renwick’s overall design choices for his museums indeed succeeded in providing an architectural construct of power and a site of spectacle for their elite patrons. As will emerge in the following discussion, the architect confidently appropriated historic building types in creating these two Washington monuments, whose presence in their surroundings was undoubtedly far greater in Renwick’s time than today. It is important to acknowledge, then, that while on an academic and theoretical level Renwick’s designs were justified, especially considering the few precedents he had at hand and the architectural environment in which he worked, the buildings themselves almost immediately became symbols somewhat contradictory to their original intents.

Scholars have also discussed the reform capabilities of the nineteenth-century museum. Here, it is important to remember that most museums, including the Smithsonian and Corcoran, exist firmly within the public sphere and constitute “ritual spaces [...] of civic culture,” as defined by Sophie Forgan.<sup>11</sup> Certain analyses of museums have taken this actuality to a more sinister interpretation; for example, “[...] the public museum exemplified the development of a new ‘government’ relation to culture in

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 32. Also cited in Neil Harris, “The Gilded Age Revisited: Boston and the Museum Movement,” *American Quarterly* 14 (1962): 546.

<sup>11</sup> Sophie Forgan, “Building the Museum,” 577.

which works of high culture were treated as instruments that could enlist in new ways for new tasks of social management.”<sup>12</sup>

There are two ways of interpreting the didactic purposes of the nineteenth-century museum. First, it is possible to maintain, in a more Foucaultian mode, that the museum offered a hierarchical solution to the problem of order, whereby a process of social discipline provided a “means of combatting [the populace’s social and political unruliness],” which “lies in the “opacity” of the populace to the forces of order.”<sup>13</sup> A less cynical perspective, on the other hand, places the power and prerogative for reform in the hands of the people themselves, thereby “reversing the orientations of the disciplinary apparatuses in seeking to render the forces and principles of order visible to the populace—transformed, here, into a people, a citizenry...”<sup>14</sup> In the case of the Smithsonian, furthermore, the involvement of the government itself adds another consideration for discourse in the establishment and construction of the institution.

The philosophical question over who wielded the political, cultural, and intellectual power within the nineteenth-century museum is strongly relevant at both the Smithsonian Institution and the Corcoran Art Gallery. Appropriate for this study, moreover, is problem of architectural authority, a relatively unexamined aspect of museums, especially in view of the academic emphasis on institutional histories and the compositions of individual collections. Among others, Sophie Forgan has questioned the evocative power of the “physical materiality of the [museum] building” in her work on

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<sup>12</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, theory, politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 6-7.

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey Minson, *Genealogies of Morals: Nietzsche, Foucault, Donzelot and the Eccentricity of Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 24.

<sup>14</sup> Bennett, “Exhibitionary,” 119.

British museums of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> The timing of her scholarship, which seeks to connect typical concerns of theory and history with the methods of architectural history, is particularly fitting here, for this project is the first to analyze the designs of Renwick museums within their museological traditions and landscapes. In the cases of the Smithsonian Institution and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, furthermore, although Renwick can be credited as architect, he was working against the backdrop of debates over architectural style and institutional function, both of which directly impacted his work.

### *Museums Before the Smithsonian and Corcoran*

The history of the museum as a cultural institution is quite extensive, spanning over two millennia and countless civilizations. From its mythological and legendary foundations in the ancient world to its modern manifestations in contemporary society, the idea of a museum—a place for the collection, preservation, and/or exhibition of artistically, culturally, or scientifically significant objects—is nearly universal amongst most advanced societies and includes some of the most famous and paradigmatic monuments of the history of architecture. It is impossible here to attempt to survey the entire history of the museum, either as idea or building. Rather, it is important to examine the closest precedents (whether temporally or thematically) for the institutions designed in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century, including those by Renwick.

The importance of both the Smithsonian and Corcoran in the architectural history of the museum ultimately relates to the institutions' public nature, which, in turn, reflects the growing political and cultural influence of the bourgeoisie. While public museums,

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<sup>15</sup> Forgan, "Building the Museum," 574.

whether dedicated to art, science, technology, or other intellectual disciplines, are virtually ubiquitous in most modern cultures, their presence in the nineteenth century was minimal. An examination of the rise of the public museum reveals the complex dynamic between varieties of seemingly incompatible dualities and provides evidence into the relationship between a populace and cultural commodities of a certain society.

Additionally, the evolution of the museum from private collection to public commodity is thoroughly recognized in historical literature; one can find numerous examples of this development in even the most famous and respected museums of the world. In Europe, most museums, such as the Louvre, Vatican, and Uffizi museums, originally featured the collections of royalty or equally wealthy and powerful individuals and rulers. The buildings that housed these private collections reflected the status of their patron and the cost of the objects within, and firmly adhered to the architectural traditions and idioms of their time and place.

While nearly all of these collections were private and palatial in nature and scope, there exist some examples of museums established either exclusively for the public or another apolitical institution, or for “objects not shown for aesthetic reasons.”<sup>16</sup> The Amerbach-Cabinet in Basel, Switzerland and the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford University represent the earliest examples of the former classification. For the latter, an early example is Museum of Natural History, founded in 1739 by Comte de Buffon from the Jardin de Plantes in Paris (founded 1626). More often, however, museums before the nineteenth century were less focused in mission than the above examples and, somewhat paradoxically, commanded less monumental buildings to hold their comprehensive collections. Scholars have attributed the ubiquity of the “cabinet of curiosity,” especially

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<sup>16</sup> Pevsner, *History of Building Types*, 132.

in the eighteenth century, to the interest in an encyclopedic conception of knowledge born from Enlightenment thinking.<sup>17</sup> Thus, as one scholar notes, even in the most monumental settings, such as the Louvre and British Museum (both of which were public by this time), the confused composition of rooms and displays, as well as undefined missions, were prevalent and slowly becoming irrelevant.<sup>18</sup> In addition, access to and interest in such collections were limited according to predetermined societal standards and roles.

Most American collections of either natural or artistic artifacts existed in private homes. This trend parallels the situation in Europe (which albeit occurred centuries earlier), wherein museums existed in domestic settings and evolved from the intellectually sacrosanct *studio* of the elite male.<sup>19</sup> The space of the *studio*, whose principles were taken up and developed by the most important architectural theorists, including Alberti, exhibited a strict hierarchy of access and awareness of societal norms related to gender and status similar to those of the earliest institutional museums in the nineteenth century. The monopolization of knowledge and its historical implications finds its roots centuries before the buildings mentioned in this study and can be traced back even further if space would permit.

In the earliest American collections of the late-eighteenth century, there was a clear preference towards an amassing of history. Interestingly, Foucault identified this trend as a primary feature of the century after, as articulated with uncharacteristic brevity

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<sup>17</sup> J. Pedro Lorente, *Cathedrals of Urban Modernity: The First Museums of Contemporary Art, 1800-1930* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 23-24.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> For example, see Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 109ff.

in his 1984 article “Of Other Spaces.”<sup>20</sup> The critic opens the text by claiming that “the great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis and cycle, themes of the *ever-accumulating past* [emphasis added], with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world.”<sup>21</sup> As early as the late-eighteenth century, however, one finds prominent examples of the preference towards accumulation as pertaining to historically (and pre-historically) significant or fascinating objects.

Among the earliest, and most personal, incarnation of this tendency is Thomas Jefferson’s famous Entry Hall at Monticello. This room, which welcomed visitors to Jefferson’s home, presented an unexpected exhibition of natural and unnatural artifacts representing one aspect of the multi-faceted interests of America’s intellectual father. While initially Jefferson’s collection and its surrounding architecture embodies an American *Wunderkammer* indicative of its owner’s taste and status, the Entry Hall, as Roger Stein has argued, presents a “epistemological challenge” composed of object arranged according to a Lockean understanding of the mind:

Jefferson created in the design of his visual space a problematic for his viewers, an epistemological challenge, asking through juxtapositions, through these temporal and spatial intersections, to see the course of empire performed, enacted within the enclosing order and the neoclassical harmony of his architectural space, his “museum.”<sup>22</sup>

One cannot ignore the somewhat Foucaultian aspect of the “temporal and spatial intersection” of Jefferson’s Entry Hall as described by Stein. The author’s description on

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<sup>20</sup> “Of Other Spaces” represents a unique work in Foucault’s overall corpus, for it was originally given as a lecture in 1967 and was not intended for publication. Michael Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 22-27.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Roger Stein, “Mr. Jefferson as Museum Maker,” in *Shaping the Body Politic: Art and Political Formation in Early America*, ed. Maurie D. McInnis and Louis P. Nelson (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2011), 211.

the effect of the Jeffersonian hall as the visual representation of “the course of empire preformed” embeds the display with a level of imperialism inherent, according to most scholars of museums, in such intellectually and politically charged spaces.

While the architecture of Jefferson’s exhibition space should command equal attention, the collection and its organization wherein provides an appropriate analogy to Renwick’s eclectic design of the Smithsonian Institution. The “incorporation of time” in Jefferson’s museum,<sup>23</sup> which resulted in an artificial and forced, yet immediate and powerful conception of the past and its relevance in the present, neatly parallels Renwick’s amalgamation of disparate architectural elements within his museum design at the Smithsonian. Like Jefferson, furthermore, both Renwick and the political patrons of the Smithsonian were the inventors, keepers, and collectors of this historical image; moreover, just as Jefferson’s visitors viewed and were challenged by their hosts’ presentation of artifacts, so the American public, through the newly established institution, were presented with an architectural “site for Lockean exploration”<sup>24</sup> in the fullest visual sense.

A similar, and equally relevant, space to Jefferson’s semi-private exhibitions at Monticello is Charles Willson Peale’s famous museum in Philadelphia. In 1794, Peale, painter and naturalist, rented space in Philosophical Hall of the American Philosophical Society<sup>25</sup> to display his “Repository of Natural Curiosities,” which he acquired from his

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<sup>23</sup> Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 213.

<sup>24</sup> Stein, 199.

<sup>25</sup> The American Philosophical Society was founded by Benjamin Franklin and John Bartram in 1743 and provided a venue for philosophical, political, and other academic and practical discussion for America’s early leaders, intellectuals, and colleagues, including Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Rush, and Marquis de Lafayette. In 1769, following some inactivity, the society united with the American Society for Promoting Useful Knowledge and aimed to preserve “every sort of human knowledge” and “everything that might improve American methods in agriculture, mechanics,

and others' expeditions throughout the country, including those of Lewis and Clark.<sup>26</sup> The collection featured a plethora of artifacts, such as bones, plants, and minerals, which attracted the attention of his colleagues, including Thomas Jefferson.<sup>27</sup> As seen in the background of Peale's famous self-portrait *The Artist in His Museum* (1822), the artist's collection, while seemingly objectively organized and manageable, was a confused conglomeration of objects, ranging from the natural specimens mentioned above to his own portraits of Revolutionary War figures, in addition to inscriptions of Biblical passages on the walls intended to "inspire Christian contemplation of divine works of nature."<sup>28</sup>

The Peale Museum represents the first example of a specialized public museum in America. Despite its incongruous image to the modern viewer, Peale's vision boasted few precedents; in addition to the European examples noted above, one can point to the equally famous Soane Museum in London, founded a few years after the Peale Museum by Sir John Soane and dedicated exclusively to the exhibition of artistic and architectural models. The impetus behind the Peale Museum, however, was the accumulation and preservation of a national heritage and its relation to the natural and historical legacies of the Old World. Similar endeavors coexisted with Peale's institution (and with the American Philosophical Society), such as the museum of the American Antiquarian

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manufacturing, and shipping. Its noble mission was strengthened by the donation of interesting artifacts and objects by private individuals and society members. In 1789, the society finished construction of their first dedicated exhibition space, Philosophical Hall in Philadelphia, next to Independence Hall. See Whitefield.

<sup>26</sup> The original date of the opening of Peale's museum differs in relevant literature. According to Whitfield J. Bell, Jr. in his account of the American Philosophical Society, Peale rented from the society in 1794. See Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., "The Cabinet of the American Philosophical Society," in *A Cabinet of Curiosities: Five Episodes in the Evolution of American Museums* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1967), 8.

According to David Brigham's more recent article, Peale opened his collection in 1786. See David R. Brigham, "'Ask the Beasts, and They Shall Teach Thee': The Human Lessons of Charles Willson Peale's Natural History Displays," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 59 (1996): 1.

<sup>27</sup> Brigham, esp. 183-87.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

Society, founded in 1812 in Worcester, Massachusetts and dedicated to the investigation of the historical and prehistorical past of America.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, the American Antiquarian Society had a reciprocal relationship with the Smithsonian over publication matters immediately after the latter's founding.<sup>30</sup>

Both the American Philosophical Society and the American Antiquarian Society commissioned the construction of permanent buildings to house their growing collections and provide adequate space for discussion and learning. Despite the influential identities of each society, both of which are still in existence, their original buildings exhibited little architectural imagination; neither could provide Renwick an appropriate archetype on which to model either the Smithsonian Institution (his earliest museum design and closest in mission to the American societies) or the Corcoran (closest in scale to the societies). Philosophical Hall of the American Philosophical Society, which still houses the group, is a typical brick Georgian structure, monumental for its time and location, but insufficient for the newly established Smithsonian; the original home of the American Antiquarian Society featured a wood frame and clapboard structure common in New England architecture.<sup>31</sup>

The architecture of the museum in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries often followed paradigms previously reserved for more established building types, such as the cathedral, monastery, or palace; indeed, both the Smithsonian Institution and the

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<sup>29</sup> Like the Christian undercurrents of the Peale Museum, the goals of the American Antiquarian Society were equally focused. For example, as Clifford Shipton writes in his discussion of the institution, at the first annual meeting of the society, William Jenks spoke of the necessity of studying Native American in order to prove their ancestral connection to Noah, thus claiming Biblical roots for America. See Clifford K. Shipton, "The Museum of the American Antiquarian Society," in *A Cabinet of Curiosities: Five Episodes in the Evolution of American Museums* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1967), 36.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>31</sup> The original home of the American Antiquarian Society was replaced in 1854; a third Antiquarian Hall (as their headquarters was known) was built in 1910 in a Jeffersonian neoclassicist style.

Corcoran Gallery conform to this pattern. However, one must not assume that Renwick's design choices were predetermined and inevitable. The princely palaces of the Old World were clearly unsuitable for the American institutions and patrons working with Renwick. Their monumentality and extravagance would have appeared foreign within the architectural fabric of the United States and too elaborate for the comparatively modest collections they were meant to house.

The facilities of the fledgling intellectual societies of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, moreover, could have offered acceptable models for Renwick. However, their own nature—more as *Wunderkammern* than museums—were also inimical to the ideas of both the Smithsonian founders and W. W. Corcoran. It is clear, then, that the architect was working within an undefined framework, for both museums and their individual missions boasted unprecedented missions in American architecture and society.

### ***The National Castle***

The history of the Smithsonian, perhaps more than any other nineteenth-century museum, illustrates the “high political stakes” to which Carla Yanni refers in the previous discussion. The founding of the Smithsonian was effectively a half-decade-long debate between two camps, one headed by Joseph Henry, the other led by Robert Dale Owen, which affected (and, in many cases, delayed), nearly every major decision concerning the project. While the designation of the Smithsonian today as a complex of museums and research centers neatly categorizes its functions and identifies its purpose as a national repository and engine for cultural, scientific, and artistic knowledge and artifacts, the

dispute among its nineteenth-century founders featured fierce struggles and machinations typical of the political arena from which the institution originated.<sup>32</sup>

Joseph Henry, professor at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) and first secretary of the Smithsonian, exerted his authority most on the early conception of the institution, its mission, and its architectural manifestations. Henry preferred an institution dedicated to intellectual research related to science, politics, and the fine arts, in a setting similar to an academic forum—in other words, the *increase* rather than the *preservation* of knowledge.<sup>33</sup> Henry’s logic for this program involved the inherent local nature of the capital and its newly formed institution; those not within convenient travel distance, according to Henry, would be unable to access the Smithsonian’s collections. Fittingly, he warned his fellow founders that “all necessary expenditure on local objects [including the building itself] would be a perversion of [James Smithson’s] trust.”<sup>34</sup>

In order to combat the spatial and geographical constraints of the Smithsonian, furthermore, Henry proposed the establishment of various publications, through which new research could be disseminated throughout the country. First, he suggested the publication of a series of quarterly volumes entitled “Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge” (informally shortened to “Contributions”) to contain more scholarly and specialized research. Henry also envisioned the circulation of smaller treatises on subjects of more general interest.<sup>35</sup> The potential of Henry’s plan for the Smithsonian, especially the framework for publication, was realized almost immediately (and even before the

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<sup>32</sup> The passionate and, at times, contentious debates surrounding the founding and character of the Smithsonian is usually only mentioned hastily in official histories of the institution. The dialogues, however, comprise the focus of Kenneth Hafertepe’s *America’s Castle*.

<sup>33</sup> Hafertepe, 39–41.

<sup>34</sup> Paul H. Oehser, *Sons of Science: The Story of the Smithsonian Institution and its Leaders* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1949), 40.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

building itself was completed) through the first study to be included in the scholarly journal, “Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley,” authored by George Squire, A.M. and E. H. Davis, M.D., in 1848.<sup>36</sup>

As Hafertepe notes, Henry’s conception of the Smithsonian as research center not only affected the architectural composition of the Smithsonian building itself (whose plans, at this point in the debate, had not been finalized), but also questioned the necessity of a building altogether.<sup>37</sup> Under Henry’s plan, research could be performed at the fellows’ individual institutions (i.e., colleges and universities), much like the characteristics of the modern system of scholarly research and publishing; in other words, Henry’s Smithsonian was more elusive and universal. Appropriately, then, when Augustus Saint-Gaudens was commissioned in 1893 to create the official seal for the Smithsonian, of which a mosaic lay in the Castle’s Regent’s Room, the sculptor included “*per orbem*” (“throughout the world”) within its iconography, indicating the universality of the young institution (fig. 93).

Nonetheless, the competition to choose the architect for the newly established institution involves one of the most controversial narratives in the history of American architecture. The architectural inception of the design of the Smithsonian Institution can be credited to both Robert Dale Owen and his brother, David Dale Owen, in collaboration with Robert Mills. After Robert had discussed briefly the architecture of the institution with his brother, David procured a design from Mills, which he immediately sent to Robert. The first drawing, dated February 1841, displays a “Saxon style” building complete with two monumental onion domes, myriad crenellations, and rhythmic

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 41-42. This paper, while the first major external publication of the Smithsonian also became a seminal study in advanced the fledgling field of American archaeology.

<sup>37</sup> Hafertepe, 41.

buttressing (fig. 94). A later watercolor, dated 1846 and labeled “[Perspective of] the Smithsonian Institution agreeably to the Design” further establishes the medieval idiom and general arrangement of the building (fig. 95). Both preparations greatly resemble the competition submissions and eventual Renwick design.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, once specific spaces of the complex were codified by the Owen brothers, a building committee was created in the fall of 1846, which collected plans from thirteen prominent northeast architects.<sup>39</sup>

The haste with which Robert Dale Owen engineered the acquirement of a preliminary design incited great contention among the parties involved; like the scenarios of many major museums in America and abroad, “[the] architecture [...] provided the arena in which issues were thrashed out.”<sup>40</sup> Over a month before the deadline for submissions, the building committee chose Renwick as the winner of the so-called competition. Renwick’s submissions, both Gothic and Romanesque (figs. 24, 25, 26, 96), differed in some important ways from the other entries (or, at least, those of which drawings survive). The compositional and stylistic elements of Renwick’s designs were much more independent than those of the other submissions, especially Notman’s and Warren’s (fig. 97). Renwick defined more emphatically the spatial variety of the edifice;

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<sup>38</sup> Two years after the Smithsonian competition, in 1848 Renwick worked with Mills during the early stages of design for the Washington Monument. Although Mills produced the final drawings (and therefore is always labeled the author of the monument), the overall composition of an obelisk surrounded by columns can be credited to the collaboration between the architects. See Pamela Scott and Antoinette J. Lee, *Buildings of the District of Columbia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 101.

<sup>39</sup> Hafertepe, 46-61; 50 n. 22. Only the competition drawings of Notman, Warren, and the east elevation of Rogers’s have survived. All three architects borrowed from Gothic architecture for their submissions. The earliest drawings by Renwick are the north and south elevations, which must be dated in 1847 and show a two-story building. All the competition drawings, including Renwick’s lost entries, probably featured a three-level building.

Hafertepe has also surmised the style of the competition entries for which no graphical evidence survives. According to Owen, John Haviland submitted a Norman-style drawing, while Wells and Arnot offered a Gothic design. Howard Daniels, the least known of the consulted architects, submitted an “Italian” design, which was the only non-medieval example of the competition.

<sup>40</sup> Forgan, “Building the Museum,” 575.

there is no primary roofline, nor focal point, even to the main block of the complex. His extensive, and perhaps overzealous, use of towers (or campaniles, as Owen deems), and their various heights and character break up the entire mass and define the building's five bays.

Furthermore, it is interesting that Renwick's Romanesque design, unlike the other submissions, featured two drastically different, yet equally commanding facades. In examining the two facades, one can best appreciate the fantastical medievalism embedded in Renwick's vision. Although the Smithsonian Institution represents the architect's first major non-ecclesiastical commissions, it is clear that Renwick still preferred design elements typical of sacred architecture. The north tower is almost a direct quotation of Renwick's earlier Church of the Puritans in New York. Its details, citing early-twelfth-century Norman architecture, interestingly established an ecclesiastical precedent for the design of the exclusively public institution. Here, Renwick emphasizes the round arch form, indeed one of the definitive elements of Romanesque architecture.

For this study, one must be careful when analyzing the Smithsonian, for it can be difficult to detect Renwick's hand in the building. Two important points in the early history of the institution helped to undermine Renwick's contribution. The first was the decision not to renew Renwick's contract, which expired in 1852. At this time, the exterior of the building was effectively complete, while the interior lay radically unfinished. Henry hired the relatively inexperienced Captain Barton S. Alexander of the Army Corps of Engineers to re-envision and complete the interior in the secretary's own vision. In order to maintain methodological precision, then, one must rely almost

exclusively on the plan and description of the Smithsonian published in Owen's *Hints* as an indication of Renwick's original intentions for the interior (fig. 98).

The second was the fire in January of 1865, which destroyed virtually the entire interior. While no major injuries occurred to occupants of the institution, the fire was consequential for two reasons. First, it destroyed a majority of the Smithsonian's artworks, scientific objects and instruments, and papers (including most of Henry's and all of Smithson's). Among the artworks lost was the collection of portraits of Native Americans by American artist John Mix Stanley, thus leaving the institution without its greatest artistic display. The second effect of the fire was the complete rebuilding of the interior by Adolf Cluss, which represented the final stage in Henry's decades-long attempt at subverting the contributions of Owen and Renwick at the Smithsonian.

The legacy of Joseph Henry, whose statue greets the modern visitor outside the Mall entrance to the building, represents the construction of power relations and struggles at the Smithsonian during its founding and early manifestations. Henry considered himself the sole representative and interpreter of the government's desire for a national institution. His persistence proved successful as he eventually forced Robert Dale Owen off the Board of Regents and, without any opposition, modified the functions and layout of nearly every space of the museum to his own ideals. As a political institution, furthermore, the Smithsonian and its incarnation under Henry's rigid leadership symbolized the role of the nineteenth-century museum in the "production of cultural power by governments."<sup>41</sup>

At the death of Henry in 1878, the Smithsonian redirected its mission to an image closer to Owen's original ideas. While Henry adamantly expressed his belief that the

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<sup>41</sup> Bennet, *Birth of the Museum*, 23.

Smithsonian was “not a popular establishment” and should “not depend for its support upon public patronage,” the institution quickly began to increase its collections and exhibition space. The museum’s leaders retrieved works of art from the Corcoran and Library of Congress and commissioned Adolf Cluss and Paul Schulze to design the Arts and Industry Building next to the Castle, which originally housed displays from the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. Therefore, decades before the construction of its most visited buildings—the Museum of Natural History, the National Gallery of Art, and the Air and Space Museum—the Smithsonian complex was beginning to emerge as an collection of architecturally and culturally significant exhibition spaces.

The battle over style at the Smithsonian Building, a conflict inherently linked with the struggle over the actual function of the institution, culminated in the executed design by Renwick and the publication of Owen’s *Hints on Public Architecture*. Scholars of the Smithsonian have recognized the Owen’s treatise as a manifestation of contemporary architectural thought. For example, Cynthia Field, one of the foremost experts on the history of the Smithsonian, first outlined the writers to whom Owen was indebted, including Archibald Alison, Thomas Hope, and Thomas Rickman.<sup>42</sup> Later, Kenneth Hafertepe would dedicate a chapter in his *America’s Castle* to elaborating on the philosophical lineage of Owen’s treatise.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, as Field reveals, Owen consulted an extensive corpus of architectural literature, including Andrea Palladio’s *Four Books on Architecture* and Augustus C. Pugin’s *Specimens of Gothic Architecture*.<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, yet unsurprisingly, Renwick’s own architectural library included many of the same

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Dale Owen, *Hints on Public Architecture, containing, among other illustrations, views and plans of the Smithsonian Institution: together with an appendix relative to building materials* (1849; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1978), n.p.

<sup>43</sup> Hafertepe, 84ff.

<sup>44</sup> Owen, n.p.

publications; it is possible, then, that Owen consulted Renwick on his extensive order for the library of the institution itself.

*Hints on Public Architecture* is incredibly important in the history of American architecture, for it represents one of the first intellectual attempts at codifying a theory of design for America. Its scope is simultaneously nationalistic and universal; it searches for an “Architecture for America,” while outlining the virtues and deficiencies of architecture’s commonest features throughout the millennia. The overall character of the work, however, changes when one questions its intention and effect. If one considers it an extension of the works of earlier theorists, such as Vitruvius or Hope, and a prefiguration of later American sources, such as those by Wright and Venturi, then *Hints* is an incredibly early and equally confident attempt at formulating an American idiom that continues to deflect definition in the present moment. On the other hand, if one examines Owen’s treatise at face value—that is, a lengthy defense for the acceptance of Renwick’s Romanesque design, which had been approved prior to the inception of the book—, then *Hints* presents a cunningly crafted, yet inherently bureaucratic argument cloaked as architectural insight. While Owen’s writing emerges as intelligent and “delightfully readable” as Field expresses, it is unsurprising that the author illustrated not only multiple views of Renwick’s designs for the Smithsonian, but also the architect’s previous buildings as exemplars of the medieval revival in America.<sup>45</sup>

### ***Architecture as Artifact at the Smithsonian***

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<sup>45</sup> Hafertepe notes that Owen tried to procure other competition designs from some of the losing architects. None of these architects agreed to reduce the size of their drawings and allow Owen to publish them in his treatise. The overt and excessive use of Renwick’s buildings, then, may have been necessary to fill the pages of the book.

An examination of the design of the Smithsonian Institution, perhaps more than any other of Renwick's buildings, embodies the Jeffersonian "site for Lockean exploration," as deemed by Stein.<sup>46</sup> The educatory potential of architecture and its ability to incite reform formed the basis for the choices in design for the Castle. Here, the role of Owen in the evolution of the design for the Smithsonian emerges as paramount to the overall appreciation of the building's history. Previous examinations of the Smithsonian, while greatly informative, have concentrated on the stylistic divergence from American modes of designs—in this case, its Romanesque elements, rather than a Gothic or neoclassical iteration. In all of these studies, the edifice represents a singular, monolithic, and passive entity.

In the following discussion, however, the appearance of the Smithsonian embodies an architectural artifact as discursive as the objects exhibited and ideas created within the walls of the building. It must be noted that while some may question the delineation of the Smithsonian as a traditional museum—that is, a repository of objects for display—many parts of the original, multi-functional building were dedicated to such goals. The most literal space of the institution devoted to exhibition was the Museum, which encompassed nearly the entire second floor of the building. According to *Hints*, this space would display, among other similar collections, objects of the government's "Exploring Expedition."<sup>47</sup> There were also mineralogical and geological cabinets in the north and south tower, respectively. The Gallery of Art, which comprised the connecting range and terminus of the west wing, would feature the art historical counterpoints to the natural history artifacts in the Museum and other spaces throughout the building.

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<sup>46</sup> Stein, 199.

<sup>47</sup> Owen, 106.

In addition to the myriad other spaces of the building—for example, a library, lecture hall, laboratories, and boardroom—the Smithsonian was unique in presenting one of the first multi-functional establishments in America, both institutionally and architecturally. The strong presence of the exhibition spaces noted above, however, delineates the Smithsonian, as envisioned by Owen and designed by Renwick, as the descendent for the elite institution discussed earlier in this chapter. The Museum and cabinets, primarily as displays of natural artifacts, must be considered within the same lineage as Jefferson’s Entry Hall and European *Wunderkammern*, while the pedigree of the Gallery of Art is more obvious and foreshadows Renwick’s work for W. W. Corcoran. Unfortunately, since some of these spaces were never built and, in cases where Renwick’s elements were constructed, few written or visual sources exist describing their appearance, it is difficult to reconstruct how the objects themselves were actually displayed.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, because of the destruction of documentary materials in the 1865 fire, one has little evidence cataloguing the objects, whether artistic or scientific, exhibited.

While Owen and Renwick deemed the design for the Smithsonian a specimen of the “early Gothic” or “Norman” style, its architecture lacks any archaeological specificity to be considered an historical artifact. Even Owen’s uncertainty in his terminology evinces the ahistorical mode of design, as he labels the building “what has been variously called the Lombard, the Norman, the Romanesque and the Byzantine school.”<sup>49</sup> The appearance of the edifice, both stylistically and compositionally, lacks a single

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<sup>48</sup> For an exception, see William J. Rhees, *An Account of the Smithsonian Institution, Its Founder, Building, Operations, Etc., Prepared from the Reports of Prof. Henry to the Regents, and Other Authentic Sources* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas McGill, 1857).

<sup>49</sup> Owen, 102.

associative focus, articulating, rather, heterogeneity over unity. Indeed, Owen preferred this approach to architecture as argued in the first chapter of *Hints*, in which he outlines the requirements for a proper national style of architecture. Not only should architecture, at a larger geographical scale, adapt to its specific climate, but also a proper building should not contain a “forced, inexorable correspondence of parts,” characteristic of the neoclassical style, for example.<sup>50</sup>

Critics of Owen and Renwick also recognized the ambivalence of the accepted design. For instance, in his important publication *Animadversions on the Proceedings of the Regents*, David Arnot wrote that features of medieval architecture “differ as widely as the national genius of [Europe’s and Britain’s] inhabitants.”<sup>51</sup> Moreover, he contends that “Saxon forms disguised in Norman mail” only recall the “ravages of time,” which belie a universal or unified architectural composition. While his motivation for criticizing Renwick’s design was more political than architectural, Arnot argued forcefully against what he interpreted as the artificiality of the Smithsonian and its medieval heritage. It must be asked, however, if the eclectic fusion of assumed medieval elements successfully represents the intended mission of the Smithsonian as a universal and open institution. According to Owen’s submission of the educatory properties of architecture, and the importance of education in general for the common good, it remains whether the complexity of the design was, at best, eclectically distinctive, or, at worst, absolutely impenetrable to the untrained viewer. Such questions intersect the museological issues

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<sup>50</sup> Owen, 8.

<sup>51</sup> David Henry Arnot, *Animadversions on the Proceedings of the Regents of the Smithsonian Institution in Their Choice of an Architect, for Their Edifice at Washington: Founded on Observations Made During the Proceedings* (New York, 1847), 14.

discussed above, especially those pertaining to the elitist nature of the nineteenth-century museum.

It has already been noted how Renwick's design for the Smithsonian differed from the other competition entries (for which one has graphical evidence). Perhaps paradoxically, the life of the Smithsonian after the eventual rebuilding of the interior following the 1865 fire and later decorations is perhaps more paramount than its earlier history, for the exterior boasts an even greater presence as the interior became less prominent. Therefore, one can invert the Smithsonian by emphasizing the architecture without over the artifacts within. Renwick's artifact, as the literal stones, parts, and detailing can be effectively labeled, then, presented a unique accumulation of architecture similar to the aforementioned Soane Museum, which displayed architectural specimens as modes within a "continuity of tradition."<sup>52</sup>

Here, one can review Foucault's characterization of the nineteenth-century Western museum as a space of accumulation, which affected the collapse of traditional hierarchies and classifications.<sup>53</sup> Just as one finds in the specialized details of Owen's *Hints on Public Architecture*, the architecture of the Smithsonian expresses an intricate vision of architectural history, encoded, as it were, in the eclectic amalgamation of architectural styles, periods, and types. The separate elements of the edifice juxtapose seemingly incongruous and incompatible elements, which are thus displaced from any referential framework. One can appreciate the compartmentalization of Renwick's design by examining either the sketches the architect completed for various sections of the building (figs. 99, 100, 101) or the analogous illustrations of building details in *Hints on*

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<sup>52</sup> Colin Davies, "Architecture and Remembrance: The Soane Museum and the Continuity of Tradition," *Architectural Review* 175 (1984): 48-55.

<sup>53</sup> Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 22.

*Public Architecture* (figs. 102, 103, 104). In these drawings, sections are isolated from their architectural context, thereby suggesting whatever medieval precedent from which they derive, such as a church or castle, and resembling sketches from the archaeological field rather than finished architectural studies. For those unfamiliar with the Smithsonian structure, it would be impossible to ascertain the overall setting of an individual sketch.

In the original conception of the Smithsonian, Renwick and Owen, eschewing traditional categories, juxtapose both sacred and secular architectural types for a purportedly public monument. An examination of the differences in design between the two facades—and that Renwick designed two distinct facades at all—best demonstrates this argument. The north facade, fronting the National Mall, borrows heavily from church architecture (as noted, Renwick quotes almost exactly his design for Church of the Puritans), adding only a porte-cochère to define the main entrance. Conversely, the south facade features a castellated medieval tower-keep, indeed one of the most identifiable elements of domestic (i.e., secular) architecture of the Middle Ages. Owen probably did not realize the incongruity here, for he offers as the paradigm for “Domestic Gothic” the house of Jacques Cœur (c. 1450) in Bourges, a rather late and extravagant example of a Gothic residence, rather than the castles of earlier Norman dukes or kings.<sup>54</sup>

The rest of the edifice continues the ahistorical juxtaposition of architectural references. The east wing, which primarily contained the institution’s library and art gallery in the original plan, draws heavily from sacred medieval architecture. The terminating pavilion, which originally housed the gallery, evokes a medieval basilican church, complete with a single apse and connected bell tower (although Owen preferred the term “campanile”). The basilica connects to the inner wing by a cloistered walkway

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<sup>54</sup> Owen, 65

on the north side, again appropriating a medieval type associated with highly sacred and restricted functions. The west wing, furthermore, exhibits similar details as the south facade of the central block; its castellated, multi-towered elevation evokes images of lordly power.

It is a futile task to search for any suitable precedent for Renwick's commixture of incompatible sites in the Middle Ages. More importantly, it is equally frustrating to seek American antecedents for the elements, whether taken together or separately. Hence, the architecture of the Smithsonian stands outside of any referential space or time, existing, rather, "elsewhere."<sup>55</sup> Ironically, then, Renwick and Owen were undermining the hierarchical system of spaces—sacred and secular, for instance—of the Middle Ages, which, in fact, formed the basis and justification for the architecture of the Smithsonian Institution.

The synoptic and, at times, undecipherable architecture of the Smithsonian Institution can be understood as an instrument for regulating the cultural intelligence of the public. Again, one must consider the architecture itself as the most potent artifact of the museum, whose cultural significance can only be properly read by those with intimate knowledge of its associations and context. There is a distinct social element to this restriction, whereby the architecture of the institution strengthens the boundaries separating the intellectual elite from their popular counterparts. Nearly every contemporary depiction of the institution, whether in the original form as envisioned by Renwick and Owen or in the executed configuration, shows patrons strolling the grounds of the Smithsonian, rather than the intellectuals envisioned by Henry within his universal

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<sup>55</sup> Foucault, in defining the characteristics and principles of heterotopias discusses the "placelessness" of the concept and the activities it supposedly houses. See Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

research institution. The Smithsonian, then, in the mid-nineteenth century, was still a space for those more concerned with leisurely pursuits than academic studies.

***Reception and Imitations of Renwick's Smithsonian***

The design of the Smithsonian Institution encouraged little imitation in Washington, D.C. and throughout the eastern United States in general. The expansiveness and uniqueness of the size, scope, and mission of the institution prohibited any straightforward appropriation of its character. The lack of immediate descendants, however, should not undermine the innovations of the Renwick's design; rather, it is clear that what he and Owen achieved in Washington, regardless of political obstacles and eventual modifications, represents a major chapter in the history of American architecture. It is worth noting that analogous institutions in other countries generally did not boast equally monumental buildings until shortly after the founding of the Smithsonian. The most famous example is the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, founded in 1850 and constructed 1855-60. The building, designed by Deane and Woodward in the Gothic Revival mode, embodied the museum movement in nineteenth-century Britain and the multi-functional mission of the museum, especially in the university setting.<sup>56</sup> While space does not allow for a thorough comparison of the Smithsonian with its English counterparts, it is important to appreciate the primacy of the former within the developing tradition of the institution as building type and idea.

The effect of the Smithsonian Institution as an architectural symbol of the country's perceived authority, indeed, is validated when considering its most immediate derivatives. In 1852—the same year Renwick left the Smithsonian project—Captain

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<sup>56</sup> The research of Sophie Forgan provides the best and most recent discussions on the museum movement in nineteenth-century Britain and the university museum.

Alexander began construction of Scott Hall, the main building of the Soldiers' Home (an asylum for veterans) in Washington, D.C. (fig. 105).<sup>57</sup> Although more symmetrical and compact in composition, Alexander's contribution to the complex was effectively a facsimile of the south facade of Renwick's Smithsonian. The derivative design and advantageous setting of Scott Hall (the grounds were known for their abundance of shade, cool breezes, and vistas) emphasized the picturesque qualities of the fantastical medieval idiom preferred by Owen and Renwick.<sup>58</sup> However, Alexander's appropriation of the Smithsonian's castellated exterior presents the military complex as a formidable and impenetrable institution, rather than an open and accessible retreat.

Other derivatives of the Smithsonian design quickly emerged in the early 1850s across the eastern United States. Nearly all of these buildings were constructed for colleges or universities and present unique and earlier counterparts to the emergence of the Collegiate Gothic, whose buildings were modeled after the Gothic edifices of Old World colleges and universities, such as Oxford and Cambridge. While some of the American buildings contain elements more generally medieval than specifically Romanesque or Gothic (thus straddling the line between the two revival styles), many of

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<sup>57</sup> The Soldiers' Home was founded in 1851 by the Department of War with funds acquired from the invasion of Mexico City in 1847. The government purchased the adjoining country estates of George Riggs and W. W. Corcoran and used Riggs' Gothic Revival cottage as the primary residence for soldiers. Alexander's building, named after the founder of the asylum, Gen. Winfield Scott, would be added to the grounds a year later, but did not officially open until 1857.

Scott Hall would go through a myriad of renovations. In 1869, a mansard roof was added for extra space and the exterior was re-cloaked as a Second Empire mansion. From 1887-1890, the building was enlarged and again given a new style, featuring a more Victorian version of the Gothic Revival. In 1968, Scott Hall was renamed the Sherman Building and is now part of the Armed Forces Retirement Home complex. Finally, in 2011, an earthquake greatly compromised the structural integrity of the main tower. See Matthew Pinsker, "The Soldiers' Home: A Long Road to Sanctuary," *Washington History* 18 (2006): 4-19.

<sup>58</sup> The Soldiers' Home became a preferred presidential retreat in the nineteenth century. James Buchanan was the first of four presidents to stay in one of the cottages during the summer. His more famous successor, Abraham Lincoln, used the retreat extensively while president, even during the Civil War. The cottage immediately next to Alexander's building is now known as Lincoln Cottage.

their architectural features are direct quotations of Renwick's design. Also, it is important to recollect Renwick's Free Academy in New York, designed in 1848, which constitutes one of the earliest essays in the appropriation of medieval architecture for an education building in America.

The most faithful copy of the Smithsonian in the 1850s was Douglas Hall, the original building of the Old University of Chicago, a Baptist college unaffiliated with the later (and current) University of Chicago (fig. 106).<sup>59</sup> Designed in 1856 by William W. Boyington and demolished in 1890, the university building is strikingly similar to Renwick's Smithsonian in both individual elements and overall composition.<sup>60</sup> Douglas Hall featured a single octagonal tower (in contrast to the Smithsonian's two-towered front) borrowed directly from Renwick's design. The various towers, of which none is alike, marking the corners of the main block, and the castellated roofline evoke the corresponding, picturesque elements of the Smithsonian. The extensive use of the round arch further designates the building as an exemplar of the Romanesque Revival. It is unclear, however, whether Boyington saw Renwick's design firsthand or knew of it through Owen's *Hints on Public Architecture*. The fact that the most prominent elements of Boyington's design, including the towers and arches, were discussed and illustrated extensively in Owen's treatise suggests that the Chicago architect based his work on the literary version of the Smithsonian, rather than the built form.

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<sup>59</sup> "From Smithson to Smithsonian: The Birth of an Institution," Smithsonian Libraries, [http://www.sil.si.edu/Exhibitions/Smithson-to-Smithsonian/building\\_04.html](http://www.sil.si.edu/Exhibitions/Smithson-to-Smithsonian/building_04.html). For contemporary photos, "Old University of Chicago, Douglas Hall," The University of Chicago Photographic Archive, <http://photoarchive.lib.uchicago.edu/>.

<sup>60</sup> William W. Boyington (1818-98) was a prominent architect in Chicago and worked predominantly in medieval revival idioms. Although most of his buildings were destroyed in the Great Fire of 1871, he is best known today as the designer of the Chicago Water Tower, among the few buildings to survive the disaster.

The multifaceted and expressive nature of the Smithsonian's appropriated medievalism also became the subject of various criticisms from the most erudite observers, most of whom emphasized the design's connotation of institutional authority. While one may consider the myriad criticism as proof for the inappropriateness of the design choices for the institution's mission, even the most ardent critics admit the building's confidence and innovativeness. The most dramatic arrives in a passage from Horatio Greenough's travel journal, often quoted only in part in relevant discussions. In his eloquent, yet desultory description of the Smithsonian, the American neoclassical sculptor related the forceful character of the Castle, labeling the building a medieval palace. Greenough's image, indeed, evokes the architectural and academic authority of the institution, associating the scientific patrons of the Smithsonian with theologians of the Church:

Suddenly, as I walked, the dark form of the Smithsonian palace rose between me and the white Capitol, and I stopped. Tower and battlements, and all that mediaeval confusion, stamped itself on the halls of Congress, as ink on paper! Dark on that whiteness—complication on that simplicity! It scared me. Was it a spectre, or was not I another Rip Van Winkle who had slept too long? [...]

[I] shudder[ed] at that dark pile—*that castle of authority—that outwork of prescription*.<sup>61</sup> (emphasis added)

Greenough continues in the most commonly extracted passage, “There is still a certain mystery about these towers and steep belfreys that makes me uneasy. This is a practical land. They must be there for something. Is no *coup d'état* lurking there?” (emphasis original).<sup>62</sup> The artist claims that the design of the Smithsonian provided an “allopathic dose administered to that parsimony which so long denied to science where to lay her

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<sup>61</sup> Horatio Greenough, *The Travels, Observations, and Experience of a Yankee Stonecutter (1852)* (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1958), 46-47.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

head,” thereby disguising as criticism his praise for Renwick for not submitting to the edifice of the neoclassical Capitol only a few hundred yards away. Greenough concludes his metaphor asserting that *contraria contrariis curantur*, or “the opposite is cured by the opposite.”<sup>63</sup>

Despite its premature and unfounded conclusion (even the author assures his reader he will examine the building more thoroughly at a later time), Greenough’s description may validate Owen’s belief in the instructive and associative capabilities of architecture, especially the “Norman” style. However, one finds a strikingly similar passage written by Owen himself in his *Hints on Public Architecture*. After warning against the construction or praise of “time-defying pyramids” or “a republican copy of St. Peter’s,” Owen predicts the American’s response towards the architecture of a noble fortress or residence:

When the eye of some citizen of this New World, as he descends the Rhine, rests on the castellated heights, of which the dark masses and picturesque outline so greatly add to the romantic beauty of that noble stream, shall he turn with a sigh to reflect, that *his* country presents no remains of such imposing grandeur? Let him rather call to mind, that these lordly castles, with all their poetical accessories of moat and bastion, or battlement and tower, were once but strong-holds of titled robbers, the receptacles of plunder, the scenes of extortion and cruelty and repine. They cursed, while they adorned, the country.<sup>64</sup> (emphasis original)

Owen’s qualification that he is describing castles on the Rhine, and therefore probably German structures, shrewdly distances his discourse from English or French Gothic buildings (or their Gothic Revival descendants), which were the preferred precedents for similar buildings in America. Nonetheless, his association of “castellated heights,” “picturesque outlines,” and “battlements and towers”—all of which characterize the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. Here, Greenough is quoting the Hippocratic theory that diseases can be cured through inciting opposing symptoms.

<sup>64</sup> Owen, 2-6.

Smithsonian—with feudal (i.e., un-American) corruption questions the author’s credibility or, at worst, intention.

Complementing the American view of Greenough, the English writer Anthony Trollope questions the supposed historicity and architectural basis of the Smithsonian. In his seminal travelogue *North America* (1862), which documented his 1860 visit, Trollope famously labels the style of the edifice “bastard Gothic.”<sup>65</sup> Although he notes its divergence from Washington’s more recognizable neoclassical fabric, the author lists various deficiencies of the design:

[The Smithsonian’s] main attributes are Gothic, but [...] liberties have been taken with it, which, whether they may injure its beauty or no, certainly are subversive of architectural purity. [...] But windows have been fitted in with stilted arches, of which the stilts seem to crack and bend, so narrow are they and so high. And then the towers with high pinnacled roofs are a mistake,—unless indeed they be needed to give the whole structure that name of Romanesque which it had assumed.<sup>66</sup>

In this passage, Trollope, probably unknowingly, cites and questions various elements stressed by Owen in *Hints on Public Architecture* as proper architectural details. As for the more specific, Trollope observed the ubiquitous combination of the round arch and columnar stilts of the windows (also seen in the doors). Indeed, Owen mentioned this seemingly mundane characteristic of the building’s apertures and noted that “a semicircular arch not stilted has, as a general rule, a flat and clumsy air.”<sup>67</sup> Clearly, this is a point of disagreement between the two authors.

It is less clear, moreover, what Trollope means when he states that the style and details of the Smithsonian subvert “architectural purity.” As an Englishman, Trollope would have been more familiar than Owen with both Gothic (especially Norman) and

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<sup>65</sup> Anthony Trollope, *North America* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1863), 306, 313.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>67</sup> Owen, 105.

Gothic Revival architecture (in its earliest stages) of England and the continent, and perhaps was commenting here on the differences between what he knew in his home country and what he saw in Washington. Like Owen, furthermore, Trollope compounds the Gothic and Romanesque styles, elements of both can be found in the eventual design of the institution. However, it is difficult to define what Owen's conception of architectural purity was. The best, and most often cited, characterization (which ultimately illustrates his opinion on proper architecture in general) is that in the purist design "external form should be the faithful interpreter of internal purpose," an idea that foreshadows so many later and more recognizable theories on architecture.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, even in the briefest criticisms, the convoluted and redundant aspects of the Smithsonian design become evident.

Trollope concludes his description with unique insight into the local reception of Renwick's design and architectural acumen of Washington:

I cannot say that the city of Washington seems to be grateful, for all to whom I spoke on the subject hinted that the Institution was a failure. It is to be remarked that nobody in Washington is proud of Washington, or of anything in it. If the Smithsonian were at New York or at Boston, one would have a different story to tell.<sup>69</sup>

Washington's designation as a center of government today is consistent with its nineteenth-century identification. Therefore, while its rich architectural tradition is worthy of study, up to the 1850s the capital was not the laboratory of architectural experimentation and innovations as the commercial and cultural centers of its northeastern counterparts, including Boston and New York. Renwick's work in

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>69</sup> Trollope, 313-14.

Washington in the final years of the decade, however, would offer the city a landmark neither Boston nor New York could boast.

***The Corcoran Gallery of Art: Architecture as Cultural Imperialism***

To the casual viewer, the architecture of the Smithsonian Castle and the Corcoran Gallery of Art present extreme examples of historically influenced design. While the fortress-like exterior of the Smithsonian insights images of medieval militaries (as represented in Greenough's and Trollope's evocations), the stately sophistication of the Corcoran exudes elegance and, in contrast to the Smithsonian, better befits a repository of fine art. Indeed, that Renwick based the Corcoran on Lemerrier's Pavillion de l'Horloge (1624) and Visconti and Lefuel's New Louvre (1852-57) has been related almost ad nauseum and provides little insight into the unprecedented nature and implications of this art gallery in nineteenth-century American culture.

It is worth beginning this examination with a few modern descriptions of the building during its twentieth-century restoration to remove the museum briefly from its questionable historiography.<sup>70</sup> In speaking about his work on the interior of the Corcoran Gallery in 1972, Hugh Newell Jacobson, the prominent postmodern architect, described

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<sup>70</sup> The 1970s restoration of the gallery and its eventual entry into the Smithsonian complex of museums is the culmination of a complicated history. During the Civil War, the building, barely completed, was appropriated by the Union as the headquarters of the Quartermaster General. After being returned to Corcoran in 1869, the same year Corcoran donated his art collection to the nation, the gallery opened for a fundraising event in 1871 (on February 22, George Washington's Birthday) and officially opened to the public on January 19, 1874. The final cost of the gallery totaled approximately \$250,000. In 1899, after the completion of Ernst Flagg's larger, Beaux-Arts gallery on Seventeenth St., the Renwick building became the home of the United States Court of Claims (whose buildings are under the administration of the Architect of the Capitol). In 1963, when the court moved out of the building, the gallery was nearly demolished for several reasons, including the inefficiency of floor space and the lack of fire-proofing. It was saved by Jacqueline Kennedy and transferred to the Smithsonian in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson. After renovations, the museum, renamed the Renwick Gallery, houses the Smithsonian's collections of American craft and decorative art objects. The gallery became a designated landmark in 1969 by the Historic American Buildings Survey and in 2013, a major renovation and preservation campaign began to equip the gallery with new technology for the twenty-first-century museum visitor.

Renwick as “the perpetrator of some of the wackiest and most interest buildings in New York and Washington.” Jacobson continues his evaluation of Renwick, concentrating on the building whose interior his firm spent years revitalizing:

[The architecture of the Corcoran] is nutty stuff. But once you get into the esthetic, you begin to dig it. You find that Renwick took the rules and instead of copying them, kicked them. [The Corcoran] is designed very deliberately, no accident, to make you feel smaller and the building grander. In photographs, the rooms look vast. You walk in and look around, and you feel like Alice after she drankme.<sup>71</sup>

It is clear that Jacobson, especially in his evocation of Lewis Carroll’s fantasy, was admiring the characteristics of the Corcoran—the exaggeration of scale and playfulness of detail, for example—that align with the postmodernist’s approach to design and the characteristics of his own works. The significance of the Corcoran, however, involves more than the building’s formal qualities; the gallery, like many of the buildings presented in this study and unprecedented in function, became a paradigm of its particular institution and purported purpose.

Notwithstanding Jacobson’s imaginative view of the design of the building, the Corcoran, through its unprecedented nature, both architecturally and institutionally, immediately became a symbol of the emergence of a high-art culture in Washington and in America itself. Thus, like the Smithsonian Institution in relation to the natural history museum, the Corcoran established a tradition concerning the foundation of the public art gallery in America, which nearly every American metropolis would follow to some degree. Consequently, the Corcoran, especially through its institutional foundation and

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<sup>71</sup> Sarah Booth Conway, “The Restoration of James Renwick,” *Potomac*, 30 Jan. 1972, 9. Jacobson was commissioned to restore the interior of the Corcoran. Before starting on this project, he traveled to New York to study Renwick’s other works, including St. Patrick’s Cathedral, about which the architect wrote: “St Patrick’s is damn good. It’s not copying the 12<sup>th</sup> century [sic]; it’s a marvelous piece of sculpture.”

architectural inspirations, established the image of the art gallery as a space reserved for and led by the elite. Indeed, the ultimate character of the museum as a custodian of privileged status and knowledge conflicts with its original intention as public gallery.

Like Renwick's collaboration with Hughes at St. Patrick's Cathedral, his work on the Corcoran Gallery was the result of a unique relationship with William Wilson Corcoran (1798-1888; fig. 107), one of the most prominent patrons of nineteenth-century Washington. While Archbishop Hughes's resource was his resolute religious conviction, Corcoran's currency was more literal; as the most influential banker in the capital, Corcoran amassed a huge fortune and devoted his retirement to intense philanthropy. It is unsurprising, then, that contemporaries lauded Corcoran for his devotion to public causes. For example, a lengthy and poetic tribute, written during the banker's lifetime, designates him as "the noblest philanthropist of our National Capital."<sup>72</sup>

Anticipating the more famous activities and benefaction of Gilded Age industrialists, Corcoran assembled a priceless collection of fine art (at the time, worth approximately \$100,000), for both his own pleasure and the indulgence of the American public. Corcoran began collecting Old World works he acquired overseas; later in his life, he devoted most of energy to American art, including the Hudson School painters and their derivatives.<sup>73</sup> The masterpiece of the collection was one of five replicas of Hiram Powers' *The Greek Slave* (1846), a neoclassical sculpture depicting a young girl captured and sold into slavery by the Turks during the Greek War for Independence.<sup>74</sup> After a

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<sup>72</sup> Mary E. P. Boulligny, *A Tribute to W. W. Corcoran, of Washington City* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1874), 5.

<sup>73</sup> Holly Tank, "Dedicated to Art: William Corcoran and the Founding of His Gallery," *Washington History* 17 (2005): 31-32.

<sup>74</sup> Powers' *Greek Slave* is perhaps the most famous American sculpture. The first was created in 1843, after which Powers made five full-scale replicas and numerous smaller versions. Executed in a decidedly neoclassical style, the sculpture was extremely popular throughout its numerous exhibitions.

failed attempt through the brief organization of the Washington Art Association, in 1858 Corcoran established his gallery, which he intended to become the “national museum” of art (in the words of Corcoran himself).<sup>75</sup> The gallery was not incorporated, however, until 1870, since the construction on the building was halted during the Civil War, during which it served as the headquarters for the Quartermaster General of the Union army. Notwithstanding the tortured history of the building, the establishment of the Corcoran Gallery would predate the founding of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York by a decade and the National Gallery of Art in Washington by over half a century.<sup>76</sup>

In contrast to the roughly six-year period of initial design for St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Renwick produced the design for the Corcoran Gallery within a year of its patron securing the property. By 1861, the majority of the building had been constructed.<sup>77</sup> The gallery was built of Baltimore red brick with red Aquia Creek sandstone (common throughout Washington) for the detailing.<sup>78</sup> The main Pennsylvania Avenue facade of the gallery features a five-part, two-level elevation. It should be noted

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Furthermore, its powerful iconography and beautiful sensuality has ignited a myriad of responses and interpretations in the form of poems, engravings, and scholarship, among other media. Since her creation, the woman has been a symbol of numerous ideals and concepts, including Victorian womanhood, religious purity, or female servitude. More literally, it became a centerpiece for the moralization of art as a warning against the atrocities of slavery in antebellum America. For different, yet equally informative, discussions of *The Greek Slave*, see Linda Hyman, “*The Greek Slave* by Hiram Powers: High Art as Popular Culture,” *Art Journal* 35 (Spring 1976): 216-23; Joy Kasson, *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 46-72.

<sup>75</sup> Tank, 33.

<sup>76</sup> The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. was founded in 1937 by Andrew Mellon. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City was incorporated in 1870 and first opened in 1872. As noted in a previous chapter, the museum’s collections were housed temporarily in Renwick’s Cruger Mansion before the construction of Calvert Vaux’s much-criticized building.

<sup>77</sup> As Tank notes, in 1861, Corcoran advised Renwick to stop construction due to the inception of the war. See Tank, 35.

<sup>78</sup> A recent scientific account of the building’s architecture claims that the sandstone was quarried in Belleville, New Jersey and that “no other source of similar sandstone is currently known.” See Hollis J. Stevens, S. Z. Lewin, and A. E. Charola, “Facade Restoration of the Renwick Gallery of Art: Materials Investigation and Architectural Analysis,” in *Nessun Futuro Senza Passato*, vol. 1, 6<sup>th</sup> ICOMOS General Assembly and International Symposium (Rome: International Council on Monuments and Sites, 1981), 333. This source is unique in its claim.

that the second-story statue niches on the facade, eventually filled with sculptures by Moses Ezekiel in 1884 (some of which can be seen on the Seventeenth Street facade), were converted to windows in 1912 when the United States Court of Claims expanded to the second floor (fig. 108 shows a depiction of the museum with all the statues in place). While generally proportional and well executed, the eclectic detailing of the neoclassical facade has provided an issue of contention for some scholars examining the building. For example, one writer emphasizes the flatness of surface and the “lack of complete fluency with the plasticity” of the Second Empire style as characteristic of Renwick’s work.<sup>79</sup> This author posits that these qualities are a result of the author working with prints of Parisian buildings, which would have valued two-dimensionality over spatial correctness. While this situation may have impacted the translation of detail from Paris to Washington, it ignores Renwick’s previous experience as architect and its growing fluency with molding historical modes of design for contemporary building projects. Overall, the facade of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, as envisioned by Renwick, successfully provided a palatial expression of Parisian architecture on a simpler scale appropriate for mid-nineteenth-century Washington.

The stately simplicity of the exterior composition informed the organization of the gallery’s interior. While its current reformulation as a wing of the Smithsonian Institution’s collection of American craft and decorative arts has somewhat altered the interior, one can still appreciate the elegance of the building and envision its nineteenth-century appearance. The best description of the interior arrives in the aforementioned

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<sup>79</sup> Daniel D. Reiff, *Washington Architecture, 1791-1861: Problems in Development* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, 1971), 2-3.

publication and tribute to Corcoran, written in 1874.<sup>80</sup> Both the first and second stories of the gallery contained exhibition spaces for Corcoran's collection, along with rooms for other functions. The main sculpture gallery, which measured 96 feet by 45 feet, resided on the first level. In this hall, various objects were exhibited, including, armor, animal bronzes, and vases.<sup>81</sup> Rooms off the sculpture gallery were originally planned for use as a school of design per Corcoran's intentions for his institution.<sup>82</sup> Equal in configuration and directly above the sculpture gallery is the grand picture gallery (fig. 109). This space displayed Corcoran's collection of paintings and features a massive skylight, similar to Renwick's design for the art gallery in the Smithsonian Institution building, but that "can be regulated as to quantity" to control the light input.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, and more famously, the grand gallery included 285 gas jet lights that "suddenly flash into brilliancy by means of electricity" according to the contemporary chronicler.<sup>84</sup> The most important room of the gallery, and the one around which the institution hinged, was the octagon room, designed specifically to display Powers' *The Greek Slave*. It is possible that Renwick was quoting Lefuel's octagon room, designed for the Louvre in 1853 for the Venus de Milo, an appropriate precedent given the compositional similarities and iconic standing of the sculpted women.

Similar to the situation characterizing Renwick's relationship with Archbishop Hughes, one must speculate when and how Corcoran met Renwick. Corcoran would have been familiar with Renwick's work on the Smithsonian as the businessman managed the institution's finances beginning in 1846; Corcoran also became a good ally of Joseph

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<sup>80</sup> Bouligny, 35ff.

<sup>81</sup> Tank, 40.

<sup>82</sup> Bouligny, 40-41; Tank, 33.

<sup>83</sup> Bouligny, 41.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

Henry (who would write a letter of introduction for Corcoran's European trips) and probably was aware of the animosity between the Smithsonian's secretary and his detractors, particularly Owen and Renwick. Corcoran also may have been introduced to Renwick through his connection with William H. Aspinwall, the prominent New York businessman and philanthropist, whose art collection rivaled that of Corcoran.<sup>85</sup> As mentioned, Aspinwall became Renwick's father-in-law when the architect married his daughter, Anna Lloyd in 1851.

Corcoran immediately recognized Renwick's talent as he commissioned the architect for various projects before beginning his gallery. In 1850, Renwick began two ecclesiastical commissions associated with Corcoran. The first was Trinity Episcopal Church (Third and C Streets, NW; fig. 23), which featured a faithful adaptation of Renwick's unused Gothic version for the Smithsonian. The church, demolished in 1936, was located on land donated to the parish by Corcoran. Also in 1850, Renwick began to design the Oak Hill Cemetery Chapel in Georgetown (fig. 76). As noted in the previous chapter, the chapel is an important example of Renwick's fluency in the Gothic Revival mode, for it represents one of the architect's few designs adhering to Augustus W. N. Pugin's theories at the scale of a small parish church. Oak Hill Cemetery, along with the Louise Home for Woman and the art gallery, belongs to the most personal philanthropic projects to Corcoran. That the banker hired Renwick to design two of the three reveals the admiration Corcoran had for the New York architect and his work.

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<sup>85</sup> Rattner Papers, box 20, fol. 18.

Most significantly, furthermore, Corcoran hired Renwick to redesign his Washington mansion at 1611 H Street, NW (demolished, 1922; fig. 110).<sup>86</sup> In 1849 (a year after Corcoran obtained the Federal style home) Renwick remodeled and enlarged the residence in the fashionable Italianate Style, adding a fourth floor (for servants), a carriage house, and two major wings to the main block. The east wing (1850) featured a dining room and library, while the west wing (1849) housed the parlor and picture gallery. The latter is critical for this discussion, for it marks the first exhibition space built by Renwick for Corcoran to display the latter's growing art collection. While this space was semi-public (Corcoran was famous for his extravagant dinner parties and their elite guest list), its mostly private character evokes the model of the Renaissance *studio* or the domestic *Wunderkammer*, both discussed above.

The evolution from the private to public display of Corcoran's collection and the accommodations provided by Renwick continue in another commission the architect received from the banker before the construction of the more famous gallery. In 1848, Renwick designed a six-story multi-use building on Fifteenth Street, NW (between Pennsylvania Avenue and F Street; demolished, 1917; fig. 111).<sup>87</sup> The Corcoran Building

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<sup>86</sup> The home was built in 1828 by Thomas Swann, a prominent Maryland attorney. Corcoran obtained the property around 1848. It is unclear whether Corcoran purchased or leased the mansion. After Corcoran's death in 1888, the home was left to his grandson, who rented it to politicians and government officials. The mansion was razed in 1922. See James M. Goode, *Capital Losses: A Cultural History of Washington's Destroyed Buildings* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1979), 54ff.

<sup>87</sup> An obituary of Renwick in the *New York Times* mentions the Corcoran Building along with the Corcoran Gallery of Art. See "Death of James Renwick," *New York Times*, 25 June 1895, 9. A 1908 entry in the *Columbia Historical Society Records* states that Corcoran also built the structure to house office for the Treasury of the United States. See "The Sessford Annals," *CHSR* 11 (1908): 336. Reiff, in his book on Washington architecture is not convinced that Renwick was the architect of the Corcoran Building. There exists ample correspondence, however, between Renwick and Corcoran about the design of the office. See Reiff, 112 n. 86.

Renwick may have also built a series of six row houses for Corcoran on I Street, between Fifteenth and Sixteenth Streets. Further research is needed to ascertain the definitive architect of these houses.

included studio and exhibition space for local and visiting artists.<sup>88</sup> By 1850, Renwick had collaborated with Corcoran to provide appropriate accommodations for the banker's aspirations for the American artistic scene. In the early years of the 1850s, there was little contact between the two men. In 1855, however, Corcoran and Renwick (albeit not together) would travel to Europe where they would experience the explosion of architectural activity in the continent's capitals, which would greatly inform their work as patron and architect, respectively.

*An American Gallery for an American Emperor*

The significance of the Corcoran Gallery and the most commonly cited characteristic is its unapologetic appropriation of the Second Empire style of architecture, which Renwick is responsible for popularizing in America. In addition to his religious edifices, Renwick's Second Empire designs constitute a major component of his corpus. As illustrated in the previous survey of the architect's career, the period when Renwick was designing in this mode (roughly from the second half of the 1850s and 1860s) marks the fulcrum point when Renwick's production shifted from the exclusive use of medieval idioms (both Romanesque and Gothic Revival) to a more eclectic European inspired oeuvre. Likewise, the proliferation of the Second Empire in America, first by Renwick and later by his colleagues, has provided historians a similar stage of transition between antebellum architecture and the more eclectic approaches after the war.

Although Renwick was the first to design Second Empire buildings at the scale of their Parisian counterparts, earlier experimentations with the style can be found in the work of other American architects. Some have credited German-born, American-trained

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<sup>88</sup> Tank, 32.

architect Detlef Lienau as the first to utilize a dormered roof in an American design, particularly in his Hart M. Schiff House on Fifth Avenue in New York (1850-52; fig. 112). Original sketches of this house feature prominently this Parisian element; the residence overall, however, exhibits more traditional classical details and cannot be fully considered a Second Empire design. Lienau's use of the mansard roof, moreover, is interesting for a discussion on Renwick since there is evidence of the two New York architects collaborating on a project on a Panorama Building, albeit decades after the completion of the Corcoran Gallery.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, it is probable that Renwick would have seen Lienau's work, including his European influenced designs, in New York in the 1850s.

When visiting Paris in 1855, Renwick would have seen a city under a tremendous transformation. Napoleon III, the nephew of Napoleon I and the ruler of the Second Empire, initiated a vast rebuilding campaign in his capital, which, by the middle of the nineteenth century, was still largely a medieval city. While the execution of the modernization of Paris is often credited to Baron Haussmann, historians of France tend to place the most emphasis on the efforts of the emperor himself as the engine for the decades-long project.<sup>90</sup> The propagandistic motivations for the rebuilding, therefore, cannot be ignored and provide an analog writ large for the construction of the Corcoran Gallery of Art by Renwick and his powerful patron.

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<sup>89</sup> In 1885, a lawsuit was initiated by Renwick and Lienau against *La Société Anonyme des Panoramas de New York*, a Belgium company located in New York. The case involved unpaid funds regarding the construction of a Panorama Building at Fifty-fifth Street and Seventh Avenue. Renwick and Lienau won the case and were awarded \$1953.06 for their work on the project.

<sup>90</sup> S. C. Burchell, *Imperial Masquerade: The Paris of Napoleon III* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 85.

Napoleon's Second Empire was greatly characterized by its extravagant display of wealth and power through intricately staged spectacles. Nearly synonymous with the Second Empire is the notion of the *fête impériale*, which can be defined by the "legitimation [of control] through the implied continuities of rituals and ceremonies."<sup>91</sup> Like many of his European predecessors, Napoleon III strove to maintain and publicize his image as a beneficent Caesar through architectural and urban programs, which eventually culminated in the beautification of Paris as an urban utopia. The impact of this project on American design has been realized in relevant studies, for example, it is accepted that the theories of urban design espoused by Napoleon and Haussmann influenced the City Beautiful Movement in America, which naturally emerged from the French-based Beaux-Arts approach to architecture.

Individual buildings of Second Empire Paris would prove to have major impact on Renwick's approach to architecture as manifested in his work on the Corcoran Gallery of Art. The first, and perhaps most definitive, architectural undertaking of Napoleon III was the completion of the Louvre Palace complex. Beginning in 1852, architects Louis Visconti and Hector Lefuel (who took over after Visconti's death) finished the wings to connect the old palace with the new Tuileries Palace (figs. 39, 113), thereby completing the *Grand Dessein*. It is clear that Renwick admired this complex, for he based two of his Second Empire designs on its constituent buildings—the Corcoran Gallery of Art on the Louvre and Vassar College on Tuileries.

Most elements of Napoleon's vision for Paris, however, did not begin the final years of the 1850s and later, when Renwick had already returned from his overseas trip;

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<sup>91</sup> David Baguley, *Napoleon III and His Regime: An Extravaganza* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 158-60.

therefore, the architect would only have appreciated the imperial image through the *Exposition Universelle* of 1855, the first of two universal expositions organized by the French emperor.<sup>92</sup> Both Renwick and Corcoran were two of the approximately five million paid visitors to the fair, which featured an eclectic display of artistic, industrial, and other cultural objects. The buildings of the exposition offered modern counterparts to the more classically rich designs of the Louvre and the Tuileries. The architectural centerpiece of the exposition was the Palais de l'Industrie on the Champs-Élysées. Through its material and scale, the monument represented Paris's attempt to surpass London's Crystal Palace of 1851. The architecture of the Palace of Industry and the exposition's other pavilions influenced Renwick's use of modern materials, including iron construction. Moreover, many of the buildings combined these new techniques with historical modes; the Palace of Industry was effectively an iron cathedral cloaked in a traditional stone exterior.<sup>93</sup>

The significance of the *Exposition Universelle* on Renwick's collaboration with Corcoran was the ideological imagery pervading the event. As noted, the exposition was a major conduit through which Napoleon III asserted the cultural and political standing of the Second Empire in the view of hundreds of foreign countries and their representatives. Appropriately, his own image appeared throughout the exposition, most conspicuously as a bust flanked by allegories of painting and sculpture on the facade of the Palace of

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<sup>92</sup> As many scholars have noted, no monograph exists on the *Exposition Universelle* of 1855. The Paris international expositions of both 1855 and 1867 are usually discussed in literature on world's fairs or the politics of Napoleon III and the Second Empire. Art historians have dealt with the expositions in terms of their art exhibits, which featured the works of early modern artists of France, including Ingres, Delacroix, and Decamps. The architecture of the main pavilions, however, despite ample visual evidence, has not been treated adequately.

<sup>93</sup> Matthew Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics: Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte and the Fête Impériale, 1849-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 114.

Industry.<sup>94</sup> Renwick mimicked this common configuration for the Corcoran Gallery of Art, whose facade unabashedly features the monogram of its patron within a tympanum crowning the Palladian window and roundels on the outer bays (figs. 114, 115).<sup>95</sup> According to contemporary descriptions, the pediment originally featured allegorical sculptures of the arts. Similarly, the inscription “Dedicated to Art,” indeed, the most commonly cited detail of the gallery, parallels the personifications of the French monument.

In looking beyond the formal relationship between the architecture of both the Corcoran Gallery of Art and Second Empire Paris (up to 1855), one can better recognize the eclecticism of Renwick’s design for the American gallery. The similarities between the intended motivation and execution of Corcoran Gallery and its analogous Parisian institutions cannot be ignored. Indeed, the prominence placed on control and elite modes of display and design should underline the framework for fully appreciating what Renwick and his patron achieved in Washington. Here, one can relate Pierre Bourdieu’s seminal thesis that taste, in this case the selection of a modern imperial mode of design, directly corresponds to social position.<sup>96</sup> The exposition allowed Renwick an educatory experience unlike anything an academic or other formal training could afford.<sup>97</sup> The

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<sup>94</sup> Baguley, 194; Treusdell, 114.

<sup>95</sup> The bronze sculptures of the central pediment were not added until the 1880s. Renwick’s original design included similar bronze groups flanking the pediment, but probably not a profile of the founder. These elements, sculpted and casted by Moses Ezekiel while the artist was in Rome, feature the profile and monogram of Corcoran, thereby reemphasizing the imperial implications of the gallery and its patron.

<sup>96</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, transl. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>97</sup> As Patricia Mainardi cites, Théophile Gautier, the French critic and intellect, commented that the visitor to the Palace of Fine Arts (the counterpart to the Palace of Industry) “would be able to learn more in four hours than he had in fifteen years of travelling.” See Patricia Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire: The Universal Exhibitions of 1855 and 1867* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 66.

architect certainly would have understood and appreciated the ideological link between imperial imagery and cultural control as exhibited throughout the exposition.

The association between the architecture of the Second Empire and its imperial implications in the mind of Renwick also appears in the architect's second major design in the French style. Renwick's original vision for Vassar College featured a monumental adaptation of a Napoleonic palace. An early presentation watercolor, tentatively dated late-1860, indicates the imperial scale with which the architect was working for this project.<sup>98</sup> If built as first planned, the main building for Vassar College would have rivaled the Parisian palaces of Napoleon and his predecessors. For various reasons, however, including issues of cost and execution, the architect slightly reduced the size of the building and removed some detailing. Comparing the executed structure (as it appears today) with the intended version reveals the subtle differences in architectural effect, as the current version lacks the complexity in detail and composition as the original. Nonetheless, it is interesting that after his trip to Paris and the Universal Exposition of 1855, Renwick no longer associated monumentality with the Gothic or Romanesque Revival, as exemplified at St. Patrick's Cathedral and the Smithsonian Institution, respectively. Rather, the Second Empire mode, characterized by its imperial scale and Napoleonic associations, became the model for the architect's large-scale institutions.

To validate the impact of Renwick's unique introduction of a fashionable Parisian idiom at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and its imperial associations, one must consider how contemporaries of Renwick appropriated similar styles for their own projects. The situation in Washington, D.C. is particularly complex, yet revealing. Indeed, one scholar has claimed that Renwick's Second Empire designs failed to ignite widespread

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<sup>98</sup> McKenna, "Second Empire," 100.

emulation.<sup>99</sup> While the more literal method of translation, as exemplified in the Corcoran, perhaps was not preferred, one can find parallel adaptations in two major building types that prominently feature Parisian idioms immediately after the Corcoran Gallery: elite mansions and governmental buildings. Regarding the former, Washington elites surveyed France for powerfully semiotic models on which to design their own residences.<sup>100</sup> The fashions of France under Napoleon III inspired some of these homes, especially in the 1850s. Specifically, furniture designers, derived from the French *ensembliers*, brought Parisian interior decorations to the most prominent homes of Washington, including the White House.<sup>101</sup> While the antebellum appropriation of French taste culminated after the war in the decoration of the executive mansion, a major juncture of the second wave of Francophilia in American architecture can be found in Renwick's design for the Corcoran. Furthermore, and most importantly, the influence of Paris on Washington mansions suggests that Renwick's design for the Corcoran Gallery was considered more palatial than public.

More specifically, the Second Empire style emerged as the favored fashion for large-scale governmental buildings in the late-nineteenth century. This trend, which only has been briefly glossed in relevant literature, has caused scholars to disregard the impact of Renwick's introduction of the style to the American repertoire. The earliest example is the Department of Agriculture Building (1868; demolished, 1930; fig. 116) designed by Adolf Cluss, who had rebuilt the Smithsonian Institution after the 1865 fire and

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<sup>99</sup> Reiff, 112.

<sup>100</sup> Liana Paredes, "Private Homes, Public Lives: Francophilia among Government Officers and the Washington Elite," in *Paris on the Potomac: The French Influence on the Architecture and Art of Washington, D.C.*, comp. and ed. Cynthia R. Field, Isabelle Gournay, and Thomas P. Somma (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 77-116.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-3.

constructed the adjacent Arts and Industry Building (originally known as the National Museum) in 1879.<sup>102</sup> Cluss fashioned the department's main building as a Parisian palace on the National Mall, whose total square footage was just less than that of the Corcoran.<sup>103</sup> Taken as a whole, which included a modern conservancy and picturesque grounds, the agricultural complex paralleled the parks and estates of nineteenth-century Paris, particularly those designed or redesigned under Napoleon III's reign.

The Department of Agriculture Building featured a similar elevation as the Corcoran, and retained the appreciable scale and details as Renwick's design. While Cluss's design exhibited the same five-part elevation as the gallery, its planar construction was less sculptural and modulated. Its mansard roof, moreover, was consistent throughout the middle three bays, unlike the same element of the gallery, which Renwick emphasized in the outer and central bays of the facade. Overall, however, the architectural affinity the Department of Agriculture Building showed for the Corcoran Gallery of Art cannot be missed, especially given the traditionally neoclassical fabric of most antebellum structures in the capital.

It is been argued here that through Renwick's unprecedented design the Corcoran Gallery of Art represents the cultural superiority of its patron more than his supposed public munificence. Like the situation at the Smithsonian Institution described above, the actual architecture of the museum presented the imperial-like supremacy as much as the collection of Old and New World art displayed within its halls. The centralization of

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<sup>102</sup> Renwick, in fact, had submitted a design for the Department of Agriculture Building, which featured a monumental pavilion (1,000 feet by 500 feet) clearly inspired by the Crystal Palace and its derivatives, and capped by a Brunelleschian dome and smaller domes throughout.

<sup>103</sup> The area of the Corcoran Gallery and Department of Agriculture Building are approximately 13,000 square feet and 10,500 square feet, respectively. The dimensions of the Agriculture Building were 170 feet by 61 feet.

culture reflected in the impressive architecture of the gallery was translated into the bureaucratic realm as the Second Empire style became appropriated for massive governmental buildings in Washington and elsewhere. The most conspicuous example is the former State, War, and Navy Building, begun in 1871 by Alfred Mullett, on Pennsylvania Ave. and Seventeenth Street (fig. 117).<sup>104</sup> Located only one block from the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Mullett's design formidably marks the area west of the White House as a nexus for the American version of Parisian architecture in the capital. In an article on Mullett's French designs, Wodehouse suggests that the architect may have visited the Universal Exposition of 1855. However, although Mullett had already experimented in the Second Empire style by 1870 in other American cities, his design choices for the State, War, and Navy Building clearly evoked the implications of Renwick's Corcoran Gallery of Art only a few hundred yards north. The monumental scale of Mullett's building, as well as its original function, moreover, attests strongly to the hermeneutical reputation of the style in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The model on which Renwick based the design for the gallery would have appealed to Corcoran, who, as noted, was among Washington's most cultured men. As Isabelle Gournay contends in an informative survey on the influence of Paris within the architectural culture of Washington, the Second Empire was aligned not only with Napoleon and his court, but also with the *grands bourgeois* of France, whose wealth

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<sup>104</sup> This building is now the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. Before this designation, it was known as the Old Executive Office Building. One writer questions the connection between the Corcoran and the State, War, and Navy Building, citing Mullett's earlier Boston Post Office and Treasury as a more probably model, rather than Renwick's nearby design. See Reiff, 112. The proximity of the two buildings, however, must be taken into account when discussing them together.

rivalled that of the emperor himself.<sup>105</sup> Thus, through Renwick, Corcoran could evoke the image of both Napoleon and figures such as the Péreire brothers and the Rothschild family (the two banking powers cited by Gournay) in becoming the foremost cultural philanthropist in the United States. It is appropriate, then, that the first image that greeted the visitor when entering the grand picture gallery was a large-scale portrait of Corcoran, painted by Charles Loring Elliot, which overshadowed Canova's bust of Napoleon I displayed in the vestibule. Like a Roman emperor holding court in a basilica or Napoleon III boasting the cultural and industrial supremacy of France to the world, then, Corcoran literally, figuratively, and visually reigned within his own "American Louvre."

***The National Gallery of History and Art: A Universal Appropriation***

Renwick's final design, which was summarized briefly in the first chapter of this dissertation, must be revisited in view of this discussion of the architect's museum commissions. Franklin Smith's publication outlining his vision for a massive National Gallery of History and Art, located just behind the Washington Monument on the banks of the Potomac River, displays some similarities with Renwick's earlier museum designs.<sup>106</sup> As previously mentioned, Renwick's firm supplied the original illustrations of the proposed complex for Smith's publication at the architect's own suggestion following one of Smith's lectures in St. Augustine, Florida. Renwick and his associates worked on the project for six months; some of the drawings, in fact, label Bertram Goodhue as draftsman.

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<sup>105</sup> Isabelle Gournay, "The French Connection in Washington, D.C.: Context and Issues," in *Paris on the Potomac: The French Influence on the Architecture and Art of Washington, D.C.*, comp. and ed. Cynthia R. Field, Isabelle Gournay, and Thomas P. Somma (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 8.

<sup>106</sup> Smith, *National Gallery of History and Art*.

According to Smith, the complex would correct the disparity in the number of “finer and artistic institutions” between America and its European counterparts, and would inspire a “more refined cultivation.”<sup>107</sup> Although his justification criticizes the “luxurious dissipation” of American citizens, Smith evokes ideals related to American imperialism and exceptionalism and the country’s obligation to preserve the artistic and architectural treasures of the world’s greatest civilizations, both extinct and present. Smith, in fact, dedicated a section of his proposal to surveying the histories and missions of foreign galleries and museums in order to illuminate the necessity and originality of his complex.<sup>108</sup> The National Gallery, however, according to Smith, would “surpass in architectural grandeur and extent all similar constructions.”<sup>109</sup> Smith and his vision provide perhaps the most extreme embodiment of the “economy of cultural power” characteristic of the nineteenth-century museum.<sup>110</sup>

Like the Soane Museum in London, Smith’s National Gallery would express cultural hegemony through the reproduction of architecturally and culturally significant monuments within a modern urban setting (the principles of the complex’s composition are clearly derived from Beaux-Arts design). The plan of the museum, as seen in figure **Figure 73**, was comprised of numerous courts (each approximately three acres), dedicated to a specific historical period or culture, within which there would be complete or fragmentary reproductions (at various scales, including larger-than-life) of famous or distinguishing monuments, constructed using modern materials. In the Roman Court, for instance, a reproduction of Trajan’s Column and the Porta Maggiore, among other

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 21-28. Expectedly, the Louvre and its Second Empire pavilions, the architectural model for the Corcoran Gallery of Art, are discussed in his survey.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>110</sup> Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 23

structures, would be built. Many of the museum's buildings, moreover, were merely suggestive of their respective culture's architectural style, an example of which is given in figure 118. Nonetheless, the illustrations provided by Renwick's firm and included throughout the publication reveal an adept and expansive handling of historical details. The collection of illustrations, then, represents an architectural practice long-removed from the Gothic Revival and later Victorian idioms, indeed the commonest characterization of Renwick's approach to architecture.

It is difficult to appreciate fully the overall ambition in both scale and intention of Smith's project.<sup>111</sup> The experience of the park, furthermore, would have been overwhelming—only the modern theme park approaches a similar experience without the assistance of digital resources. It is probable that Smith's gallery would have incited as much controversy as occurred at the Smithsonian Institution decades earlier. Indeed, Robert Owen himself would have shuttered, among other spectacles, at the sight of the “Castle from the Rhine,” one of the exemplars of the Medieval Court, hovering over the Potomac. Nonetheless, in collaborating with Smith on the visionary's outrageous project, Renwick authored another revealing chapter in America's desire for cultural hegemony through the construction of exhibition spaces. Unlike Renwick's work at the Smithsonian and Corcoran, however, the appropriation of architecture was not limited to a contained historical source, but rather was universal and unapologetic in its expression and function.

***Concluding Remarks: Architectural Authority in the Museum***

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<sup>111</sup> Smith calculated the width of the complex at 2,000 feet and the length at 2,400 feet.

Throughout its expansive history, the museum has provided both architects and patrons an opportunity to assert effectively their artistic or cultural authority, especially within the construct of accepted public values. Scholars have typically emphasized the interpretive possibilities of museum collections, whether composed of objects of artistic, natural, or scientific importance, rather than the walls that enclose their display. The time, money, and energy put into constructing museums, especially those within prominent urban centers and capitals, attests to the significance of the buildings themselves as a bearer of institutional meaning and authority.

At the Smithsonian Institution and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Renwick collaborated with his most powerful patrons to create what have remained his most lasting designs. In both projects, one finds the architect and his patrons searching for an architectural expression appropriate for the museum as building type and mining the architectural history of the Old World for architectural ideas to represent the cultural hegemony of the New World. Like many of the buildings examined in this dissertation, Renwick's museums anticipated more familiar institutions in the history of American architecture. Furthermore, they demonstrate and embody the processes of cultural control embedded in the museum as monument and institution. Indeed, perhaps more than any other component of his corpus, Renwick's contribution to the museum landscape of America represents the most enduring aspect of his legacy.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Disguises for Diseases and Destitution:* **Renwick's Reform Buildings on Blackwell's Island, New York**

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*No piled up Parthenon, the pagan's pride,  
 No Coliseum chocked with gory tide,  
 No Caesar's house with guarded door,  
 No, it is the palace of the suffering poor.*

#### ***Introduction***

The historiography of nineteenth-century American architecture is generally dominated by only a select set of building types. For various reasons, especially patterns of architectural survival and source material, domestic, religious, and civic edifices have emerged as exemplars of an architect's production, thereby undermining the full consideration of other buildings, such as schools, clubhouses, and offices. As seen in the first chapter, however, Renwick's activity involved a myriad of these supposedly secondary types, which should command equal academic attention. Among the most prominent and socially significant are buildings dedicated to health-care or welfare.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, just as a patient of Renwick's Charity Hospital so eloquently expressed, institutions devoted to caring for the sick or poor represent values either important or imperative to American society, just as the Parthenon and Colosseum have become symbols of Greek and Roman society, respectively, in the academic and popular imagination.

Renwick's designs for health-care and reform institutions, on which the architect concentrated a major portion of his career, represents the most unrecognized aspect of his

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter, when speaking in general terms, these buildings may collectively be called "hospitals."

corpus. In fact, Renwick's authorship was neither affirmed nor considered important in relevant scholarship until the last decades of the twentieth century; for example, in his 1970 report on the buildings of Roosevelt Island (as Blackwell's Island is now known), architect and preservationist Giorgio Cavaglieri writes concerning the Smallpox Hospital, "that Renwick was the architect has not yet been firmly established, *but it is irrelevant at this point*" (emphasis added). Notwithstanding this disinterest, these buildings together provide a perfect paradigm for the relationship between nineteenth-century architecture and public institutions. Furthermore, through a contextualization of Renwick's hospital designs, it becomes clear how influential his architectural activity was, especially in the rapidly changing architectural fabric of the United States.

In the nineteenth century, health-care institutions were often not the massive, monolithic, and multi-functional complexes one thinks of in their twenty-first-century forms;<sup>2</sup> rather, many of the earliest buildings dedicated solely for the physical and mental care of the sick were more limited in function, and thus more varied in conception and scope. While the plans of such complexes could be intricate and expansive, architects were often concerned with individual and usually specialized components of the overall design. Renwick's hospital designs, mostly located on New York's Blackwell's Island were composed mainly of such components, each of which boasts a unique and distinctive architectural history. For this reason, each building will require its own discussion in conjunction with a broader consideration of Renwick's place within the specific narrative of hospital architecture in nineteenth-century America.

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<sup>2</sup> John Duffy makes the same observation, which was discovered late into the research of this dissertation. See John Duffy, *A History of Public Health in New York City, 1625-1866* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1968), 241.

The period during which Renwick designed buildings dedicated to physical and mental health is notable for its nascent ideas of reform concerning the treatment of hospital, asylum, and prison inmates. In the first half of the nineteenth century, moreover, American doctors and theorists were incorporating European (mostly French) conceptions of diseases and their treatment into the fledgling medical scene.<sup>3</sup> While the history of these ideas is complicated, a few individuals and ideas emerged as the most influential engines of such issues. Furthermore, New York City, because of its dense population and often-unsanitary conditions, contained incipient forms of hospital and welfare architecture since the seventeenth century, thus providing a relevant environment for Renwick to experiment with and evolve his designs. As will become clear, Renwick played a major role in implementing these ideas on an architectural level and provided models on which later designers and practitioners could construct their own institutions.

***The Study of Hospital Architecture: Building for Health-Care and Charity***

The history and historiography of hospital architecture is complicated and varied, while frustratingly limited in scope and approach. The majority of scholarship on health-care architecture concentrates on England, France, and, to a lesser extent, Germany, from where Western principles of medicine and patterns inmate care emerged. Although not directly relevant to the history of American design, this history will become useful in the following study's attempt to contextualize Renwick's work on Blackwell's Island, especially considering the comparatively few precedents for hospitals in the United States versus its European counterparts.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Duffy, 461 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, scholars of the history of hospitals and hospital design, especially of American examples, have pointed out the historiographical bias towards Europe, as well as the usefulness of the European

Moreover, and somewhat more elusively, studies on the history of hospital design attempt to find correlations between social and cultural values and the emergence and progression of the hospital as a building type. As Brandt and Sloane maintain in their brief study on the American hospital, “the modern American hospital sits squarely between the world of science and public culture”; they also note that “the grand facades that adorned many of the early [American] hospitals reflected the desire to reassure the public that the hospital had a preeminent purpose and role in society.”<sup>5</sup> These thoughts, which clearly embrace multiple methodologies of historical examination, have progressed the study of hospitals and their architecture beyond simple notions of style and construction, thus heightening the current scholar’s understanding of the building type and the role of the architect within his specific society.

Although it is convenient to consider the hospital, especially in American society, as a reflection of the charitable concern for patient treatment, one must not espouse such linear views without strict scrutiny; the environment of the hospital as related to architectural design was much more hierarchical and, in some cases, less concerned with scientific reform (which beget patient welfare) than one would like to think. In fact, some historians of hospital architecture claim that medical advancement, which included the invention of some fundamental doctrines and techniques (e.g., anesthesiology, anti-sepsis treatments), were not as influential in shaping the principles of designs later implemented

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framework within this specific area of examination. For example, in his “The Transformation of the American Hospital,” Morris J. Vogel suggests that “the American general hospital can best be examined in light of its European origins and the specific social and medical circumstances of its American evolution.” See Morris J. Vogel, “The Transformation of the American Hospital,” in *Institutions of Confinement: Hospitals, Asylums, and Prisons in Western Europe and North America, 1500-1950*, ed. Norbert Finzsch and Robert Jütte (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 40.

<sup>5</sup> Allen Brandt and David C. Sloane, “Of Beds and Benches: Building the Modern American Hospital,” in *The Architecture of Science*, ed. Peter Galison and Emily Thompson (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), 281-82.

by architects. Such views seem counterintuitive and perhaps frustrating to the architectural historian, who constantly strives to find correlations between socio-cultural developments and architecture to support his or her theses. The recognition that medical innovations may not always be present, however, is critical for an examination of Renwick's designs since these facilities existed firmly within the sphere of public charity.

Much of the thinking and writing about hospitals was a product of the Enlightenment, during which various political movements against established monarchies emerged, most importantly the rising discontent with the *ancien régime* in France, which eventually fell in 1789. The redirection of political and intellectual power from royal regimes to the people, indeed, contributed to the evolution of the hospital as a more egalitarian institution. Furthermore, the intellectual climate of the Enlightenment, especially the myriad of philosophical, scientific, and social thought, developed a particularly ripe environment for thinking about the hospital and its place within an ordered society. Most of these thoughts were expectedly critical in nature, thereby marking the late-eighteenth century as a nadir of change concerning hospital design.

The famous Hôtel-Dieu was the commonest target of criticism, unsurprising considering its prominence within Paris and rich history dating to the seventh century (fig. 119). Various commentaries on the Hôtel-Dieu throughout the centuries, indeed, exhibit the inherent intimacy between medical and architectural concerns. Most notably, in the 1765 article "Hôpital," published in the eighth volume of the *Encyclopédie*, Denis Diderot criticized the administration of the Hôtel-Dieu and the repellent conditions the institution's leaders allowed to develop.<sup>6</sup> Diderot introduces the complex with literary

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<sup>6</sup> John Frangos, *From Housing the Poor to healing the Sick: The Changing Institution of Paris Hospitals under the Old Regime and Revolution* (London: Associated University Press, 1997), 24;

force by describing it as “the most frightening of all our hospitals” (*le plus effrayant de tous nos hôpitaux*).<sup>7</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, the most fluent observations were often quite specific about architectural design and the composition of various components of the hospital. Marc-Antoine Laugier, suggesting solutions on how to deal with the decoration and elaboration of hospital design, wrote that “hospitals must be simply built. [...] Magnificence announces too much money in the foundation, or too little economy in the administration; [...] too much beauty in the house [of charity...] stifles charity.”<sup>8</sup> As Stevenson points out, the belief that hospitals should conform to a model of austerity and reject overt ostentation arose from the equivocation between the hospital and the poorhouse, a situation avoided in the separation of components under Renwick’s supervision on Blackwell’s Island.<sup>9</sup>

Among the countless commentaries on the role of the hospital within society and the theories of design are specific ideas on the relationship between architect and physician, which, in turn, relate to more general issues of patronage and function. Since Renwick’s work in this particular portion of his career was mainly directed by boards composed of aldermen and other charitable groups, there are few summaries of his own relationship with the professionals (such as doctors or wardens) who utilized his designs. For this reason, it is worth mentioning some early considerations of this relationship in its

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Originally from Denis Diderot and Jean-Baptiste le Rond d’Alembert, eds, *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.* (1751-72), ARTFL Encyclopédie Project, University of Chicago, <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>, s.v. “Hôpital.”

<sup>7</sup> Diderot and d’Alembert, eds., s.v. “Hôtel-Dieu.”

<sup>8</sup> Christine Stevenson, *Medicine and Magnificence: British Hospital and Asylum Architecture, 1600-1815* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

most ideal incarnation, which often privileged the professional knowledge of the physician over that of the architect.<sup>10</sup>

Many theorists attempted to discredit the architect's professional voice. Regarding the role of the architect in hospital design, in 1765 Diderot unapologetically stated that the "architect must subordinate his art to the opinions of the physician" (*l'architecture doit subordonner son art aux vûes du medecin*).<sup>11</sup> Just a few years later, John Aikin, English doctor and theoretician of hospitals, furthered Diderot's hesitation about architectural authority noting that the ideal composition of space differs in the mind of the architect from that of the physician.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, according to Johann Peter Frank, German physician who influenced much early thought on public health, the builder of hospitals represents "petty considerations and misplaced parsimony" and if the physician were consulted more, "hospitals would not have failed so often to fulfill their purpose."<sup>13</sup> In terms of the Vitruvian triad, therefore, architectural beauty must submit to utility and strength. It is important to recognize that the emphasis placed on the role of the physician versus that of the architect in the changing nature of the hospital was, for the most part, not an affront directed towards the entirety of the architectural profession. Although specific propensities of the architect and his craft were cited as detrimental, such as his aesthetic sensibilities, the attenuation of the architect was more of a necessary

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<sup>10</sup> John Frangos, in his book *From Housing the Poor to Healing the Sick: The Changing Institution of Paris Hospitals under the Old Regime and Revolution*, argues this trend was a part of the process he calls "medicalization of hospitals" or the "triumph of the physician," defined by the strengthening role of the doctor and his science within the hospital versus the hospital's original function as charity for social welfare. See Frangos, 13ff., 13 n. 1, 122ff. Although the designs of Renwick's hospitals seemed to express a limited role of the architect, their level of "medicalization" is debatable, especially considering the wealth of criticism over their later failure as treatment centers.

<sup>11</sup> Diderot and d'Alembert, eds., s.v. "Hôpital."

<sup>12</sup> John Aikin, *Thoughts on Hospitals* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1771), 12-13.

<sup>13</sup> Johann Peter Frank, "Location, type of construction, and equipment of a public hospital," in *A System of Complete Medical Police: Selections from Johann Peter Frank*, ed. Erna Lesky (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 419.

compliance to the physician in the closed system of power within the hospital itself than a purposeful provocation against the profession. In simpler terms, as the physician became more prominent, the architect acceded authority.

The impact of the Enlightenment on the rise of academic and intellectual thought on hospital design is irrefutable. Considering the influence of the European philosophical movement on the early intellects of American society, one would expect similar concern in the United States from the beginning. Unfortunately, however, the documentary and architectural evidence suggests less extensive foundations for American hospitals. Accordingly, American commentators naturally studied English modes of charities and health-care in their attempt to fashion a framework fitting for the early Republic. Among the most intente was Benjamin Franklin, whose writings reveal reluctance towards the English system's disposition towards charity:

There is no country in the world where so many provisions are established [for the poor]; so many hospitals to receive them when they are sick and lame, founded and maintained by voluntary charities; so many almshouses for the aged of both sexes, together with a solemn law made by the rich to subject their estates to a heavy tax for the support of the poor.<sup>14</sup>

Attesting to the submission of theoretical tenets to practical concerns, Franklin was instrumental in the foundation of the Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia in the 1750s. While it can be said that Franklin's framework for funding the institution through private donations adhered to his belief in economic individual (versus public) intervention, that

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<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 13, The Packard Humanities Institute, <http://franklinpapers.org/franklin/>.

. Cited in Howell V. Williams, "Benjamin Franklin and the Poor Laws," *Social Service Review* 18 (1944): 79. The original passage is from the essay "On the Price of Corn, and Management of the Poor," which the author published in the *London Chronicle* on 29 Nov. 1766, under the pseudonym "Arator."

he spent so much effort in assuring the hospital's success confirms that a tradition of institutional health-care facilities in America needed to be established.<sup>15</sup>

Although by 1873, according to one contemporary compendium compiled by the American Medical Association, there existed 120 general hospitals in the United States, in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries only the major urban centers—Philadelphia, New York, and Boston—boasted prominent care complexes.<sup>16</sup> In 1756, the aforementioned Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia was founded following the efforts of Benjamin Franklin and Dr. Thomas Bond; the New York Hospital system, chartered by King George III, was established in 1771. Scholars duly note that the organization of these two institutions followed the model established by European examples, albeit in a typically American secular manner.<sup>17</sup> The third major American hospital to be founded was the Massachusetts General Hospital, established in 1821. The history of the founding of this institution is relevant for this study because it involves the contributions of Charles Bulfinch, among the most important architects in early America, who provided recommendations for the design of the hospital complex. Bulfinch's two reports provide the first indication of a certain architectural awareness on the part of the institution's leaders and glimpses into the thoughts of a professional architect on a building type with little immediate precedent.

Before composing his reports, Bulfinch traveled to Philadelphia and New York to examine the cities' aforementioned hospitals; the architect also had in hand Benjamin

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<sup>15</sup> Williams, 89ff.

<sup>16</sup> J. M. Toner, "Statistics of Regular Medical Associations and Hospitals of the United States," *Transactions of the American Medical Association* 24 (1873): 314-33. This collection lists 178 hospitals, fifty-eight of which were psychiatric institutions.

<sup>17</sup> Vogel, 42.

Latrobe's plans for a marine hospital in Washington, D.C.<sup>18</sup> On the Pennsylvania and New York Hospitals, Bulfinch noted a few principles and concerns he believed should inform the design of the Bostonian institution. The architect was particularly impressed at the charity of the New York Hospital, where he observed, "all the sick appeared to be of the poorest classes of society," but that "although great order of cleanliness was observable [...] there was no provision for discrimination of privacy."<sup>19</sup> Bulfinch recommended a similar mode of operation in Boston, whereby the sick who could afford at least part of the cost of treatment could patronize the hospital, while the poorest members would reside in the complex's almshouse, a common means for segregation at major hospitals.<sup>20</sup>

By reading Bulfinch's notes closely, one can infer that the architect recommended building separate components of the hospital complex that would segregate inmates according to their financial means among the population. Indeed, Renwick adopted a similar approach in his own designs on Blackwell's Island. Bulfinch also recommended stone as primary building material because of its durability and inherent decorative properties.<sup>21</sup> It is clear that Bulfinch's ideal hospital, with which the complexes on Blackwell's Island would share certain characteristics, diverged from Latrobe's overall scheme for the marine hospital, which was massive in scale and conception but "displayed a certain contemptuous neglect of interior planning."<sup>22</sup> Bulfinch's reports were duly successful in their recommendations to the Trustees of the Massachusetts

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<sup>18</sup> Leonard K. Eaton, *New England Hospitals, 1790-1833* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), 81.

<sup>19</sup> Leonard K. Eaton, "Charles Bulfinch and the Massachusetts General Hospital," *Isis* 41 (1950): 9-10.

<sup>20</sup> Eaton, *New England Hospitals*, 82.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

General Hospital, for the design competition announcement focuses greatly on the architectural concerns espoused by Bulfinch,<sup>23</sup> thus providing an historical precedent for the role Renwick played on Blackwell's Island.

***Hospitals in New York City: A City of Concern***

While the construction on Blackwell's Island, including Renwick's contributions, represent a major chapter in the history of the hospital in New York, from the late-eighteenth to early-nineteenth century the city's collection of hospitals compared well to those of other American cities. Indeed, as Stern et al. write, New York was a city "reflecting a commitment not only to medical science but also to the general welfare of the common person,"<sup>24</sup> the abundance of institutions dedicated to health and reform within the architectural fabric of the metropolis corroborates the authors' claim. While a complete history of hospitals in New York City is far beyond the scope of a single study, it is worth mentioning the most influential, both architecturally and administratively, within the narrative in which Renwick's buildings play a significant role.

The concern for the sick in New York began as a response to the social conditions of the eighteenth century, especially during and after the Revolutionary War. Following the founding of the Society of the Hospital in the city of New York in 1771, the aforementioned New York Hospital officially opened in 1791 and "marked a new step in the development of social responsibility" for the city.<sup>25</sup> The New York Hospital and Dispensary was the most prominent medical facility in the city and was consistently enlarged or rebuilt throughout the nineteenth century. Notably, in 1877 George B. Post

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<sup>23</sup> The competition's details were presented in the *Columbian Centinel*, 12 Nov. 1817.

<sup>24</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 253.

<sup>25</sup> Duffy, 66-67, 90.

completed a new home for the New York Hospital; the cast-iron and sandstone monument was praised both for its luxurious accommodations and architectural utility.<sup>26</sup>

The second major hospital complex in New York City, and still a major facility, was Bellevue Hospital. The history of Bellevue begins in the 1790s, when the city acquired a private farm (called Belle Vue) to serve yellow fever patients during a major epidemic.<sup>27</sup> In 1805, the complex became the city's almshouse (a type of which Renwick would later design) and in 1826, a new, four-story building was completed on the shores of the East River. Throughout the century, the complex would expand considerably, featuring elements built by Renwick himself, including a morgue (1866) and ferry house (1869). While Bellevue Hospital remains New York's premier medical complex, its current form bears no resemblance to the massive complex at the end of the nineteenth century.

The hospital landscape of New York City during Renwick's life can be characterized by both diversity and constant change in construction. By the 1850s (when Renwick first entered the hospital scene), the city boasted some of America's best medical facilities, which remained largely charitable in their intended mission and diverse in their medical specialties. Indeed, Renwick's health-care and reform buildings on Blackwell's Island were part of an evolving history of hospital design in the city, to which architects such as A. J. Davis, Richard Morris Hunt, and George B. Post could attach their name.

### *An Island of Institutions*

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<sup>26</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 253-56.

<sup>27</sup> Duffy, 250.

Among the collection of islands in the East River, Blackwell's Island boasts one of the richest chapters in the history of institutional architectural in America and the history of New York City itself. Extending from about Fiftieth to Eighty-fourth Streets, and about a mile and a half in length (modern infill has extended the island a total of about a half mile) and 800 feet at its widest point, Blackwell's Island became the center of construction of disciplinary, correction, and charitable institutions, which the city of New York preferred to keep off of Manhattan Island itself. The first major construction on Blackwell's Island was the house of the eponymous Blackwell family (who owned the island since 1686), built in 1796 and one of the oldest extant homes in New York City. In 1828, the city bought the island from the Blackwell Family and built an immense penitentiary there (fig. 120; popularly known as "Newgate" after the British prison).<sup>28</sup> From this point, the island became the primary center for correctional and charitable institutions of New York City due to its isolation from Manhattan and its abundance of gneiss stone, from which most of the building would be constructed (often using the cheap labor of the prisoners themselves). Various images, such as contemporary maps, help reveal the institutional character of the island (fig. 121). Following a constant progression of construction projects, including those by Renwick, the island maintained its charitable function into the twentieth century and was renamed Welfare Island in 1921. In the middle of the century, services of the institutions were slowly transferred to newer buildings off the island, whose named was changed to Roosevelt Island in 1971. Despite the destruction of many of its prominent institutions, the architectural history of Blackwell's Island has featured buildings and proposals of some of the world's foremost

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<sup>28</sup> In 1859, Renwick added a minor fireproof section to the prison. See "Building Operations in New York," *The Architects' and Mechanics' Journal*, Nov. 1859, 46.

architects, including Frederick Clarke Withers, Philip Johnson, Louis Kahn, and Rem Koolhaas.<sup>29</sup>

Blackwell's Island also became the subject for American artists in the early twentieth century. The most extraordinary work is a 1903 video panorama by Thomas Edison's studios filmed from a boat traveling along the East River. The film (which runs just under two and a half minutes) begins with a view of the lighthouse at the northern tip of the island and shows a majority of the institutions, including the Lunatic Asylum, Penitentiary, Workhouse, and Charity Hospital. This artifact is exceptionally informational as it depicts the island's dense construction of institutional buildings, most of which did not survive the century. The intimidating institutional fabric of the island is somewhat softened in Edward Hopper's *Blackwell's Island* (1928; fig. 122). Hopper's painting presents the island as an isolated and lifeless landscape—a considerable amount of water distances the viewer from the architecture, of which there is no indication of inhabitation. Both Hopper's scene and Edison's video reveal the impersonal and institutional nature of the landscape in which Renwick's designs existed. The island, therefore, presented much different surroundings than the picturesque grounds of the Smithsonian Institution or the suburban heights of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

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<sup>29</sup> Since the 1960s, the development and rejuvenation of Roosevelt Island has maintained the interest of the city, especially its most prominent preservationists and architects. Numerous solutions and proposals have been submitted over the past few decades to reimagine the island for modern New York. In 1969, for example, Philip Johnson and John Burgee published a small proposal, entitled *The island nobody knows*, which sets out the architects' visions for the island, including Southpoint Park, which would incorporate Renwick's Smallpox and Charity Hospitals into a landscape element. It was the hope of Johnson and Burgee that Blackwell's Island could become a residential and architectural center for New York in the tradition of urban islands: "[Blackwell's Island] may never contain another Notre Dame; but—planned with imagination and vision—it will never be littered with beer cans either." See Philip Johnson and John Burgee, *The island nobody knows* (New York: New York State Urban Development Corporation, 1969), 1.

In 2012, completing the project first begun by Louis Kahn, Four Freedoms Park, a memorial to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, opened and sites on the island's southern extremity just below the ruins of the Smallpox Hospital.

The first architectural project designed on Blackwell's Island for which the architect is known, and featured prominently in Hopper's view, was A. J. Davis's Pauper Lunatic Asylum (also known as the Island Retreat), which opened in 1839 on the northern part of the island.<sup>30</sup> The asylum was the first public mental institution commissioned by the city of New York; prior to the 1830s, mental patients were treated in poorhouses or in either Bloomingdale Asylum or Bellevue Hospital on Manhattan. Davis's intended design featured a massive U-shaped complex, centered on a three-story pavilion, which would have housed the administrative offices of the hospital (fig. 123).<sup>31</sup> As Davis's vision was only partially constructed, one of the octagonal pavilions, originally intended to house baths, lounges, laundry rooms, and dining halls, became the central administrative area of the L-shaped complex.<sup>32</sup>

The exterior ornamentation of the octagonal pavilion featured Davis's preferred Tuscan Style, albeit in a rather reserved manner; only the entrance porch featured characteristic Tuscan columns and capitals. The upper story, including the cupola, constructed after the original plan was truncated, reverted to the Greek Revival idiom. The octagon's hallmark, however, is its geometrical simplicity, bold silhouette, and overall functionality appropriate for a public asylum. Renwick in fact imitated the neoclassical decoration and architectural characteristics of Davis's octagon in his design for the island's lighthouse, constructed from 1871 to 1872 nearby on the northern tip of

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<sup>30</sup> After the asylum's closure in the 1950s, the building's wings were demolished in 1970; the central octagon, however, was saved following the suggestion of Henry-Russell Hitchcock and the Landmark Preservation Commission reports. In 2006, the octagon was incorporated as the lobby of a high-end condominium complex.

<sup>31</sup> Francis R. Kowsky, "Simplicity and Dignity: The Public and Institutional Buildings of Alexander Jackson Davis," in *Alexander Jackson Davis, American Architect, 1803-1892*, ed. Amelia Peck (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 46-47.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 47. Soon after the start of construction, the building was reduced in size to include only the central pavilion and a single wing, running east to west. The second wing was completed in 1839, at which time Davis had left the project. The mansard roof was added to the octagon in 1879 by Joseph Dunn.

Blackwell's Island (fig. 124).<sup>33</sup> Renwick's lighthouse, like Davis's pavilion, was octagon in plan and featured the island's rusticated granite quarried by the prisoners themselves. Renwick, however, ignored the restraint shown in Davis's pavilion by designing what effectively was a monumental Tuscan column, relating to the tradition of ancient honorific monuments and presaging the most paradigmatic buildings of postmodernism.

While Renwick's lighthouse was successful in both design and functionality, the Lunatic Asylum was the target of some criticism. Charles Dickens, after visiting the island and its institutions in 1842, praised the architecture of the asylum as "handsome" and "elegant" and its spiral staircase as "spacious and elegant," but complained that "everything had a lounging, listless, madhouse air which was very painful."<sup>34</sup> The situation of the asylum as indicated by Dickens's observations, while undoubtedly impactful, was probably the effect of financial difficulties and poor administration, rather than of deficiencies in Davis's design, a seemingly unavoidably outcome that characterized many of Renwick's own institutional designs. Nonetheless, the monumental structures of the penitentiary and asylum on Blackwell's Island provided

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<sup>33</sup> Few modifications have been made to the lighthouse from Renwick's original design. Images of the lighthouse in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries show a more conical roof than the current glass and steel octagonal lantern.

The history of the lighthouse in local lore is perhaps more interesting than the architecture. An inscription on a stone near the structure, which relates the legend associated with the construction, reads: "This is the work / was [sic] done by John McCarthy / who built the Light / House from the bottom to top / All ye who do pass by may / pray for his soul when he dies." According to a report by the asylum warden of 1870, an "industrious but eccentric" patient had constructed a fortified seawall on the northern tip of the island as protection from an imagined British invasion. After demolishing the unused fort, the patient (probably John McCarthy) built the lighthouse as indicated in the inscription. While Renwick is certainly the architect of the lighthouse, the legend, indeed, provides an interesting layer to the history of Blackwell's Island and the debilitated individuals who called it their home.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (1874), Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/DicAmer.html>.

The asylum was also the setting for the best-selling book *Ten Days in a Mad-House*, published by journalist Nellie Bly in 1887 (who feigned insanity to gain admission), which exposed the harsh and inhuman conditions within the institution.

prominent precedents for the adjacent buildings later constructed by Renwick, who would help establish the island the institutional epicenter of New York City.

***“Separating Vagrants from Criminals”: The Workhouse on Blackwell’s Island***

In 1851, Renwick took over the construction of the nearby workhouse on Blackwell’s Island (figs. 125, 126). Although not directly an institution dedicated to medicine, the workhouse, which possesses its own rich tradition, was invented to care for components of society unable to care for themselves. The workhouse in America is inherently related to similar institutions, including the almshouse and poorhouse, which housed destitute inmates, including abandoned children, the elderly, the mentally or physically handicapped, or the eternally unemployed. For the purposes of the following architectural examination, these types—the workhouse, poorhouse, and almshouse—will be considered together as interrelated institutions with similar functions; even the most specialized histories tend to discuss them interchangeably as “embodying similar assumptions and strategies.”<sup>35</sup>

Notwithstanding the subtle distinctions between these buildings, in the simplest terms, the workhouse lay somewhere in the middle of the institutional spectrum between the hospital and the prison. Inmates of workhouses, indeed, lived within a tightly controlled system of labor, operating on “shame and fear,” and were considered “indoor paupers” within the strata of society.<sup>36</sup> At times in its evolution, however, the workhouse and its related types were the “most important symbol[s]—and realit[ies]—in the practice

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<sup>35</sup> Michael B. Katz, *In The Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 10.

<sup>36</sup> Kathryn Morrison, *The Workhouse: A Study of Poor-Law Buildings in England* (Swindon, England: English Heritage, 1999), 1.

of relief.”<sup>37</sup> A description of Renwick’s workhouse explains that “the object of [the workhouse] is to reform the prison system by separating vagrants from criminals, and to compel all who are able to do something for their own support.”<sup>38</sup>

The nineteenth-century workhouse ultimately evolved from the institution of the English almshouse, a religiously sponsored refuge established under a series of statutes collectively comprising the Old Poor Law.<sup>39</sup> In England, almshouses established in the eighteenth century did not follow any advanced architectural models and were usually connected administratively to major hospital complexes.<sup>40</sup> The history of the building type in America parallels the narrative of the institution in England from the seventeenth to eighteenth century. The first almshouse in the United States was founded in the 1660s in Boston, while New York opened its own almshouse in 1700, the latter of which was built as a traditional residential structure.<sup>41</sup> Later, the Friends Almshouse, administered by the Quakers, was founded in Philadelphia in 1713, predating the founding of the Pennsylvania Hospital by decades.<sup>42</sup> Like the New York Almshouse, the nascence of the

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<sup>37</sup> David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971), 180.

<sup>38</sup> *Francis’s New Guide to the Cities of New-York and Brooklyn... With Maps, and Numerous Engravings* (New York: C. S. Francis and Co., 1854), 71.

<sup>39</sup> The institution of the almshouse, in fact, boasts a medieval origin. In England, especially after the dissolution of the monasteries, who usually administered the almshouse, the authority of the almshouse or workhouse gradually shifted to the government, which ordered local parishes take control of the institution. For the purposes of this simplicity, this study only considers the manifestations of this building type in the seventeenth century and beyond.

The most important statute of the Old Poor Laws mentioned above is the Act for Relief of the Poor, passed by Parliament under Queen Elizabeth in 1601. This law effectively created a national system of workhouses and established the system of administration and inmate routines, which would last until 1834 when the New Poor Laws were passed to drastically reform the ancient system.

<sup>40</sup> Morrison, 3ff.

<sup>41</sup> For Boston’s almshouse, see Eric Nellis and Anne Decker Cecere, eds., *The Eighteenth-Century Records of the Boston Overseers of the Poor* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001). For New York’s, see Rothman, 36ff.

<sup>42</sup> Lawrence, 17ff.

Friends Almshouse echoed its humble home on Walnut Street, which was composed of cottage-like houses and gardens organized in a simple and quaint manner.<sup>43</sup>

Future developments of the almshouse or workhouse correspond with a variety of antebellum reform movements.<sup>44</sup> As the earliest hospitals (such as those in Philadelphia and New York) were maturing in the early decades of the nineteenth century, so too the almshouse was emerging as both a major component of health-care and a preferable solution for the care of the helpless. The social and political climate guiding the workhouse, both in America and abroad, drastically changed after the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act (colloquially known as the New Poor Law) in 1834 by the British Parliament. The act initiated the concept of “less-eligibility,” which ordered that living conditions of those in workhouses must be worse than those of the independent poor. For various reasons, including a growing hatred towards the poor and the belief that individual values affected economic prosperity (indeed, a major tenet of the Protestant ethic and the Second Great Awakening) the philosophical and economic principals underlining the New Poor Act found tremendous support in America.<sup>45</sup>

The effect of this new legislation on workhouses cannot be underestimated. In the early decades of the eighteenth century, greater support for workhouses arose in America and especially New York, particularly around the 1824 County Poorhouse Act, which centralized the administration of the poorhouse and mandated that those receiving public

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<sup>43</sup> For image of Walnut Street Almshouse, see Lawrence, 17.

<sup>44</sup> Joan Underhill Hannon, “Poor Relief Policy in Antebellum New York State: The Rise and Decline of the Poorhouse,” *Explorations in Economic History* 22 (1985): 234.

<sup>45</sup> For a more thorough discussion of the adoption of similar tenets in America, see Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 52ff.

assistance actually work in (rather than merely live in) such institutions.<sup>46</sup> This act was the culmination of the shift towards indoor relief, thereby necessitating the construction of workhouses throughout the country. Some historians, especially those taking a Foucaultian perspective of social control, suggest that the rise of the workhouse in urban centers such as New York City was the result of the urban elite's growing mistrust of the poor and its desire to incarcerate the pauper population.<sup>47</sup> Others, however, take a more softened view of the reforming spirit, citing the number of benevolent societies established or a rising intellectual interest in social inquiry.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, it is clear that in the 1820s and 1830s, new public action in many forms was emerging as the main tool with which to tackle the ills of society.

Complementing the new legislation in America and England, furthermore, were some important studies and commentaries on workhouse architecture. In terms of Renwick's design, the most important is certainly Augustus W. N. Pugin's comparison of "Residences for the Poor" in his *Contrasts* (fig. 127).<sup>49</sup> While clearly influenced by his Gothic Revival sensibilities, including the glorification of the medieval church as patron, Pugin's illustration is interesting in its separation of two characteristics present in Renwick's workhouse. Pugin's "modern" residence resembles a panopticon prison, whose "master" enforces strict discipline on his "subjects" whose fate has already been destined. In contrast, his "ancient poor house" features a monastic-like setting, where the poor and the masters are equals in status and routine. As expected for one of the

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<sup>46</sup> Trattner, 58; Hannon, 235ff, esp. 242. Here, however, Hannon statistically shows that the effect of the 1824 law was greatest in less densely settled areas than urban centers.

<sup>47</sup> Hannon 234, 242; M. J. Heale, "Patterns of Benevolence: Charity and Morality in Rural and Urban New York, 1783-1830," *Societas* 3 (1973): 338ff.

<sup>48</sup> For example, Rothman, 159ff.

<sup>49</sup> See Pugin, *Contrasts*, n.p.

country's foremost Gothic Revivalists, there is evidence that Renwick owned a copy of Augustus C. Pugin's *Gothic Ornaments* and *Specimens of Gothic Architecture*;<sup>50</sup> it is nearly certain that the architect possessed, or could access, the younger Pugin's *Contrasts*.

Renwick's workhouse on Blackwell's Island was a massive complex, composed of three primary buildings connected by intermediate blocks. The building, however, was begun by architect Charles F. Anderson in 1849-50, by which time a majority of the foundations of the central and north wings had been laid. Anderson originally designed the building in the "Norman style of the twelfth century" according to the architect's report. In 1851, Renwick took control of the construction and probably changed the overall style of the complex from Anderson's Romanesque to a more general Gothic, which one can appreciate in early photographs of the building (fig. 128). The finished complex commanded a prominent view from the river, as contemporary images indicate, and was unprecedented in scale. A contemporary guidebook notes that the workhouse "is more complete than any structure of the kind" in America and could house 600 inmates, segregated according to sex with each residing in separate connective wards.<sup>51</sup> According to another description of the workhouse in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, the original plan called for a third wing, projecting perpendicular to the overall complex, as well as auxiliary buildings on its grounds.<sup>52</sup>

The overall composition of the workhouse resembles Renwick's design for the Smithsonian Institution, albeit on a much more monumental scale. However, while one can argue that some elements were specifically borrowed from the architect's previous

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<sup>50</sup> See Cantor, Appendix B, esp. 219.

<sup>51</sup> *Francis's New Guide*, 71.

<sup>52</sup> "The Work-House—Blackwell's Island," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Nov. 1866, 683.

design, the A-B-C-B-A composition for institutional architecture was common in the nineteenth century, for it provided a simple organization of space and emphasized the complex's monumentality. Nonetheless, the design of the workhouse, like that of the Smithsonian, exuded an institutional authority conducive to the function of the building. The simplicity in composition and detail of the workhouse, then, asserted its appellation as a "House of Industry," which "should be repulsive as is consistent with humanity."<sup>53</sup>

As scholars have noted, the workhouse or poorhouse generally failed in their intended goal of social reform. In the second half of the nineteenth century, criticisms were abundant and repeated many of the same assessments of prisons, asylums, and hospitals. For example, one scholar cites a review made by a select committee of the New York State Senate in 1856 stating that "poor houses throughout the State may be generally described as badly constructed, ill-arranged, ill-warmed, and ill-ventilated. The rooms were crowded with inmates; and the air, particularly in the sleeping apartments, is very noxious, and to casual visitors, almost insufferable."<sup>54</sup> Thus, despite its unparalleled scale, Renwick's contribution to the workhouse tradition arrived as the institution was becoming redundant and near institutional extinction.

### ***The Island Castle: Renwick's Smallpox Hospital***

While the Smithsonian Institution has informally commanded "the Castle" as epithet, Renwick's design for the Smallpox Hospital on Blackwell's Island more approximately adheres to this characterization. Simultaneously menacing and fanciful in appearance, the Smallpox Hospital (figs. 37, 129; now popularly known as "Renwick's

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 686.

<sup>54</sup> New York State Senate, *Report of Select Committee to Visit Charitable Institutions supported by the State, and all City and County Poor and Work Houses and Jails of the State of New York, 9 Jan. 1857* (Albany, 1857), 3.

Ruin”<sup>55</sup>) represents the architect’s first essay in designing a building dedicated solely for the care of the dependent citizen. The hospital’s original appearance embodies Renwick’s inventiveness and relationship with medieval architectural forms. The three-level building was built from the gneiss stone quarried from Blackwell’s Island, which was standard building material for most buildings on the island. The design featured a grand, crenellated entrance porch; a prominent oriel window and corbelled crown further emphasized the central block. The most conspicuous and effective element of the building was the cornice, which included crenellation all around and defined the castle-like character of the edifice, while an octagonal cupola and chimney clusters enhanced the overall profile of the hospital.

Stylistically, the Smallpox Hospital fits nicely into the architect’s production in the 1840s and 1850s. During this period, Renwick exploited the Gothic Revival idiom for his church, residential, and institutional architecture. While the Smithsonian is the exemplar of this pattern, one can also point to Renwick’s Longstreet Residence (1852-55; fig. 58) in Syracuse, New York. Although larger in scale and more elaborate in detail, the residence provides a useful link between the Smithsonian Institution and the Smallpox Hospital and evidence for Renwick’s fluency in using medieval domestic architecture for various building types.

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<sup>55</sup> Since the building’s abandonment in 1955 (after the closure of the Nurses’ School) and despite efforts in the 1970s to reinforce the outer walls, the building has fallen into considerable ruin. Like many of the historical structures on Roosevelt Island, the Smallpox Hospital has been the focus of preservationists, architects, and artists, who have tried to rejuvenate the structure. Although lights have been installed to enhance the romance of the ruins, as of 2014 the building remains in a state of great disrepair.

Interestingly, the Landmark Preservations Report (LP-0908) of 1976, in recommending the reuse of the building, writes that the hospital “could easily become the American equivalent of the great Gothic ruins of England, such as the late thirteenth century Tintern Abbey [...] which has been admired and cherished since the eighteenth century as a romantic ruin.” This statement is appropriate in the case of Renwick since, as discussed in the first chapter, Renwick, Sr. was among those who admired the English abbey and sketched the ruin emphasizing its romantic qualities.

Renwick's Smallpox Hospital was the city's architectural response to its fear of smallpox, among the most dreaded maladies throughout history. Having been introduced into the Americas in the early-sixteenth century, the virus, spread either through droplet infection of the nose or throat or through direct contact with its symptomatic pustules, wrought extreme destruction to Native Americans and European colonists alike. Its proliferation throughout the Americas, furthermore, is intimately intertwined with the history of the United States. For example, an epidemic in 1617 killed thousands of Native Americans on the east coast, thereby, and somewhat conveniently, "clearing a place for settlers" arriving from England in 1620.<sup>56</sup> In the following century, the smallpox virus was exploited as a biological weapon, particularly during the French and Indian War, and, in fact, was a chief concern of General Washington during the Revolution. Despite the discovery of a vaccine by Edward Jenner in 1796, furthermore, significant epidemics of smallpox occurred in America throughout the nineteenth century. Urban environments and the conveniences they afforded were particularly conducive to the spread of the disease. According to one scholar, both European immigration and public apathy contributed to the numerous smallpox outbreaks in New York City, of which there were nine from 1804 to 1865.<sup>57</sup> In the middle of the nineteenth century, smallpox accounted for 2.5 percent of all deaths in the city, over half of which were children under the age of ten.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Frank Fenner, et al., *Smallpox and its Eradication* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1988), 238.

<sup>57</sup> Gerald N. Grob, *The Deadly Truth: A History of Disease in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 108. Similarly, Duffy writes that in New York City "the influx of immigrants accentuated the perennial problem of smallpox." See Duffy, 485.

<sup>58</sup> Grob, *History of Disease in America*, 108.

The continuous threat of smallpox, thus, necessitated specialized buildings for fighting the disease and, most importantly, isolating those afflicted. Surprisingly, the first smallpox hospitals were established long after the identification of the disease and its infectious qualities. For example, the first smallpox hospital in Britain was founded in 1746 in London, despite sufficient knowledge of the disease and its effect on the country's most powerful figures, including members of the royal house.<sup>59</sup> In the eighteenth century, there were some minor or temporary buildings constructed for the care of patients with smallpox or other infectious diseases throughout the United States, mostly in times of battle. However, according to the "Architect's Report of 1856," Renwick's Smallpox Hospital on Blackwell's Island was the first building designed for the "exclusive use" of smallpox patients in America.<sup>60</sup> The importance of the Smallpox Hospital can be affirmed, then, when considering the comparative lack of analogous institutions in New York City, where, according to the aforementioned report, patients were previously placed in "sheds" or "out-houses" adjacent to Bellevue Hospital.

In this discussion of the Smallpox Hospital, it is worth remembering that the utilization of Blackwell's Island for charitable institutions, indeed, boasts important precedents throughout the history of such buildings. The aforementioned Hôtel-Dieu, again, provided the most immediate antecedent for an island hospital or the geographical

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<sup>59</sup> Harriet Richardson, ed., *English Hospitals, 1600-1948: A Survey of Their Architecture and Design* (Swindon, England: English Heritage, 1998), 132.

<sup>60</sup> "Architect's Report on the Small Pox Hospital, Blackwell's Island, City of New York," *Annual Report for the Year 1856* (Almshouse Department of New York, 1857), 553. Philadelphia may have boasted a dedicated Smallpox Hospital constructed earlier than New York's version. In his history of Philadelphia's almshouses, Charles Lawrence notes that in 1827 patients from the almshouse were transferred to the city hospital, which he claims was "generally known as the 'Smallpox Hospital'." According to the author, the city hospital as "considered as one of the best adapted for the care of contagious diseases in the country." It seems that this hospital, which was demolished in 1854, was not solely dedicated to the treatment of smallpox itself, and may have been less architecturally distinct in scale and significance than Renwick's on Blackwell's Island. See Charles Lawrence, *History of the Philadelphia Almshouses and Hospitals* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 74.

isolation of charitable buildings from a greater metropolitan area.<sup>61</sup> The Parisian hospital, since its founding, was located on the Ile de la Cité, the famous island in the center of Paris and on which the more recognizable Cathedral of Notre Dame stands. The advantage of situating a hospital, especially one housing patients with infectious and incurable diseases, are obvious, even within a society featuring modern vaccination techniques and the promotion of hygiene. The necessity for this situation in centuries past, however, was much more critical; although the principles governing island hospitals were yet to be perfected by the eighteenth century, as the insalubrious conditions of the Hôtel-Dieu indicate, the form goes back to ancient Rome, whose Tiber Island included the city's primary cult center of Aesculapius, the ancient god of medicine and healing.

Furthermore, although not designed according to a single master plan, the buildings on the Blackwell's Island, taken as a single entity, are somewhat similar to a pavilion hospital plan, which emerged as among the most preferable to early hospital theorists, architect, and physicians. The construction of the Smallpox Hospital, which was preceded by the gradual development of the island and followed by more impressive and elaborate building projects, indeed is variation of the contemporary espousal of separate structures to ensure the healthiest environment for either isolation or treatment. Appropriately, ten years after the Smallpox Hospital was commissioned, Florence Nightingale expressed her belief that "the first principle of hospital construction is to divide the sick among separate pavilions."<sup>62</sup> Thus, one can consider the Smallpox

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<sup>61</sup> The island hospital is, in fact, related functionally to the naval hospital, or lazaretto, which served as a quarantine station for sailors returning from voyages to foreign lands. The most extreme example of this building type was the hospital ship, which, as the name implies, were floating health-care facilities for prisoners or sailors. See Stevenson, 172ff. The naval hospital, however, commands its own history and, indeed, attracted the attention of patrons, architects, and theorists in America and abroad.

<sup>62</sup>Florence Nightingale, *Notes on Hospitals* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1863), 56.

Hospital as an early incarnation of this principle, namely the design of smaller, individual areas with specific functions and population, each of which, according to Nightingale, would operate “as if it were really a separate establishment miles away.”<sup>63</sup>

In 1853, replacing the aforementioned sheds and dependencies that previously housed smallpox sufferers, the Almshouse Department of New York decided to erect the hospital to ensure that “the wants of [New York’s] citizens will be amply and comfortably provided for, in the treatment of the loathsome disease.”<sup>64</sup> Renwick, by this time familiar within New York circles for the success of Grace Church, provided the plans and design of the building and directed its construction, which was undertaken using the labor of the prisoners who were incarcerated in the adjacent penitentiary.

Those who commissioned and constructed the hospital, including Renwick himself, placed great importance on the choice of site, thus affirming an awareness of the tremendously infectious nature of the disease. Both topography and climate were considered as factors contributing to the location of the hospital. The southern extremity of Blackwell’s Island, on which the hospital was built, was deemed “unequaled either in [America] or any other country,” according to the building committee’s description.<sup>65</sup> The quality of air also comprised a major consideration. Since American architects were only beginning to experiment with and develop mechanical systems of ventilation, natural methods of air purification were still critical. Therefore, the moderate climate—“the thermometer seldom falling below zero or rising above ninety”<sup>66</sup>—afforded by the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> “Report of Isaac Townsend, Esq.,” *Annual Report for the Year 1856* (Almshouse Department of New York, 1857), xxi-xxii.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., xxv.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., xxvi.

island's location and isolation from the mainland provided an advantage usually only found in provincial areas.

Blackwell's Island was accessed primarily by ferries from both Manhattan and Long Island. Patients would arrive at Bellevue Hospital, where a steamer would transfer them to the island hospital. A landing pier dedicated solely for access to the Smallpox Hospital was constructed opposite the western facade of Renwick's building. The grounds of Smallpox Hospital to the north featured graded, graveled walkways stretching to the earlier penitentiary. These grounds were open to patients and ornamented with shading trees, providing places to rest and view the surroundings of the island and mainland. The construction of Renwick's Charity Hospital, situated between the penitentiary and Smallpox Hospital, disrupted this landscape; later maps, however, show redesigned walkways connecting the two facilities.

The overall composition of the Smallpox Hospital reflects Renwick's approach to design and resembles in conception many of his public commissions. The distinction of this hospital commission is that it was built for the good of the entire New York population, not just for one particular unit of the population. From the inception of the commission, the inclusiveness of the institutions was at the forefront; both the rich and poor New Yorker was admitted, as was any visitor to the city who contracted the disease in his travels to the city, "however able or willing he might be to pay for proper attention."<sup>67</sup> While this inclusivity was certainly guided by charitable concerns, it was also noted that treating all classes of patients would reduce the spread for the indiscriminate infection. Renwick's plan and design for the Smallpox Hospital, indeed, demonstrated the diverse mission of the institution. The commission for the hospital

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., xxix.

called for a building of a “fair architectural appearance,” with economy of detail and the minimization of future alteration or repair as priorities. Only the central block of the hospital is original to Renwick’s design; the two wings, perpendicular to the central block, were added in the first decade of the twentieth century, about two decades after the hospital was transferred to the New York Board of Health and taken up as a Home for the Nurses and the Maternity and Charity Hospital and Training School (fig. 130).<sup>68</sup> Each of these wings maintained the outer appearance of the original design, but also included a mansard roof, an architectural element popularized earlier by Renwick in the United States and a common strategy to maximize interior space. The interior of the hospital boasted a simple spatial arrangement; two main corridors, running the entire length and width of the building, separated each floor into four main sections, which were further divided into smaller wards and rooms. An iron-railed staircase in the center of the building provided access between floors.

Accounts of the organization of the interior spaces of the hospital are ambiguous and contain distinct discrepancies, suggesting flexibility in function and mission. The Board of Governor’s Report of 1856, which documented the intended and executed spatial arrangement, describes an institution and design orientated more towards public charity. This report notes that the first floor of the three-story building contained administrative and utility spaces (e.g., physician and nurses’ rooms, laundry spaces, kitchen and storage spaces), while the second floor was reserved exclusively for charity

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<sup>68</sup> The south wing was built by the firm York and Sawyer in 1903-04; the north wing was added by Renwick’s successor firm, Renwick, Aspinwall, and Owen in 1904-05.

Even in the second half of the twentieth century it is unclear whether the wings were part of Renwick’s original design. In Giorgio Cavaglieri’s report of 1970, the architect states somewhat hesitantly that “it would appear that the end wings are later [than the main block].” He also suggests that the mansard roofs of the wings may have been added after the wings themselves and notes Rattner’s opposing opinion that the roofs are original.

patients.<sup>69</sup> The third story housed paying patients, whose private rooms “for finish and comfort, will equal those of [New York’s] best hotels.”<sup>70</sup>

A later description of the institution, written in 1875, suggests that two pavilions were constructed in 1873 to house male and female charity patients, respectively.<sup>71</sup> Contemporary maps of Blackwell’s Island, indeed, display these dependencies. Paying patients, who previously inhabited the third floor of the main block, now lived on both the second and third floors, thus taking over the part of the hospital originally reserved for charity patients. While the description of 1875 notes that the spaciousness, ventilation, and overall effectiveness of the disconnected pavilions equaled, and in some respects surpassed, those of the main building, it is interesting that the new pavilions deconsolidated the hospital population into two separate units.

The immediate modifications to Renwick’s original design (in the form of the dependent pavilions) and changes of the inmate population of the Smallpox Hospital, indeed, prefigured the later concerns and institutional issues that demonstrate the failure of the hospital, which, as noted above, was functionally unprecedented. While one must be careful not to attribute these failures solely to Renwick or his design, it is worth noting their impact on the later history of the institution and building. Moreover, such discussion confirms the nascence of the institutional framework in which Renwick was working, which only emphasizes the innovation of his design.

At its completion, Renwick’s Smallpox Hospital emerged as the principal institution for housing patients of the pervasive disease. Nonetheless, in the decades

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<sup>69</sup> “Report of Isaac Townsend, Esq.,” xxiii-xiv.

<sup>70</sup> “Smallpox Hospital,” *Annual Report for the Year 1856* (Alms House Department of New York, 1857), 57-58.

<sup>71</sup> H. P. Petershausen, “The Small-pox Hospital on Blackwell’s Island, New York City,” *The Detroit Review of Medicine and Pharmacy* 10 (1875): 592-593.

following the hospital's opening, accounts and depictions of the institution varied considerably in outlook. Outsider accounts, including those from the scientific community, praised the achievements of Renwick's design and the advanced treatments afforded to the patients therein. For example, Richmond, in his encyclopedic *Institutions of New York* (1871), noted that patients "receive every attention that science and the most skillful nursing can bestow."<sup>72</sup> An article in the 1875 edition of *The Detroit Review of Medicine and Pharmacy* lauds the hospital for its innovatory presence in the city, noting how "for the majority of the patients [...] more can be done on the island than at their homes. They have there better and cleaner rooms, which are sufficiently disinfected; they enjoy, further, a purer and fresher air, and they get good nourishment."<sup>73</sup> The author concludes the article by noting that the period of treatment for most patients is two to four weeks, thus indicating the treatability of the disease at the hospital. Confirming the intellectual merit of this description, the article in the medical journal is flanked by article on "Functional Diseases of the Heart" and an address on the state of the medical field and its system of education.

Opposing these commendations are a few editorials that, although less scientific in method, provide a more intimate glimpse into the actual administration of the Smallpox Hospital. It must be noted, again, that the ultimate failure of the Smallpox Hospital in diminishing the effects of the disease mostly can be attributed to the general reluctance of sufferers to seek treatment, the penchant to keep secret the illness of

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<sup>72</sup> Rev. J. F. Richmond, *New York and Its Institutions, 1609-1871* (New York: E. B. Treat, 1871), 529.

<sup>73</sup> Petershausen, 594.

themselves of others, or the unawareness of the severity of the disease in general.<sup>74</sup> A “special plea” written as an editorial in the *New York Times* in 1874, for example, claims “it would be a public calamity to frighten small-pox patients from going to Blackwell’s Island” and that there is a “host of [sufferers] who concoct every possible expedient for escaping a trip” to the island.<sup>75</sup> It is perhaps valid (and unsurprising for that matter) to conclude, then, that despite his architectural acumen, Renwick was unable to combat the desolating disease with a single structure.

***“The Palace of the Suffering Poor”: Charity Hospital on Blackwell’s Island***

In the last years of the 1850s and into the next decade, Renwick designed almost exclusively in the Second Empire mode. As discussed extensively in the previous chapter, the Corcoran Gallery of Art represented the first major monument in America built in the fashionable Parisian style. Renwick’s evocation of Napoleonic architecture was appropriate for a gallery patronized by one of America’s wealthiest businessmen, despite the purported public mission of the institution. The analogous application of the French mode for Charity Hospital on Blackwell’s Island, on the other hand, encourages a much different interpretation of the American appropriation of the Second Empire style (figs. 38, 131, 132).

Like the commission for the adjacent Smallpox Hospital, Renwick was recruited to replace an earlier building destroyed by fire. In February 1858, the so-called Island

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<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the author of the article in *The Detroit Review of Medicine and Pharmacy* adamantly warns of the dangers of stubbornness or ignorance regarding the disease: “the institution is not in favor with the people, who rather prefer to die in their miserable homes than to be brought to the island. We do not wonder, then, that many people keep the illness of their friends secret, and only send for a physician when the hour of agony approaches. The consequence of such imprudent behavior manifest themselves, of course, without fail.” See Petershausen, 594.

<sup>75</sup> “Notes from the People: A Special Plea for the Small-Pox Hospital,” *New York Times*, 4 Feb. 1872, 5.

Hospital (previously known as the “Penitentiary Hospital” and an adjunct of the prison) burned, due in part to the complex’s “fraudulently faulty construction” and the difficulty the fire department faced in reaching the island.<sup>76</sup> The building was notoriously insufficient for its purpose and was in constant repair; however, since the Island Hospital mostly housed patients with infectious diseases, there was great urgency to replace the lost building; as a later chronicler exclaimed regarding the fire, “What an appalling menace to the safety of the Island institutions among whom this syphilitic horde [of 300 patients] was spread!”<sup>77</sup>

Less than a month after the fire, the hospital’s Board of Governors chose Renwick’s plans for the new City Hospital from the submissions of at least seven other firms.<sup>78</sup> Renwick’s building, whose cornerstone was laid on 22 July 1858, was monumental in both scale and scope, consisting of a building three and a half stories high, 300 feet in total length.<sup>79</sup> The exterior of the hospital was constructed of rubble stone masonry with quoins decorating the corners of the central block and terminating pavilions. Like the Smallpox Hospital, Charity Hospital featured a prominent entrance, marked by a double staircase, which Renwick would also use in his design for Vassar College. The most definitive and unique element of the building was its metal-clad mansard roof. The totality of Charity Hospital’s exterior presented Renwick’s first complete essay in the Second Empire style, which he would refine in later commissions.

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<sup>76</sup> Charles G. Child, Walter C. Klotz, and J. W. Draper Maury, *Society of the Alumni of City (Charity) Hospital, Report for 1904 Together with a history of the City Hospital and a Register of Its Medical Officers from 1864 to 1904* (New York: The Society of the Alumni of City Hospital, 1904), 64.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>78</sup> The other architects known to have submitted plans were R. G. Hatfield, W. McNamara, J. Cohart, J. Berrian, and Wilhelm and Fernbach. See Rattner Papers, box 24, fol. 2.

<sup>79</sup> “Laying of the Corner-Stone of the Island Hospital,” *New York Times*, 23 Jul. 1858, 1. Renwick’s design for Charity Hospital went largely unchanged for nearly a century until the eventual closing of the building in 1957 and demolition in 1994.

The appearance of Charity Hospital on Blackwell's Island, characterized in the mid-nineteenth century by its geographical isolation and institutional identity, would have been striking among its intimidating neighbors.

The composition of the hospital featured a U-shape plan with a main block and two subsidiary wings, thus anticipating a common configuration for similar institutions (such as the Smallpox Hospital with its added wings). Each area contained multiple wards (three in the central block for twenty patients apiece and two in each wings for either twenty-two or twenty-four patients apiece), which could be accessed by two main staircases.<sup>80</sup> Unlike the more specific mission of the Smallpox Hospital, Charity Hospital (as it was renamed when completed) treated patients with a variety of ailments, including dermatological, ophthalmic, uterine, and venereal, the latter of which comprised about one-fifth of total cases.<sup>81</sup> An article written in 1872 notes that the hospital also contained an amphitheater for clinical instruction.<sup>82</sup>

Renwick cloaked the multifunctional hospital in a palatial, Second Empire exterior. By the time of the hospital construction, the Second Empire had become Renwick's preferred style for institutional commissions; Charity Hospital was his third major commission completed in the style following the Corcoran Gallery of Art and Vassar College, respectively. The compositional and stylistic similarities between Charity Hospital and Vassar College are particularly evident. Both feature a prominent central block flanked by extended wings. The hospital, however, shares more characteristics with

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. Child, Klotz, and Maury, 66. There is a typographical error in the *New York Times* article transcribing the speech at the cornerstone ceremony, in which it is stated that the wards in the wings are "capable of containing thirty-two or twenty-four patients." The description should read "twenty-two or twenty-four."

<sup>81</sup> "Hospitals of the City of New York," *The Sanitarian* 1 (1873): 341.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

Renwick's original and more monumental conception for Vassar College (mentioned in a previous chapter) than the realized collegiate building.

The historic lineage for Charity Hospital follows the same pattern as that of the Corcoran Gallery of Art; both represent an American version of the Tuileries Palace in Paris. The stylistic French features of the hospital—for example, the mansard roof, stone quoins, and neoclassical details—were purely superficial. Renwick's design is more influential for its compositional and technological innovations, rather than its appropriation of the newly fashionable Parisian exterior. One may consider Charity Hospital as among America's earliest experimentations with the pavilion-plan hospital, a type whose American exemplars are usually placed in the late-nineteenth century. Although not as expansive as later examples, the composition of Charity Hospital separated the various wards of the hospital into their medical specializations and segregated patients to avoid miasmatic pollution; a comparison with the original, singular block of Renwick's Smallpox Hospital emphasizes this new form. Indeed, in the mid-nineteenth century, both European and American hospitals began to feature this type of plan; in England, more definitive pavilion-plan hospitals were being construction in the 1850s and 1860s, all of which were descendants of the famous Lariboisière Hospital (1846-53) in Paris.

Lariboisière Hospital, designed by Pierre Gauthier, was among Europe's most modern medical facilities and boasted the most advanced system of heating and ventilation in hospital architecture, on which numerous nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics and scholars have written. The revelation that clean air is critical to the health of patients and doctors alike was paramount to both medical developments and hospital

architecture in the nineteenth century. Regardless of the scientific validity or comprehensiveness of their claims, those involved in the theories and practice of hospital design placed great primacy on assuring the purity of the hospital environment. Indeed, in the publication cited earlier, J. P. Frank devotes an entire section of his treatise to ventilation and states that "among the most important things which have to be taken into account in hospitals in the first place is clean air. Clean air is an indispensable condition of maintaining healthy life which requires it every instant."<sup>83</sup>

While Charity Hospital was probably not the first American hospital to account for the importance of clean air, Renwick was in fact awarded the commission for his knowledge of the newer technologies. Here, it is worth recalling that the southern tip of Blackwell's Island was praised for its quality of air. Nonetheless, a 1904 history of Charity Hospital notes that Renwick's plan for the hospital was preferred "as being the most complete and as embodying the most perfect system of ventilation suggested."<sup>84</sup> During the cornerstone ceremony, the president of the Board of Governors of the Almshouse cited a commission that traveled to France and examined the ventilation of Lariboisière Hospital, which Renwick then implemented in the final design.<sup>85</sup> The architect probably did not travel with the committee itself, but visited the French hospital while in Paris for Universal Exposition of 1855. Renwick's incorporation of the engineering of Lariboisière Hospital at Charity Hospital is probably the first instance of the French complex's impact on American hospital design, which includes more recognized examples, such as Richard Morris Hunt's Presbyterian Hospital in New York

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<sup>83</sup> Frank, 422

<sup>84</sup> Child, Klotz, and Maury, 65.

<sup>85</sup> "Laying of Corner-Stone of the Island Hospital," 1.

(1868-72).<sup>86</sup> Therefore, within the chronological scope of Renwick's two major hospital designs on Blackwell's Island, one can appreciate the transition from natural to mechanical systems of ventilation in the American hospital tradition.

The synthesis of stylistic magnificence and technological innovation at Charity Hospital brought to the building great praise from both patrons and patients. At the cornerstone ceremony, Washington Smith, the aforementioned president of the board, imagined the hospital as an institution where "misfortune [...] finds here a home of comfort and relief, when all other doors are closed upon it; and many a heart is warmed into rejoicing under [the hospital's] roof."<sup>87</sup> Later, in a passage quoted in a previous chapter, the Board of Governors exclaimed about their new building, "Its truly magnificent structure presents the appearance of a stately palace. The scale upon which it is built is *far beyond the requirements of the class of people* that have heretofore occupied the Institution it was built to replace" (emphasis added).<sup>88</sup> Whether one interprets the emphasized statement above as indication of the design's virtues or, as McKenna insinuates, a smug affront to the unfortunate occupants, it is clear that Renwick's hospital presented a complex unique to the institutional landscape of New York. While one can appreciate the board's excitement as an expected response, the most intimate praise of the hospital came from one of its own inmates, who composed the following poem exulting the design and significance of the building:

Oh blessed refuge for the homeless poor,  
 Ill fortune's victims wounded, sick and sore,  
 The halt, the lame, no more may homeless roam,  
 For here disease indeed doth find a home  
 Poor wrecked humanity mid breakers tossed

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<sup>86</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 257-60.

<sup>87</sup> "Laying of Corner-Stone of the Island Hospital," 1.

<sup>88</sup> McKenna, "Second Empire," 100. McKenna does not note the original source of this quotation.

Finds a snug harbor on this friendless coast,  
 No piled up Parthenon, the pagan's pride,  
 No Coliseum chocked with gory tide,  
 No Caesar's house with guarded door,  
 No, it is the palace of the suffering poor.<sup>89</sup>

This touching tribute to Charity Hospital and, by extension, Renwick himself, both humanizes the architect's design and achieves for Renwick a level of comparison sought by all American architects of the nineteenth century. With Renwick's Charity Hospital, New York could finally boast a monument to stand as a symbol for its apparent concern for the poorest and most helpless citizens.

### ***Concluding Remarks: Architectural Authority in Hospital Design***

After the completion of Charity Hospital in 1861, Renwick continued to design institutional buildings for the Department of Public Charities and Corrections in New York. From 1868-69, Renwick built a new headquarters for the department on Third Avenue in the Second Empire style to match nicely with the previously constructed Charity Hospital on Blackwell's Island (fig. 133). Although the building's stable was home to the city's first ambulance corps, the design was criticized for its clumsy proportions and massive mansard roof. According to a *New York Times* writer, the roof was "cumbrous" and the design should have included more stories so that "it would be a handsome structure instead of the costly looking barn one might mistake it for at first sight."<sup>90</sup> The headquarters, however, provided an architectural symbol for the department on Manhattan; for instance, an illustration of Renwick's design serves as the frontispiece

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<sup>89</sup> Child, Klotz, and Maury, 68.

<sup>90</sup> Stern, Mellins, and Fishman, 269; "The New Building for the Department of Charities and Corrections," *New York Times*, 9 March 1869, 7.

of the chapter on the institutions of Blackwell's Island in Richmond's *New York and Its Institutions*.<sup>91</sup>

As Blackwell's Island was growing overly dense with charitable and correctional buildings, the construction of larger institutions commenced on nearby Ward's Island and Randall's Island to accommodate the rising number of destitute or diseased citizens.<sup>92</sup> Renwick contributed the new constructions, albeit in much more limited role as he had in the previous two decades. The documentary evidence for the institutions on Ward's and Randall's Island numbers far less than that on Blackwell's Island. For this reason, it is nearly impossible to ascertain exactly what Renwick's contributions were. It is probable, however, that he was involved in the enlargement of the Idiot's Asylum on Randall's Island (1867-69) and the construction of both the Inebriate Asylum (1866-68) and the Lunatic Asylum (1869) on Ward's Island.<sup>93</sup>

By the late 1860s and beyond, the island institutions, notwithstanding their authorial attribution, were monumental in scale and detail. Despite their isolation on the islands, their architectural presence equaled the importance of Manhattan's most significant and more famous monuments. Throughout this narrative involving Renwick, which began with the Smallpox Hospital and culminates in Charity Hospital, one finds the claim of Brandt and Sloane cited early in the chapter demonstrated in a variety of forms—that hospital architecture deals as much with medical concerns as it does with

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<sup>91</sup> Richmond, 523.

<sup>92</sup> In the nineteenth century and early-twentieth century Ward's Island and Randall's Island were two separate landmasses, separated by a small channel. In the 1930s, the channel was filled in, but the two names remained to indicate the two ends of the island. Today, the island is used as a recreational and athletic center.

<sup>93</sup> For descriptions of the institutions on Ward's Island, see Richmond, 551-61; for those on Randall's Island, see Richmond, 562-71.

public culture.<sup>94</sup> Additionally, in focusing on Renwick's designs on Blackwell's Island, it is possible to appreciate the preeminence of charitable and correctional design within the fabric of the nineteenth-century city. Renwick's designs clearly do not reflect Laugier's warning about ostentatious magnificence or Diderot's apprehension against architectural authority. Rather, the "grand facades" of Renwick's work, whether resembling a Norman castle or a Napoleonic palace, provided legitimacy to the institutions, many of which were unique in the American medical scene.

In the commentary on Renwick's buildings and their functions, one can conclude that his contributions offered certain reassurance, sometimes only temporary, from the medical and social ailments they were built to address. Therefore, the important role of the architect himself against the concerns of the physician or patron must be emphasized. Despite early ideas that try to limit the impact of architectural issues (e.g., form, style, scale) in the dialogue directing the design of welfare buildings, it become clear that such imbalance is vastly impractical to the process of inventing institutional identity. Renwick's work on Blackwell's Island, then, while relatively ignored in scholarship, best embodies the societal significance of his production.

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<sup>94</sup> Brandt and Sloane, 281-82.

## CONCLUSION

### *James Renwick, Jr. and the American Architectural Canon*

#### *The Priorities of an Architect*

It is a difficult task to measure Renwick's legacy. As previously noted, he wrote very little on his own work and seemed uninterested in contributing to architectural discussions by composing treatises, pattern books, or essays in style. Having established his reputation as architect, Renwick enjoyed the last decades of his life traveling from New York to Florida, where he spent the summer boating on his yacht, and occasionally made a trip to Europe. There is some evidence of his time spent in either place, which reveals the architect's personal concerns and priorities, such as notes written on St. Augustine Yacht Club stationary about specifications of and additions to his yacht.

While in Europe, one would expect collections of letters dealing with the art, architecture, and culture of the Old World. Renwick was interested in the art of Europe, but only with the thought of purchasing items and selling them "in New York for a very high price" as the architect suggested to his brother, Edward, in a letter from Germany.<sup>1</sup> Renwick also writes in the same letter that he has purchased seven "old pictures" in Rome and "a few modern ones" but that he finds it "difficult to get anything cheap and good anymore." Occasionally, Renwick would point out architectural monuments in the great cities of France, Germany, or England. A majority of the letters written while in Europe, however, are discussions between the architect and his brother on stocks and

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<sup>1</sup> Renwick, Jr. to Edward Sabine Renwick, 22 July 1873, Renwick Family Papers, 1794-1916, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

other financial matters, which reveal the attention Renwick gave to non-architectural issues while overseas.

### ***Renwick, Aspinwall, and Owen***

As this study has shown, it is possible to calculate Renwick's legacy to the history of American architecture through looking at the social and cultural implications of his works, especially those associated with significant institutions. However, there are other ways to assess Renwick's professional presence in the American architectural scene. The first is the production of his successor firm, Renwick, Aspinwall, and Owen, who continued many of the professional precedents set by Renwick and his production. It is interesting that the most important projects of Renwick, Aspinwall, and Owen, in terms of patronage, program, and function, resembled some of those discussed in this study. For example, in 1896, the firm designed the New York headquarters of the ASPCA at 50 Madison Ave., a similar commission to Renwick's office of the Department of Public Charities and Corrections of 1868-69. The Renaissance Revival building provided an extravagant home for the association just as Renwick himself attempted to construct a Parisian palace for the charitable department. Although the upper level and cornice were removed for the addition of a high-rise apartment in 2005, modern commentators praised the designs as a "proper London club."<sup>2</sup>

### ***Apprenticeships and Eclecticism***

The second indication of the Renwick's importance beyond his buildings is the short list of apprentices who worked in his office at various points of the architect's

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<sup>2</sup> Norval White, Elliot Willensky, and Fran Leadon, *AIA Guide to New York City*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 200.

career. Indeed, before the formalization of architecture schools and the prominence of the Beaux-Arts tradition in the late-nineteenth century in America, the system of architectural apprenticeship was the main means of study for young draftsmen. Among those who worked in Renwick's office were Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, John Wellborn Root, and William Hamilton Russell, each of whom continued to become important designers in the American tradition.<sup>3</sup>

John Root, whose partnership with Daniel Burnham helped to develop the Chicago School and reimagine the office building, joined Renwick's office in 1869 as a young draftsman. Greater historical evidence remains for the apprenticeship of Goodhue and, to a much lesser extent, Russell. William Russell, Renwick's great-nephew, became partner in Renwick's firm in 1884, but worked on various projects as apprentice and draftsman. As a member of St. Anthony's Hall fraternity at Columbia College, Russell helped Renwick secure the commission to design the club's new home and probably contributed greatly (if not in its entirety) to the design. Russell is better known for his work with Charles Clinton, who himself apprenticed in the office of Renwick's colleague, Richard Upjohn.

In 1884, Bertram Goodhue began his apprenticeship in Renwick's office (at the time, Renwick, Aughtumy, and Russell), working first as an office boy and later as a draftsman.<sup>4</sup> As a biographer of Goodhue writes about these years in the young architect's development, "In Renwick's office, [Goodhue's] natural sense of steely independence

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<sup>3</sup> For Russell, see above ch. 1, n. 151. John Wellborn Root studied in Renwick's office for one year before leaving to work in the office of John Butler Snook.

<sup>4</sup> Unable to afford to attend the *École des Beaux-Arts*, Goodhue moved to Manhattan to seek training in an established architectural firm. Goodhue was probably introduced to Renwick's firm through a letter from General W.H. Russell of New Haven to Renwick's partner, William Russell. Because of his financial situation, Goodhue was paid \$5.00 per month, an unaccustomed agreement given apprentices were usually unpaid. In 1891, Goodhue left the firm after winning the competition to design the Cathedral of St. Matthew in Dallas.

and self-reliance had been reaffirmed.”<sup>5</sup> One can clearly appreciate Goodhue’s architectural ability in a few extant drawings executed by the apprentice for liturgical furniture of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, including designs for carved stations of the cross (dated 1888; fig. 134) and an altar for a the chapel of St. Veronica (dated 1889; fig. 135). In fact, during these years, most of the firm’s illustrations published in architectural periodicals carry Goodhue’s name as draftsman. Goodhue also completed numerous sketches for Franklin Smith’s *Design and Prospectus for the National Gallery of History and Art* (1890), whose excellent quality and detail are evident when compared to other sketches of similar subjects not attributed to the draftsman in the publication (figs. 136, 137).

One cannot undervalue the training Goodhue received in Renwick’s office, especially considering the diversity and significance of his own architectural corpus. Scholars agree that Goodhue was among the most instrumental figures in introducing “academic eclecticism” in American architecture, an approach typically said to have begun in 1880s and lasting into the 1930s.<sup>6</sup> In his discussions of academic eclecticism and the architects who are best know for its practice, Richard Longstreth references a passage from an argument composed by Goodhue in the 1905 volume of the *Craftsman*, which is relevant to this discussion. Contributing to a conversation about the virtues of the Gothic and definition and use of past style, Goodhue writes, “Today we all stand abashed before the greatness of the past, which lies like an open book before us.” He continues:

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Oliver, *Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue* (New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1983), 10.

<sup>6</sup> Longstreth, “Academic Eclecticism,” 55.

It is probably that we shall never again have a distinctive style, but what I hope and believe we shall some day possess in something akin to a style—so flexible that it can be made to meet every practical and construction need, so beautiful and complete as to harmonize the hitherto discordant notes of Art and Science, and to challenge comparison with the wonders of past ages, yet malleable enough to be moulded at the designer’s will [...].<sup>7</sup>

Goodhue’s work in Renwick’s office—both his sketches for St. Patrick’s Cathedral and his drawings for the proposed National Gallery—fully embody his confident sentiment composed years later that American architects will and should display an erudite flexibility in their approach and designs, choosing styles and forms appropriate for a building’s program, patron, or purpose.

Certainly, neither Goodhue nor Root had perfected their craft or envisioned their innovative contributions to the American architectural tradition while working in Renwick’s office for a brief period of time. However, each architect was exposed to concepts and approaches to architecture that would define his respective career. Goodhue was introduced to an eclectic vocabulary of styles and forms that characterize Renwick’s entire corpus and was asked to become fluent in designing in a variety of historical modes. While a contemporary of Root suggests in general terms that the young architect’s “natural taste for the romantic styles was stimulated” in Renwick’s office, Root would have seen Renwick’s early experimentations in iron construction and the gradual rise of the commercial building as major building type in New York City.<sup>8</sup> As shown in the first chapter, Renwick began to utilize iron construction (both decoratively and structurally) in the 1850s; by the time Root entered the office in 1869, iron was a

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 55. Originally from Bertram G. Goodhue, “The Modern Architectural Problem: The Romanticist Point of View,” *Craftsman*, June 1905, 332-33.

<sup>8</sup> Harriet Monroe, *John Wellborn Root: A Study of His Life and Work* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1896), 22. Monroe also surmises that Root would have apprenticed under the advisement of Joseph Sands in the firm since Renwick was traveling in Italy and Egypt in 1869.

primary building material for Renwick's production, especially in the firm's commercial constructions. Again, one must not attribute the complete architectural development of these American masters to Renwick alone; rather, one must recognize the progressiveness of Renwick's professional persona and production during an era that has been historically considered too traditional or derivative.

### ***Renwick, Professional Collaboration, and Architectural Identity***

Despite some of the hesitation towards his personal disposition, Renwick was respected among his architectural colleagues and participated in many of the developments concerning the profession. Although not one of the original thirteen members who met in the New York office of Richard Upjohn, Renwick was among the twenty-nine founders of the American Institute of Architects and in 1867 became co-vice president (along with Calvert Vaux) of the New York Chapter, of which Richard Morris Hunt was president.<sup>9</sup> At an anniversary dinner of the institute, Renwick was chosen as a speaker and offered a humble note to his colleagues, both present and future:

Let us then, having formed this association render friendly assistance to each other; let us defend each other's reputation as our own; and, throwing aside that jealousy which is too often engendered among these in the pursuit of the same art or science, let us hasten to crown the victor in a fair and honorable competition. Let us in a word to use the language of a great and inspired man, "Be kindly 'affectionate one to another, in brotherly love.' For by so doing we will gain each other's good will, the respect of the world, and may humbly hope to obtain the approbation of our master, the great architect of all."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Glenn Brown, *The American Institute of Architects, 1857-1907: Historical Sketch* (Washington, D.C.: Gibson Brothers Press, [1907]), 3. Interestingly, in his biography on Richard Upjohn, Everand Upjohn does not list Renwick (Upjohn's "only rival") as one of the invitees to the institute. His list of those invited, however, omits seven other architects whom Brown mentions in this group. With the exception of the eight architects, each author lists the members in the same order. See Upjohn, 159-60.

<sup>10</sup> "American Institute of Architects," *London Builder*, 24 March 1860, 187. Since Renwick did not attend the dinner due to illness, his speech was read by Auchmuty.

The message of this speech is clear. Renwick imagined an American architectural environment based on a shared purpose and passion for the profession and what it can achieve for society.

Renwick's contributions to American architecture cannot be underestimated. His career spanned a critical period when American designers were beginning to search for more eclectic expressions in the built form befitting burgeoning branches of American society. Renwick's eclecticism offered these groups and institutions powerful architectural identities that have become symbolic to their respective personalities even in the twenty-first century. This study has concentrated on a selection of these institutions and their representative constituents, who collaborated with Renwick to ensure their needs acquire appropriate architectural identities. For the Catholic community in New York, Renwick imagined a cathedral that could rival in scale and beauty the cathedrals of the medieval world and, more importantly, bring together (at least temporarily) American Catholics and their Protestant counterparts in admiration of the monument. For elite museum patrons, Renwick designed magisterial monuments to house the country's most cherished collections or art and artifacts. Finally, for the destitute population, the architect offered palaces of refuge boasting the most current theoretical or technological innovations of the field.

The scope of this dissertation prevents a more complete consideration of Renwick's architectural achievements legacy. His colleagues, including many involved in the founding of the American Institute of Architects, have received academic attention for decades longer, resulting in a myriad of studies beyond a single dissertation. Nonetheless, Renwick and his work must play a larger role in the dialogues surrounding

nineteenth-century American architecture and American culture alike. His contributions are far greater than a few Gothic Revival buildings at the beginning of his career and represent one of the most exciting oeuvres of any architect in the American canon.

## APPENDIX

### Chronological List of Buildings and Designs

The following appendix provides a list of Renwick's buildings, including both executed and unrealized designs. This catalogue was compiled using a few important sources, including the appendices of Humphrey's 1942 thesis and Cantor's 1967 thesis. Selma's Rattner's research, especially her entry on Renwick in the *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* and her extensive research collection at Columbia University, provided more updated information on Renwick's corpus. Through the author's own research and referencing, the list has been amended to reflect the most current list of the architect's production. Only buildings and designs with significant evidence or at least one mention in a major professional publication have been listed.

Dates have been simplified to the greatest extent to indicate the year marking the start of construction. Projects whose dates are uncertain are listed at the end (n.d.). Streets are provided for buildings located in New York City; for buildings not located in New York City, only cities are given. Listings marked with a bullet (•) are mentioned in the text. Those followed by a cross (†) are illustrated below. Buildings marked with a caret (^) are still extant.

1842	<b>Distributing Reservoir, Croton Aqueduct</b> Fifth Ave. and Forty-second St., New York City	• †
1843	<b>Fountain</b> Bowling Green, New York City	• †
1843	<b>Grace Church</b> Broadway and Tenth St., New York City	• † ^
1846	<b>Church of the Puritans</b> Union Square and Fifteenth St., New York City	• †
1846	<b>Smithsonian Institution</b> Washington, D.C.	• † ^
1847	<b>Grace Church Rectory</b> Broadway and Tenth St., New York City	† ^
1848	<b>Calvary Church</b> Park Ave. and Twenty-first St., New York City	• † ^
1848	<b>Free Academy</b> Lexington Ave. and Twenty-third St., New York City	• †
1848	<b>South Dutch Reformed Church</b> Fifth Ave. and Twenty-first St., New York City	
1848	<b>DeWitt Clinton Monument</b> Albany, N.Y. (not built)	• †
1848	<b>Trinity Episcopal Church</b> Albany, N.Y.	^
1849	<b>Courthouse</b> Fredericksburg, Va.	^
1849	<b>Astor Library, competition design</b> New York City (not built)	

1849	<b>Second Presbyterian Church, original building</b> Chicago, Ill.	
1850	<b>Grace Church Chapel</b> Madison Ave. and Twenty-eighth St., New York City	• †
1850	<b>Clarendon Hotel</b> Park Ave. and Eighteenth St., New York City	• †
1850	<b>Renwick House (“Mark Twain House”)</b> Fifth Ave. and Ninth St., New York City	• †
1850	<b>Rhinelanders Gardens</b> Eleventh St., between Sixth Ave. and Seventh Ave., New York City	• †
1850	<b>Trinity Episcopal Church</b> Washington, D.C.	• †
1850	<b>Oak Hill Cemetery Chapel</b> Washington, D.C.	• † ^
1851	<b>Workhouse</b> Blackwell’s Island, New York City	• †
1852	<b>St. Denis Hotel</b> Broadway and Eleventh St., New York City	• †
1852	<b>La Farge House</b> Broadway, between Bleecker St. and Third St., New York City	
1852	<b>Douglas Cruger Mansion</b> Fourteenth St. between Sixth Ave. and Seventh Ave., New York City	• †
1852	<b>Longstreet Residence</b> Syracuse, N.Y.	• †

1852	<b>Church of St. Barnabas</b> Irvington, N.Y.	^
1853	<b>St. Patrick's Cathedral</b> Fifth Ave., between Fiftieth St. and Fifty-first St., New York City	• † ^
1853	<b>St. Stephen's Church</b> Twenty-eighth St., between Third Ave. and Lexington Ave., New York City	• † ^
1853	<b>Design for Wooden Church</b> Not built	
1853	<b>Design for Wooden Church</b> Not built	
1853	<b>Appleton Store</b> New York City	
1853	<b>Three Residences</b> Ninth St., New York City	
1853	<b>St. Anne's Episcopal Church</b> Calais, Maine	
1854	<b>Smallpox Hospital</b> Blackwell's Island, New York City	• † ^
1854	<b>Congregational Church</b> Clinton Ave., Brooklyn Heights, New York City	
1854	<b>Fulton Bank</b> Pearl St., New York City	•
1854	<b>Bank of the State of New York</b> William St. and Exchange Pl., New York City	• †
1855	<b>Warden's Residence</b>	

	Blackwell's Island, New York City	
1858	<b>St. Patrick's Chancery</b> Mulberry St., New York City	• † ^
1858	<b>Charity Hospital</b> Blackwell's Island, New York City	• †
1859	<b>Corcoran Gallery of Art</b> Washington, D.C.	• † ^
1859	<b>Row Houses ("Renwick Triangle")</b> Tenth St. and Stuyvesant St., between Second Ave. and Third Ave., New York City	#
1859	<b>Albemarle Hotel</b> Broadway and Twenty-fourth St., New York City	• †
1859	<b>Island Penitentiary, additions</b> Blackwell's Island, New York City	•
1859	<b>Five-story brick store</b> Pearl St., New York City	
1859	<b>Two-story marble stores</b> Fourth Ave., New York City	
1859	<b>Episcopal Free Church (unknown)</b> Fourteenth St., between Fourth Ave. and Irving Pl., New York City	
1859	<b>H. Van Schaick House</b> Twenty-third St., between Sixth Ave. and Seventh Ave., New York City	
1861	<b>Vassar College, main building</b> Poughkeepsie, N.Y.	• † ^
1861	<b>Grace Church Chapel</b>	

	Fourteenth St. between Third Ave. and Fourth Ave., New York City	
1862	<b>Cathedral of Our Merciful Savior</b> Faribault, Minn.	^
1863	<b>Presbyterian Church</b> Riverdale, New York City	
1863	<b>Church of the Covenant</b> Park Ave. and Thirty-fifth St., New York City	•
1864	<b>Great Western Marine Insurance Company</b> New York City	
1864	<b>Christ Church by the Sea</b> Colón, Panama	^
1866	<b>Catholic Male Orphan Asylum</b> Madison Ave. and Fifty-second St., New York City	
1866	<b>Inebriate Asylum</b> Ward's Island, New York City	•
1866	<b>Morgue, Bellevue Hospital</b> Twenty-sixth St., between Avenue A and First Ave., New York City	•
1866	<b>Washington Irving Memorial Church</b> Tarrytown, N.Y.	
1867	<b>Calvary Church Schoolhouse</b> Park Ave., New York City	^
1867	<b>Idiots' Asylum</b> Ward's Island, New York City	•
1867	<b>St. Ann's Church</b> Clinton Ave. and Livingston Ave., Brooklyn, New York City	• † ^

1868	<b>Booth Theater</b> Sixth Ave. and Twenty-third St., New York City	• †
1868	<b>YMCA Headquarters</b> Park Ave. and Twenty-third St., New York City	
1868	<b>Department of Public Charities and Corrections</b> Third Ave. and Eleventh St., New York City	• †
1868	<b>Children's Hospital</b> Randall's Island, New York City	
1868	<b>Inebriate Asylum</b> Randall's Island, New York City	•
1869	<b>Northwestern Dispensary</b> Ninth Ave. and Thirty-sixth St., New York City	
1869	<b>Ferry House, Bellevue Hospital</b> Twenty-sixth St., between Avenue A and First Ave., New York City	•
1869	<b>Renwick House</b> University Place and Tenth St., New York City	•
1869	<b>St. James' Church</b> Seventy-second St., New York City	
1869	<b>St. Joseph's Church</b> Washington Pl., New York City	
1869	<b>First Presbyterian Church</b> Eufaula, Ala.	^
1869	<b>St. Joseph's School</b> Sixth Ave., New York City	
1869	<b>Medical College, Bellevue Hospital</b>	

	Twenty-sixth St., between Avenue A and First Ave., New York City	
1869	<b>Ascension Memorial Church</b> Ipswich, Mass.	^
1870	<b>D. Willis James House</b> Park Ave. and Thirty-Ninth St., New York City	
1870	<b>Appleton Building</b> Broadway, New York City	
1870	<b>Masonic Hall, competition design</b> New York City (not built)	
1871	<b>Lighthouse</b> Blackwell's Island, New York City	• † ^
1872	<b>St. Bartholomew's Church</b> Madison Ave. and Forty-fourth St., New York City	• †
1872	<b>Pequot Chapel</b> New London, Conn.	^
1873	<b>Seven Oaks (Bourn House)</b> Bristol, R.I.	
1873	<b>St. John's Church</b> Bridgeport, Conn.	
1873	<b>Design for Wooden Church for the Sioux Mission</b> Not built	
1874	<b>Second Presbyterian Church, second building</b> Chicago, Ill.	
1875	<b>Frederick Gallatin House</b> Fifth Ave. and Fifty-third St., New York City	

1877	<b>Breezy Lawn (Frederick Gallatin Estate)</b> East Hampton, N.Y.	• †
1879	<b>Union Club, competition design</b> New York City (not built)	
1880	<b>New York Stock Exchange</b> Broad St., New York City	• †
1880	<b>St. Anthony Hall (Delta Psi) Chapter House</b> Twenty-eighth St., between Park Ave. and Madison Ave., New York City	^
1880	<b>Department of Agriculture, competition design</b> Washington, D.C. (not built)	•
1881	<b>Brick warehouse</b> Cliff St., New York City	
1881	<b>Grace Memorial House</b> Fourth Ave., New York City	^
1881	<b>R. Russell Cottage</b> Morrisania, N.Y.	
1882	<b>St. Patrick's Cathedral, Rectory and Bishop's Residence</b> Madison Ave., between Fiftieth St. and Fifty-first St., New York City	• † ^
1882	<b>All Saints' Church and Rectory</b> Madison Ave. and One-hundred Twenty-ninth St., New York City	• † ^
1882	<b>St. Mark's in the Bowery, Chapel and Parish House</b> Tenth St. and Avenue A, New York City	• ^
1882	<b>School</b> Avenue A and Tenth St., New York City	

1883	<b>St. John's Church, interior renovations</b> Washington, D.C.	^
1885	<b>G. G. Haven House, remodel</b> New London, Conn.	
1885	<b>W. B. Shattuck House</b> Lenox, Mass.	
1885	<b>Six houses</b> Madison Ave. and One-hundred Sixth St., New York City	
1886	<b>Washington Apartments</b> Washington Sq., New York City	
1886	<b>House (owner unknown)</b> Tarrytown, N.Y.	
1886	<b>Elberon Memorial Church</b> Elberon, N.J.	^
1886	<b>Tomb for Lion Gardiner</b> East Hampton, N.Y.	^
1886	<b>Seabright Lawn Tennis and Cricket Club</b> Rumsen, N.J.	^
1887	<b>St. Mary's Episcopal Church</b> Washington, D.C.	^
1887	<b>"See House"</b> Lafayette Pl., New York City	
1887	<b>The Country Club of Westchester County</b> Baychester, N.Y.	
1888	<b>Potter Building</b> Broadway, New York City	• † ^

1889	<b>Archibald D. Russell House</b> Riverdale-on-Hudson, New York City	
1889	<b>Howard Gallop Cottage</b> Baychester, New York City	
1889	<b>Henry Lewis Morris House</b> Morrisania, New York City	
1890	<b>Five-story residence</b> Park Ave. and Thirty-ninth St., New York City	
1890	<b>St. Augustine's Cathedral, restoration</b> St. Augustine, Fla.	• † ^
1890	<b>Cathedral of St. John the Divine, competition design</b> New York City (not built)	• †
1892	<b>SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral, original building</b> Indianapolis, Ind.	
n.d.	<b>Second Presbyterian Church</b> Fifth Ave. and Twenty-first St., New York City	
n.d.	<b>Charles Morgan House</b> New York City	
n.d.	<b>Courtlandt Palmer House</b> New York City	
n.d.	<b>Robert Remsen House</b> New York City	
n.d.	<b>W. W. Townsend House</b> Staten Island, New York City	
n.d.	<b>David Thompson House</b> Staten Island, New York City	

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

**NB: All buildings located in New York City unless otherwise noted.  
If known, date of image is given. For dates of buildings, see text or appendix.**

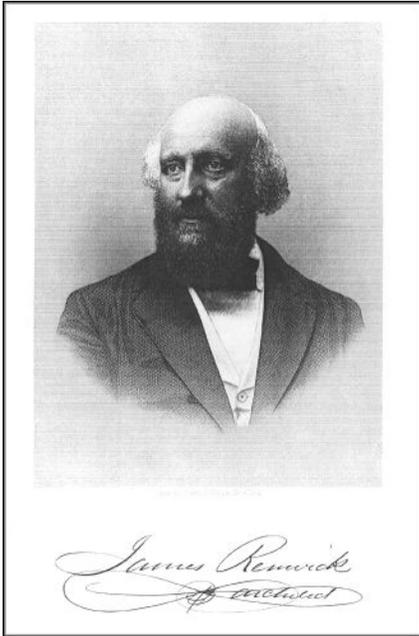


Figure 1. James Renwick, Jr.  
Engraving, George E. Perine, c. 1860.



Figure 2. Columbia College, proposal sketch.  
James Renwick, Sr., 1813.



Figure 3. Columbia College, proposal sketch. James Renwick, Sr., 1813.

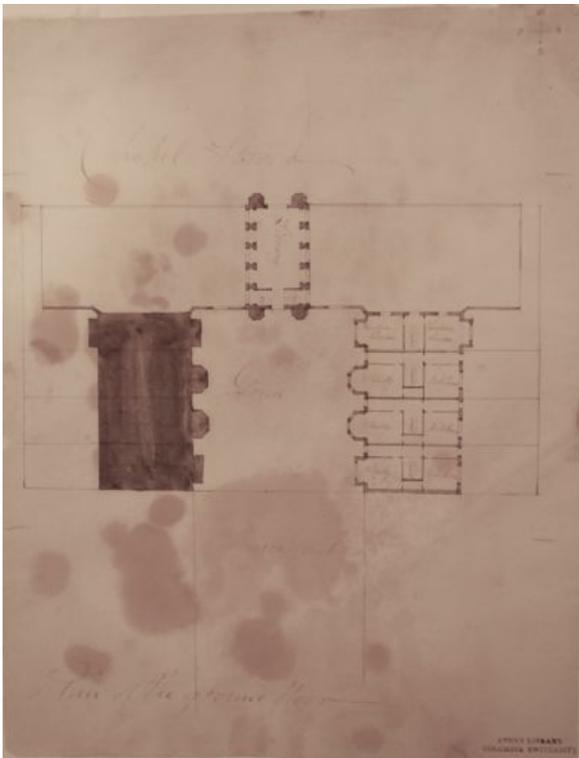


Figure 4. Columbia College, proposal sketch. James Renwick, Sr., 1813.



Figure 5. Hall of Kenilworth Castle, England, watercolor. James Renwick, Sr., c. 1815-16.

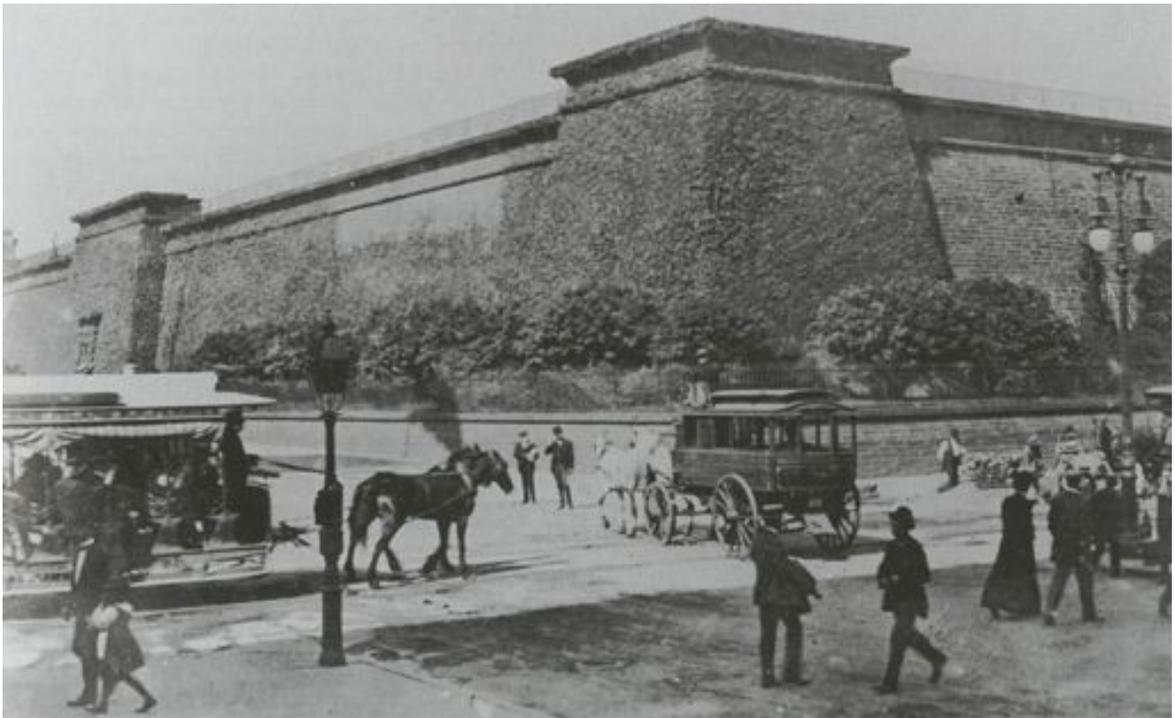


Figure 6. Croton Distributing Reservoir, c. 1875.



Figure 7. Croton Distributing Reservoir, lithograph, c. 1879.

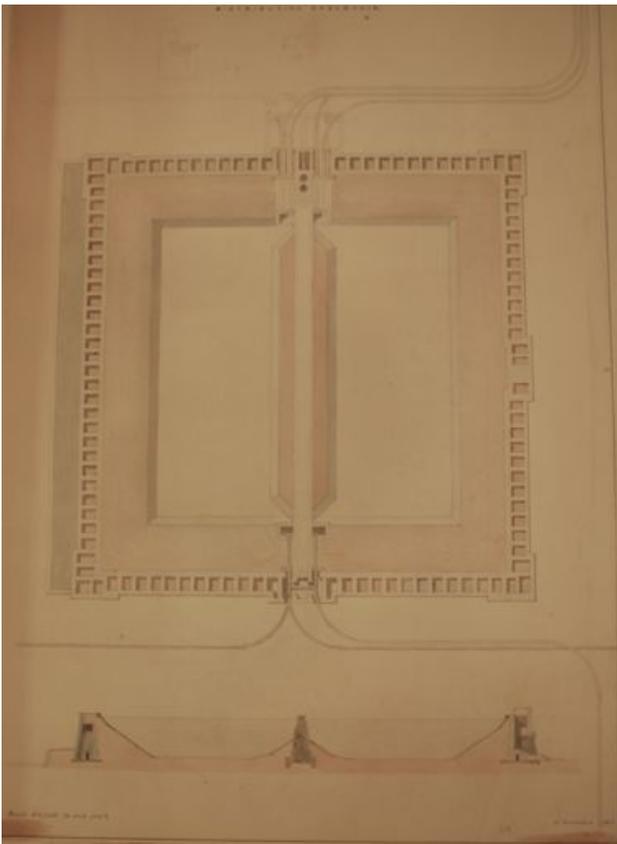


Figure 8. Croton Distributing Reservoir, plan and section. James Renwick, Jr., watercolor, 1842.

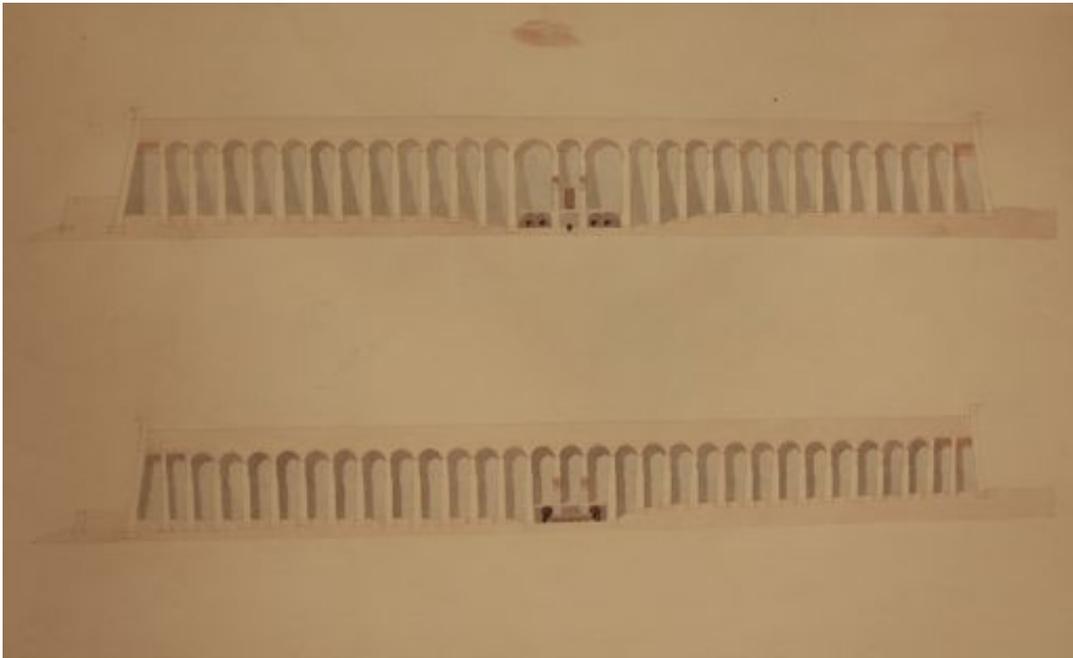


Figure 9. Croton Distributing Reservoir, section.  
James Renwick, Jr., watercolor, 1842.

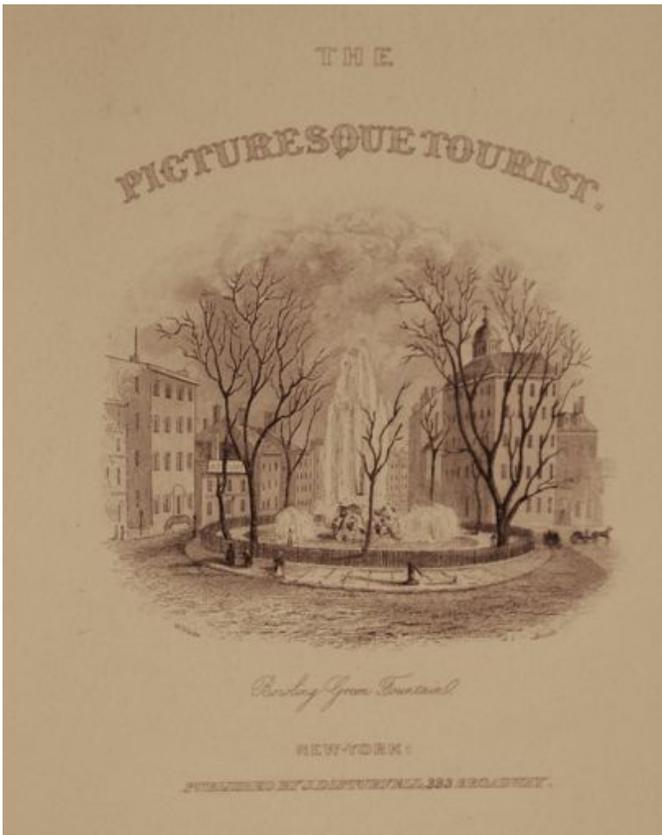


Figure 10. Bowling Green Fountain.



Figure 11. Grace Church.



Figure 12. Grace Church.

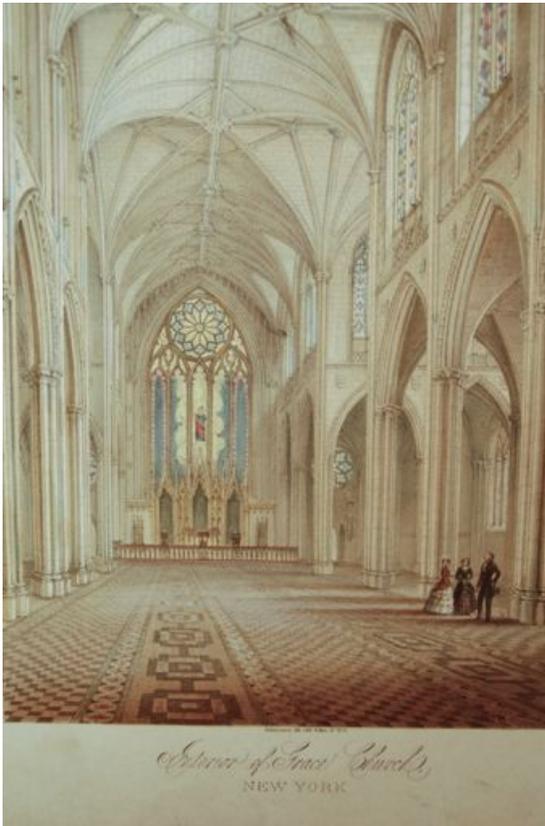


Figure 13. Grace Church, interior.



Figure 14. Trinity Church, Richard Upjohn, 1840-46.



Figure 15. Illustration of Christian church. A. W. N. Pugin, 1841.



Figure 16. Calvary Church.

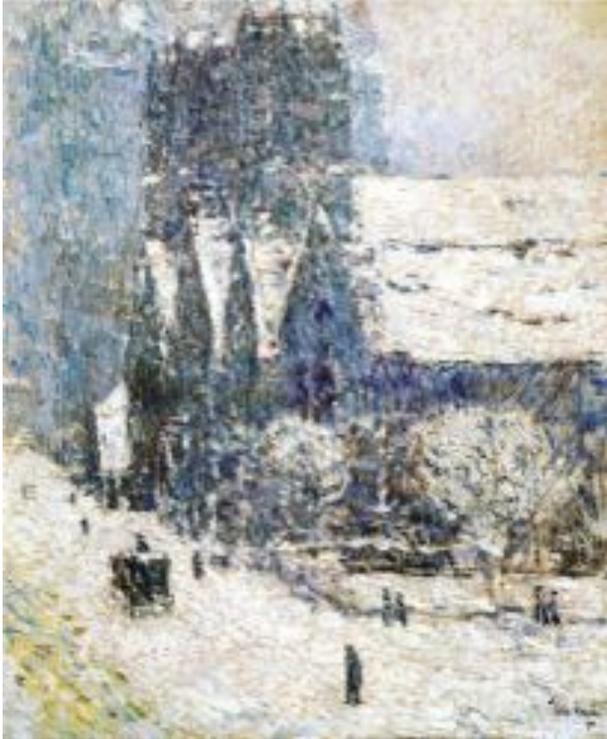


Figure 17. *Calvary Church in the Snow.*  
Childe Hassam, 1893.



Figure 18. *Calvary Church, 1849.*



Figure 19. Church of the Puritans.



Figure 20. View of Union Square showing Church of the Puritans (left).



Figure 21. St. Denis Basilica, Paris.  
West end, c. 1135-40.



Figure 22. South Dutch Church.



Figure 23. Trinity Episcopal Church, Washington, D.C.



Figure 24. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
Romanesque design, view from northeast.



Figure 25. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
Romanesque design, view from southwest.



Figure 26. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
Gothic design (unrealized), view from northeast.

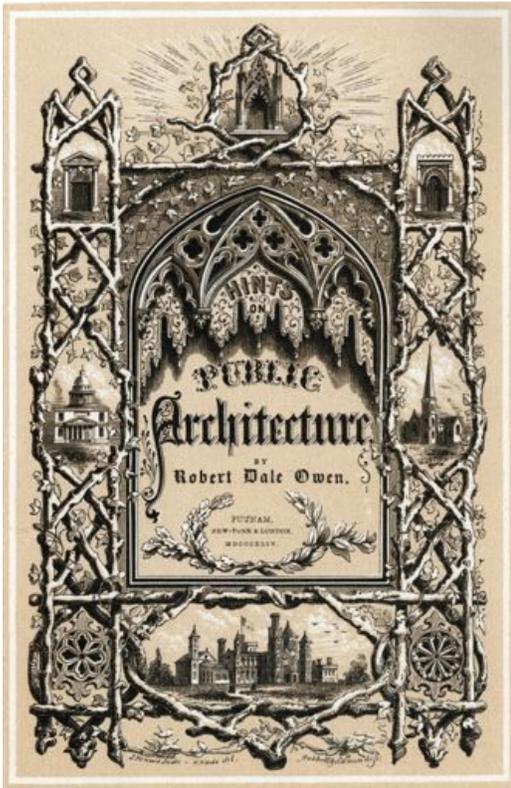


Figure 27. Cover page, *Hints on Public Architecture*.



Figure 28. Free Academy, 1849.



Figure 29. Free Academy.

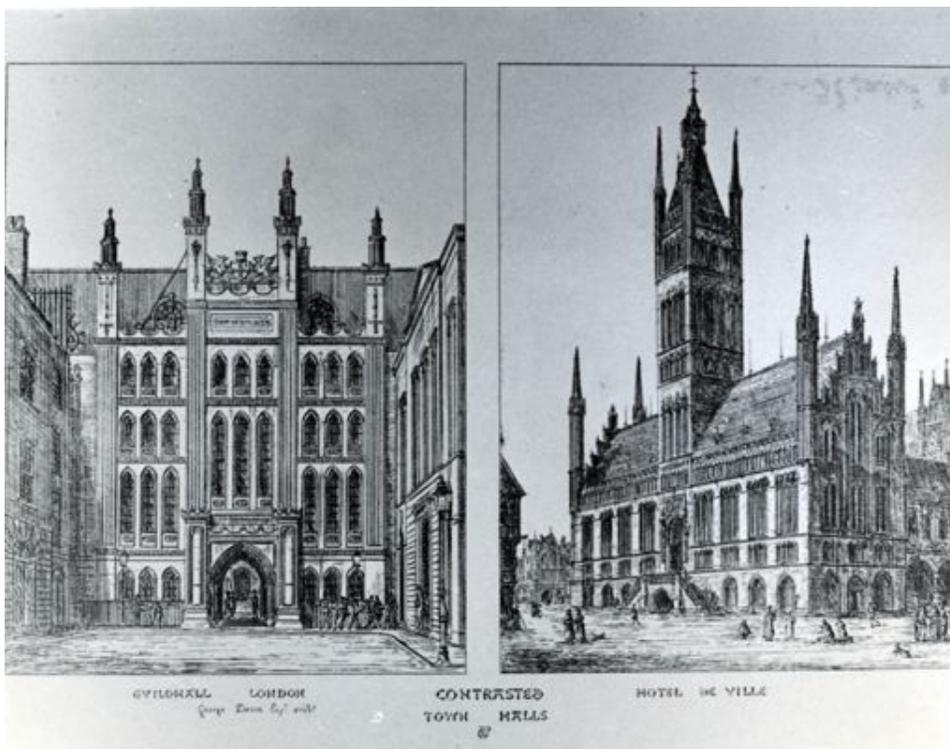


Figure 30. "Contrasted Town Halls." A. W. N. Pugin, 1836.



Figure 31. Rhineland Gardens, c. 1920.



Figure 32. Clarendon Hotel.



Figure 33. St. Denis Hotel.



Figure 34. View from Broadway down Eleventh Street showing St. Denis Hotel.



Figure 35. Renwick House (“Mark Twain House”) (far left).



Figure 36. Cruger Mansion.



Figure 37. Smallpox Hospital.



Figure 38. Charity Hospital.



Figure 39. *Tuileries Palace*, Anton Ignaz Melling, c. 1800.



Figure 40. Corcoran Gallery of Art (now, Renwick Gallery), Washington, D.C.



Figure 41. Vassar College, Main Building, Poughkeepsie, N.Y., c. 1865.



Figure 42. Vassar College, Main Building, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.



Figure 43. Albemarle Hotel.



Figure 44. New York (Old) Post Office, Alfred B. Mullett (and others).



Figure 45. Booth Theater.

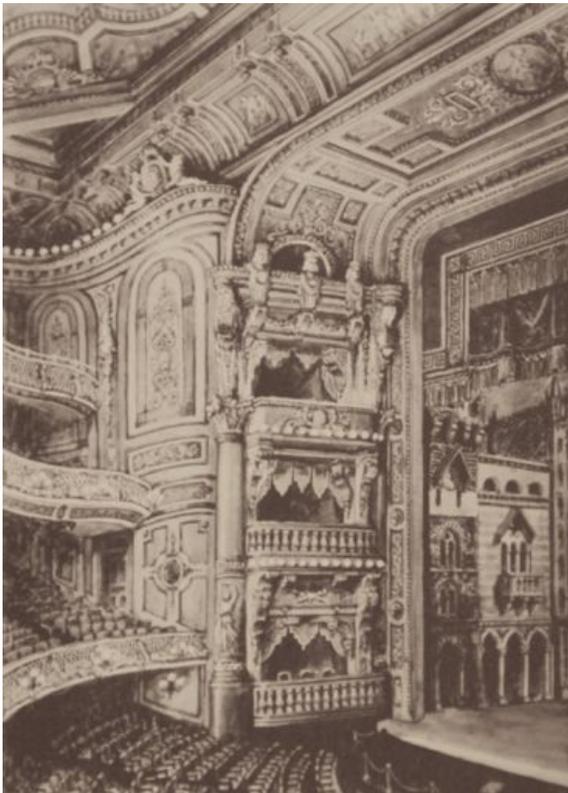


Figure 46. Booth Theater, auditorium.  
After rendering by Charles Witham.



Figure 47. Young Men's Christian Association.



Figure 48. Young Men's Christian Association.



Figure 49. St. Patrick's Cathedral, aerial view.



Figure 50. St. Patrick's Cathedral, c. 1900.



Figure 51. St. Stephen's Church.



Figure 52. Catholic Male Asylum and Orphanage.

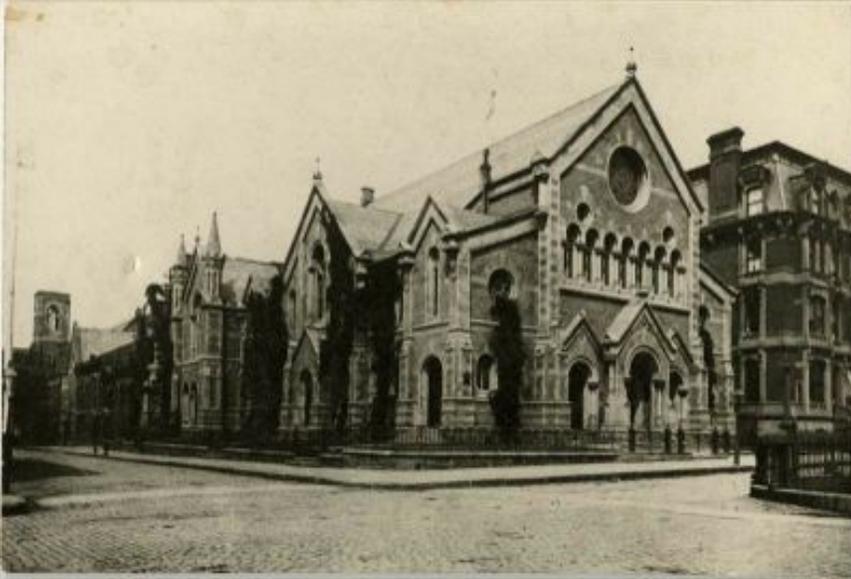


Figure 53. Church of the Covenant.



Figure 54. St. Ann's Church.



Figure 55. St. Bartholomew's Church.



Figure 56. All Saints' Church.



Figure 57. Martinstow (Peter Ames House), West Haven, Conn., c. 1950.



Figure 58. Longstreet Castle, Syracuse, N.Y., c. 1950.



Figure 59. Greyston (William E. Dodge, Jr. Estate), Riverdale, N.Y.



Figure 60. Greyston (William E. Dodge, Jr. Estate), Riverdale, N.Y.

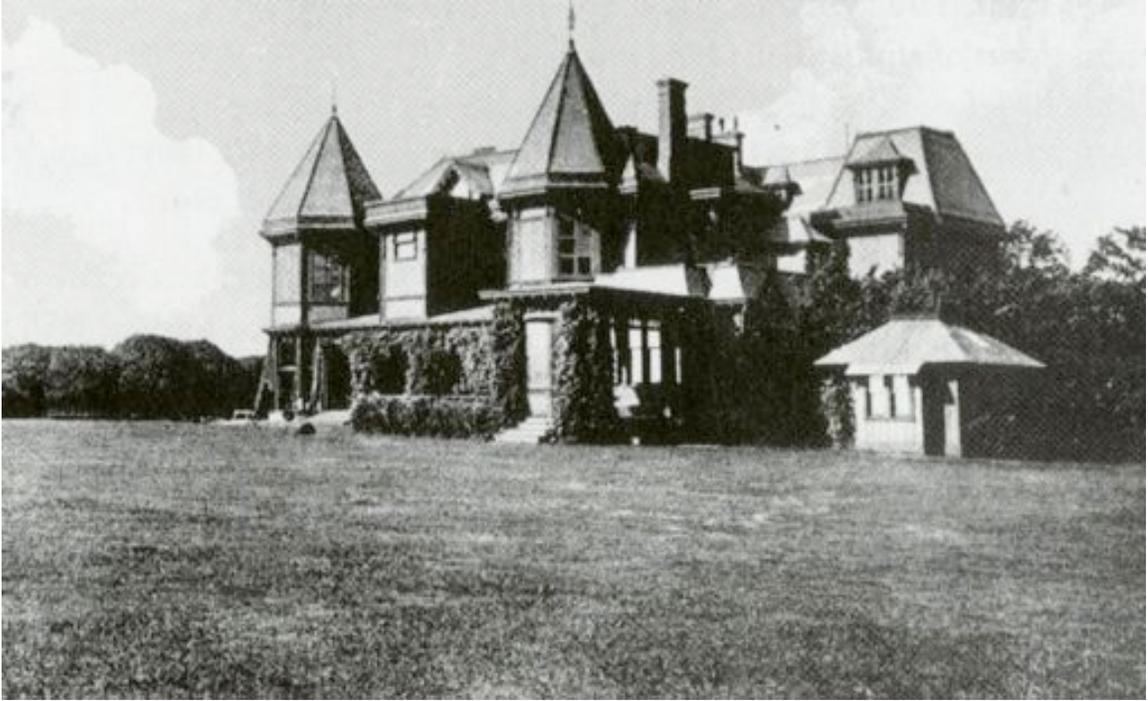


Figure 61. Breezy Lawn (Gallatin House), East Hampton, Long Island.

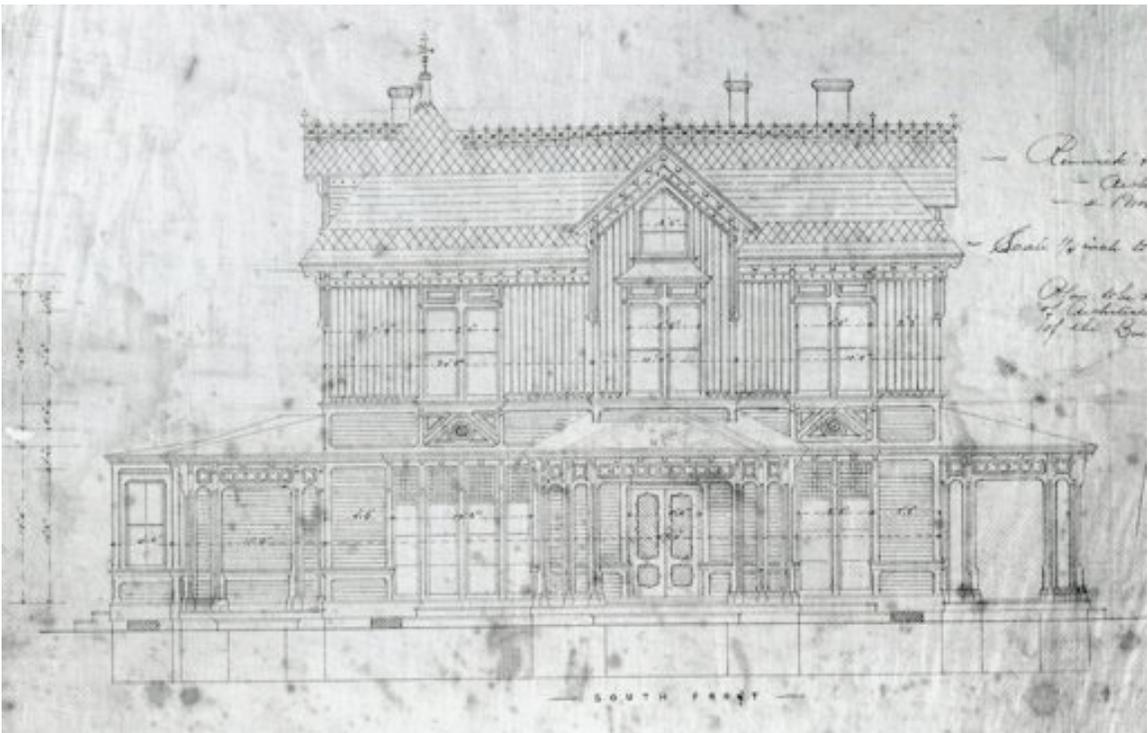


Figure 62. Breezy Lawn (Gallatin House), East Hampton, Long Island, section.



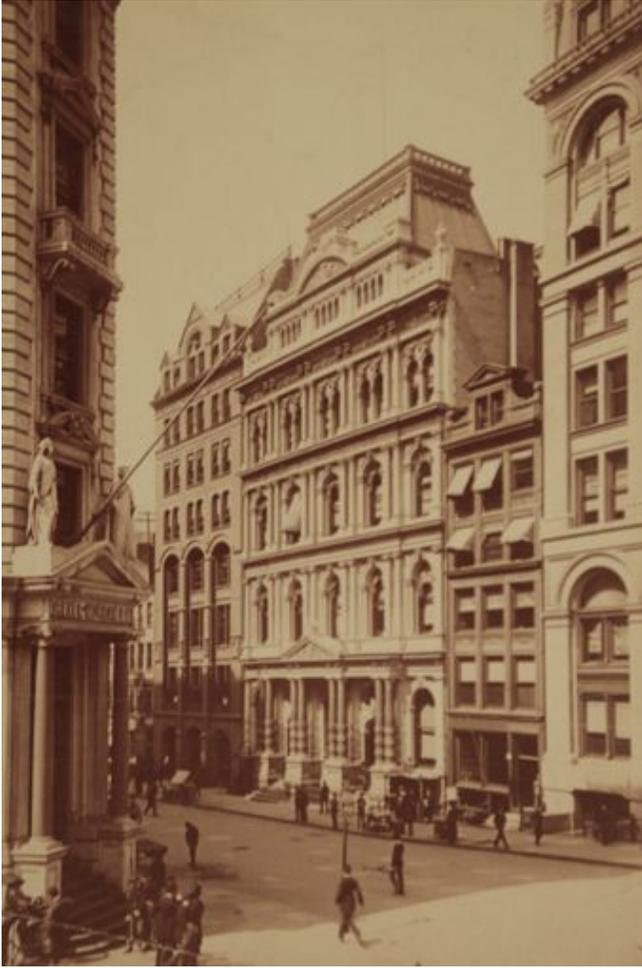


Figure 65. New York Stock Exchange.



Figure 66. New York Stock Exchange, trading room, c. 1895.



Figure 67. Potter Building showing Grace Church Parsonage (far right).



Figure 68. Grace Church Parsonage showing Potter Building (far left), c. 1950.

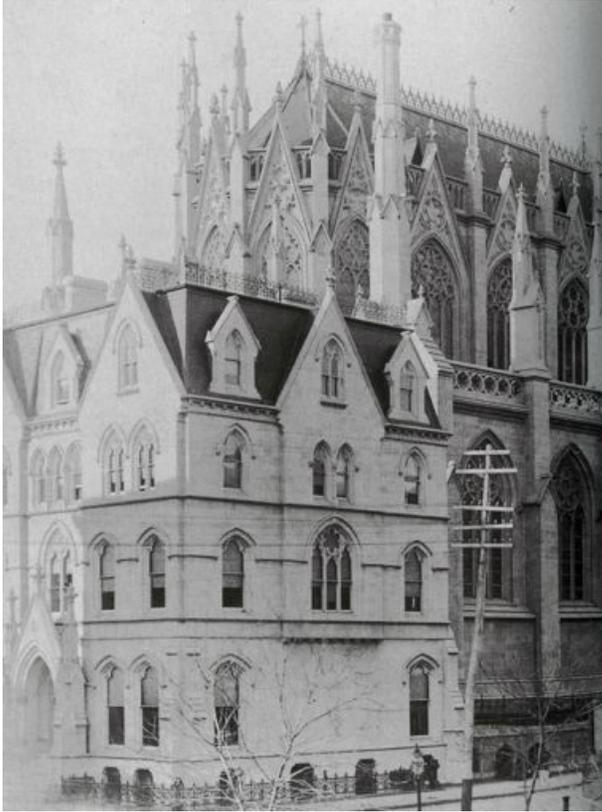


Figure 69. St. Patrick's Cathedral and Bishop's Residence, 1888.



Figure 70. St. Augustine Cathedral, St. Augustine, Fla.  
Photo, Frances Benjamin Johnston, c. 1935.

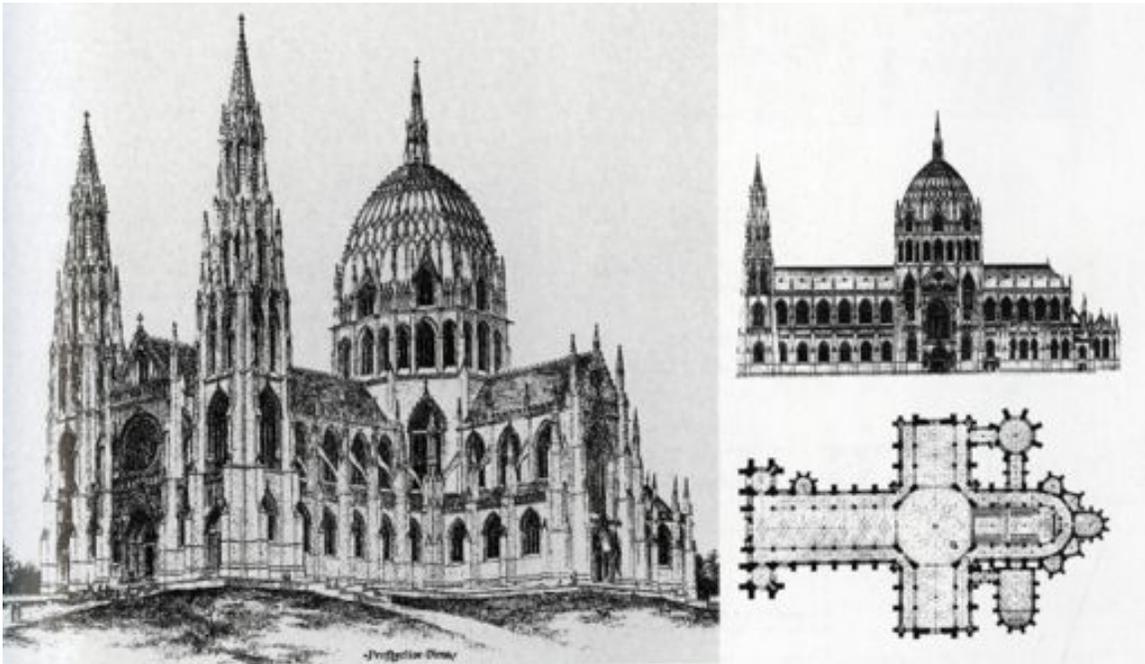


Figure 71. St. John the Divine Cathedral, competition entry.

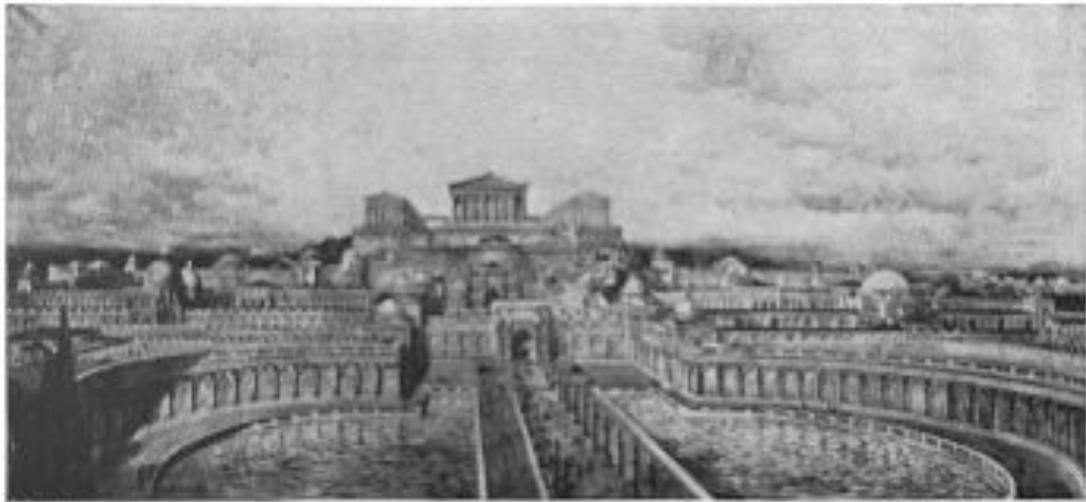


Figure 72. Frontispiece, *Design and Prospectus for the National Gallery of History and Art*.

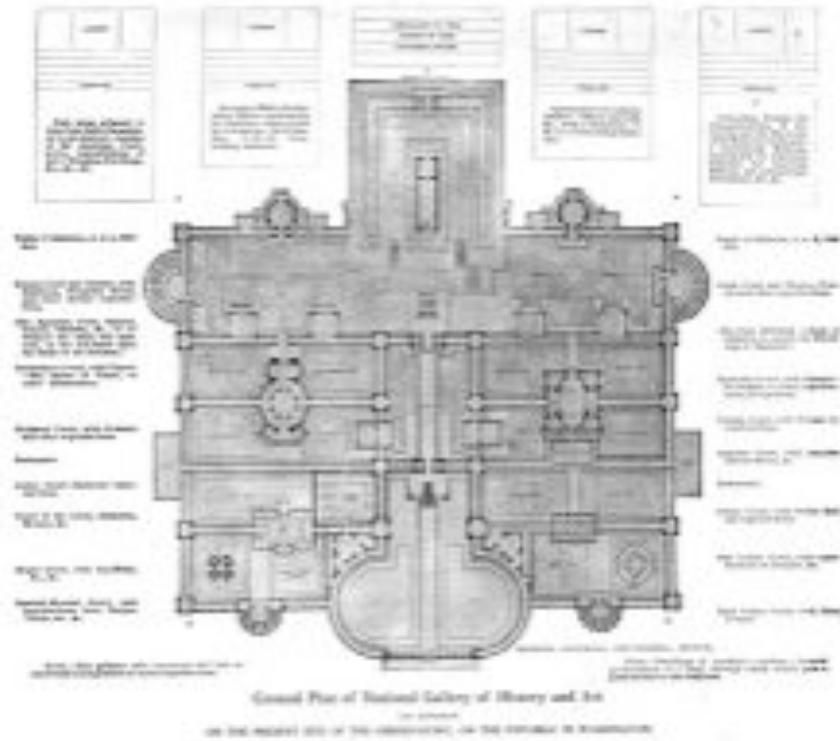


Figure 73. National Gallery of History and Art, plan.

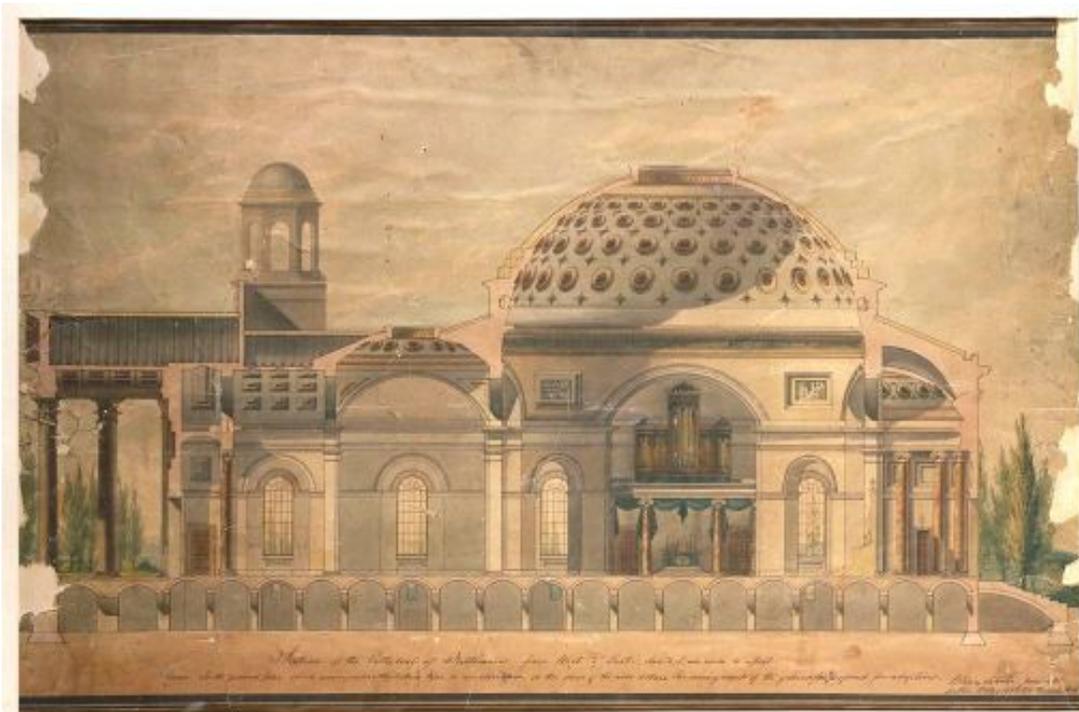


Figure 74. Basilica of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, Baltimore, Md. Section of neoclassical design, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1804.

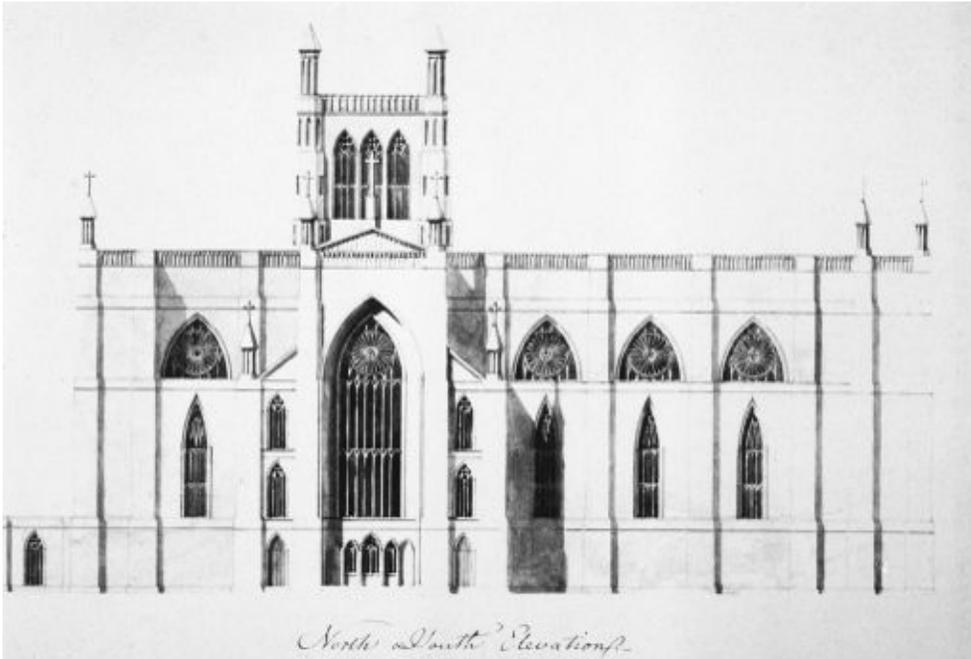


Figure 75. Basilica of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, Baltimore, Md., Section of Gothic design (unrealized), Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1804.



Figure 76. Oak Hill Cemetery Chapel, Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

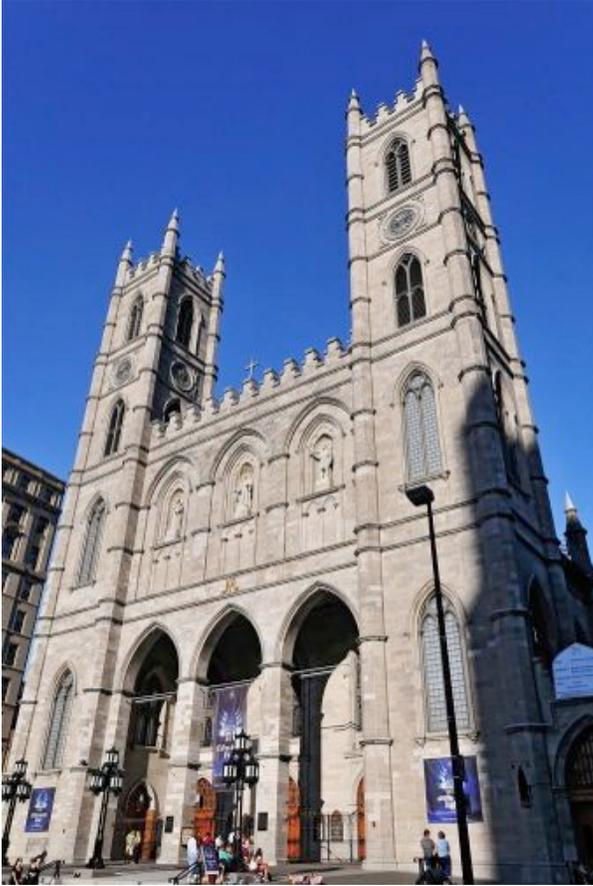


Figure 77. Notre-Dame Cathedral, Montreal, James O'Donnell.



Figure 78. Old St. Patrick's Cathedral, c. 1830, Joseph-Francois Mangin.



Figure 79. St. Patrick's Chancery  
(now, St. Michael's Russian Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite).



Figure 80. St. Patrick's Cathedral.  
Engraving, George E. Perine after drawing by Renwick, c. 1850.



Figure 81. St. Patrick's Cathedral, c. 1876.

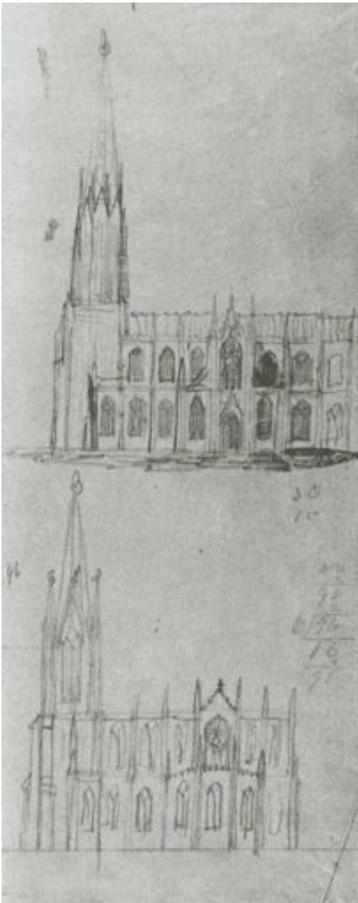


Figure 82. St. Patrick's Cathedral, sketch, c. 1850.



Figure 83. Cologne Cathedral, Cologne, Germany, 1896.



Figure 84. Ste. Clotilde, Paris, F. C. Gau.



Figure 85. St. Patrick's Cathedral, interior, 1888.



Figure 86. St. Patrick's Cathedral, interior.

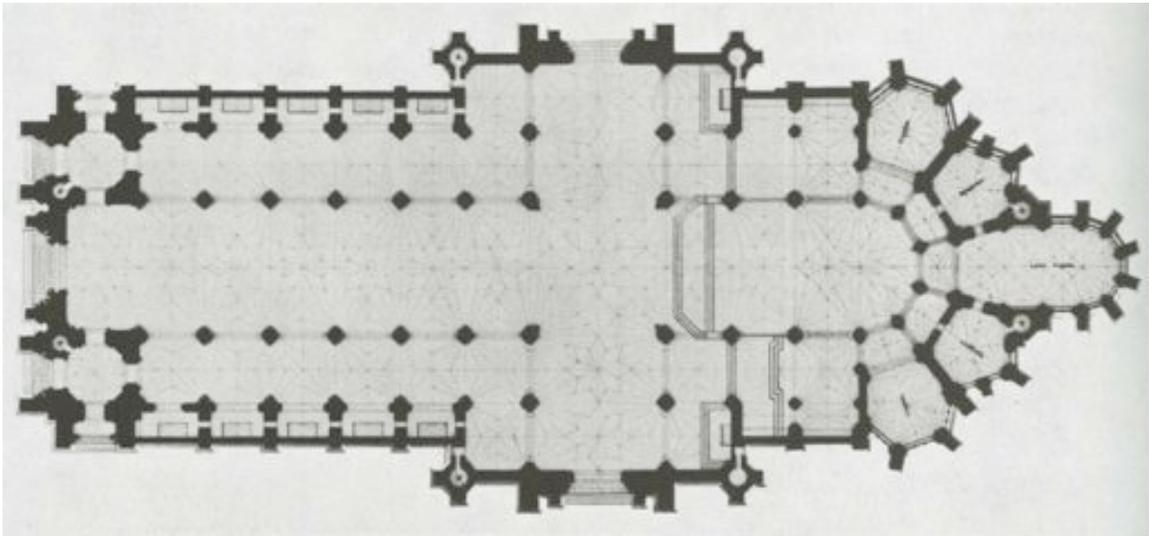


Figure 87. Original plan for St. Patrick's Cathedral showing original Lady Chapel.

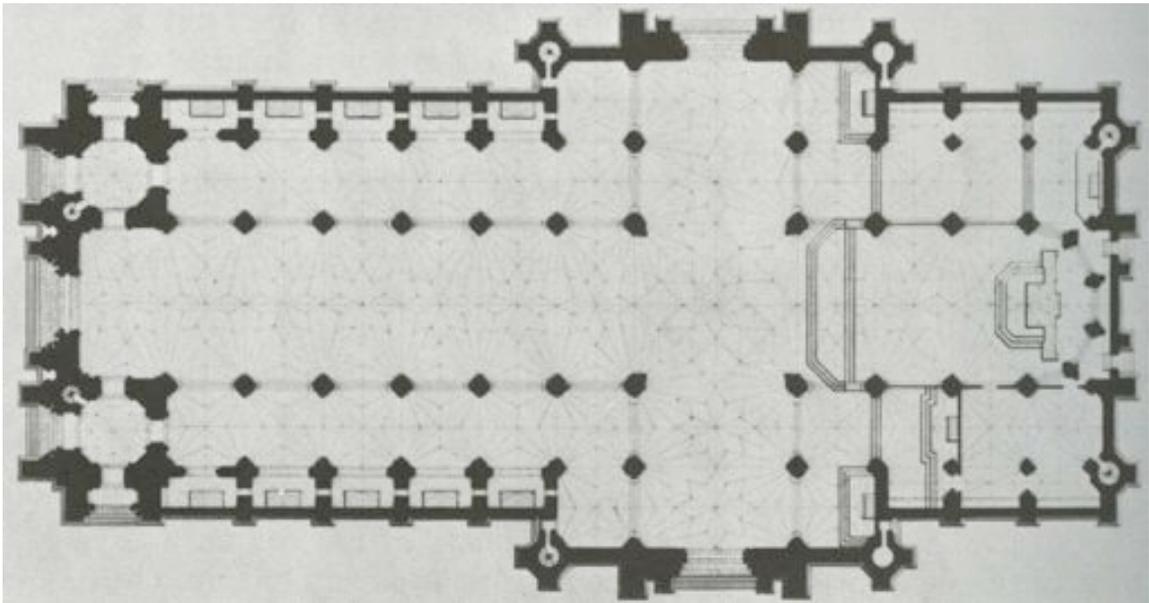


Figure 88. Plan for St. Patrick's Cathedral as built by Renwick.

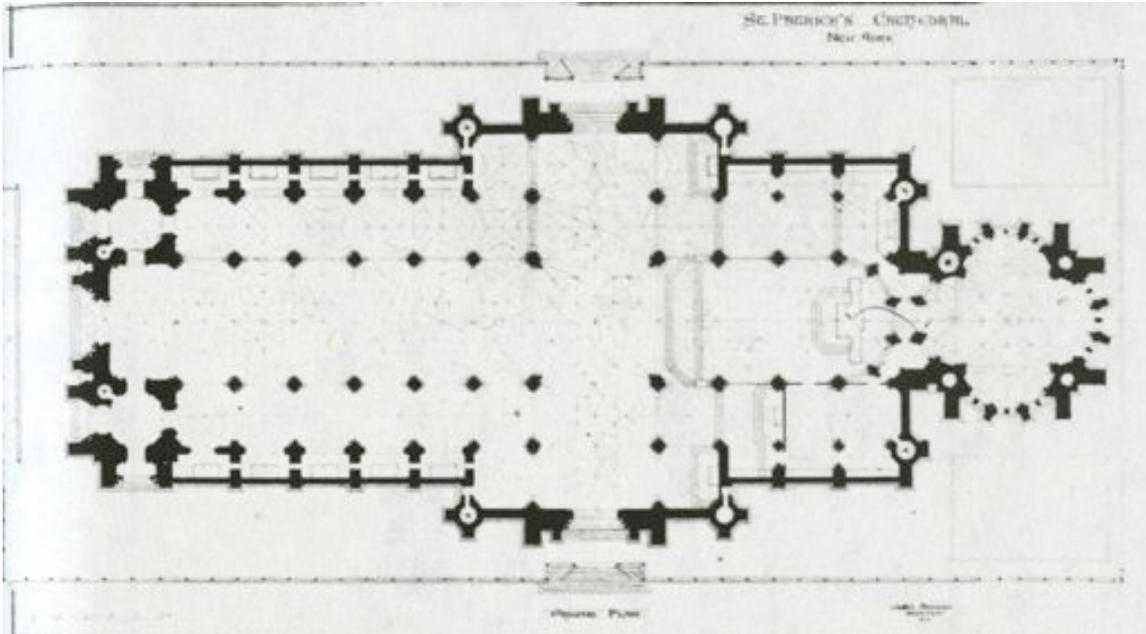


Figure 89. Plan for St. Patrick's Cathedral showing proposed Lady Chapel.

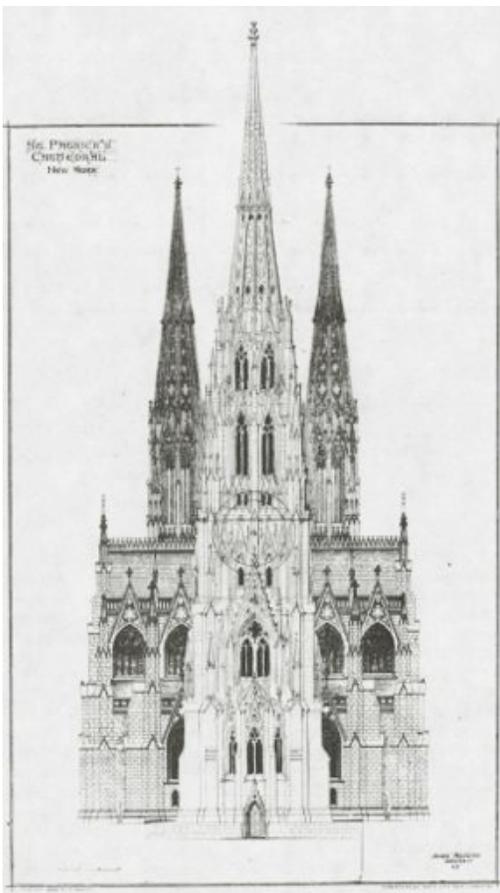


Figure 90. Elevation of east end, St. Patrick's Cathedral showing proposed Lady Chapel.



Figure 91. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., view from north.



Figure 92. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., view from south.



Figure 93. Official seal, Smithsonian Institution, Augustus Saint-Gaudens.

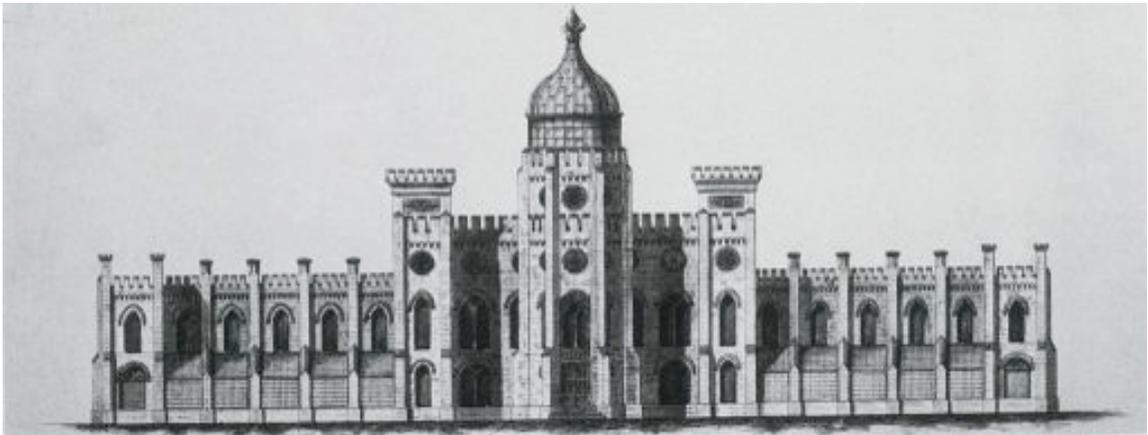


Figure 94. Proposal for Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
Robert Mills, 1841.



Figure 95. Proposal for Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
Robert Mills, watercolor, 1846.



Figure 96. Elevation of north facade, Gothic design (unrealized), 1846.  
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

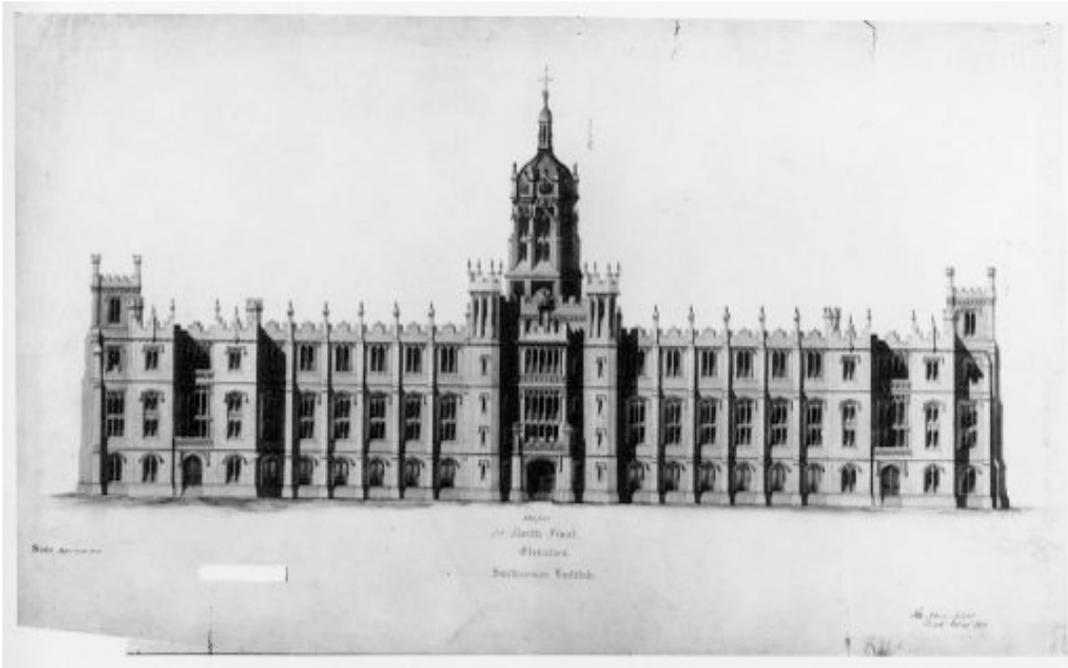


Figure 97. Proposal for Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. John Notman, 1846.

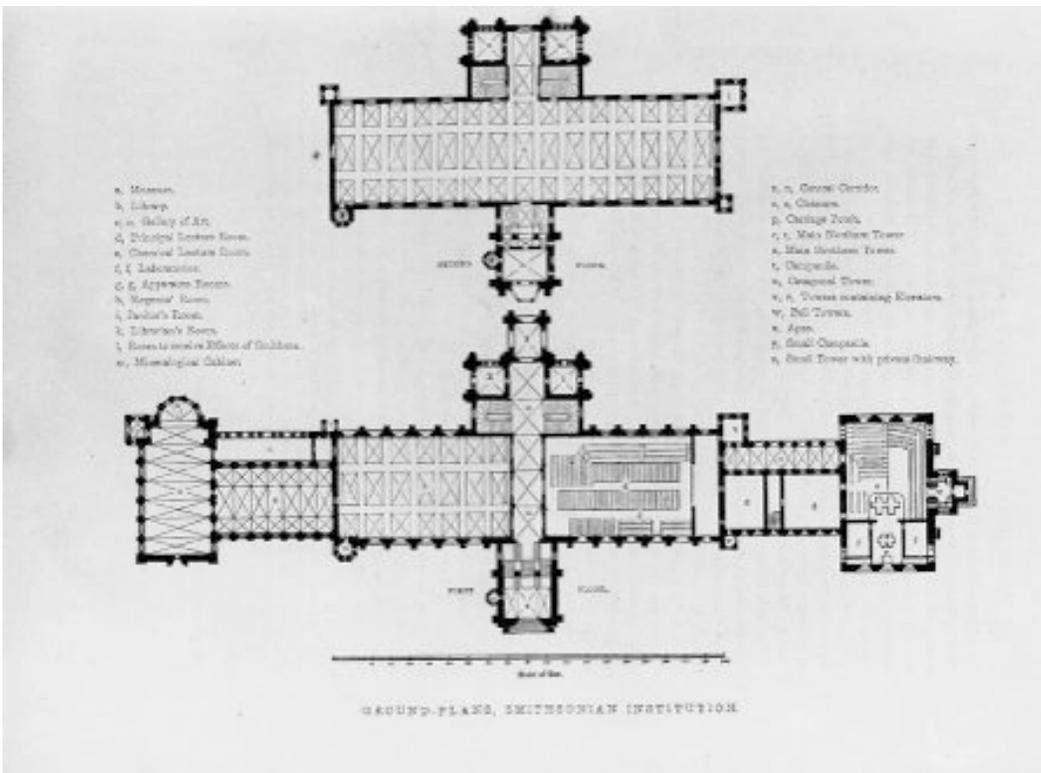


Figure 98. Plan, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1845-46.



Figure 99. Perspective of South Tower, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
James Renwick, Jr., c. 1848.

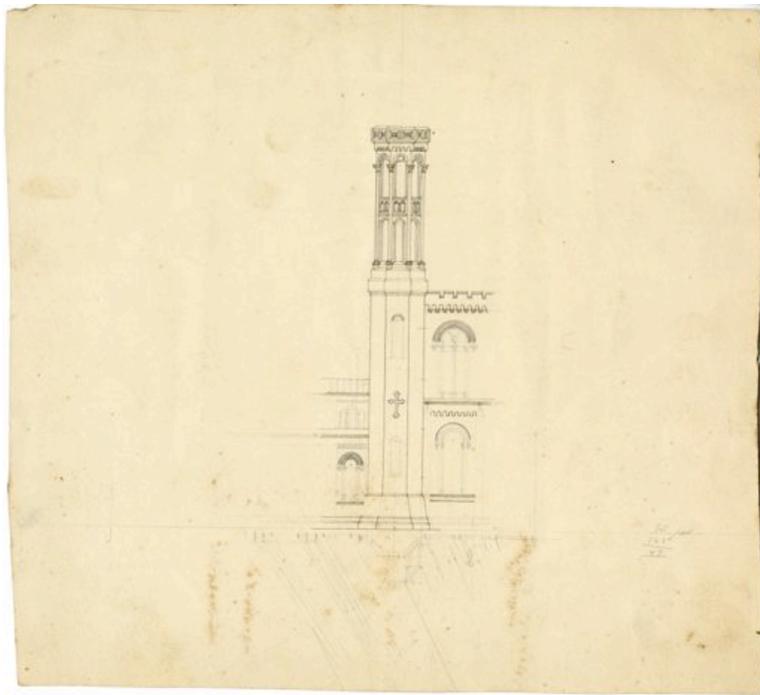


Figure 100. Elevation of Southwest Tower, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
James Renwick, Jr., c. 1846.



Figure 101. Perspective of Northeast Tower, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. James Renwick, Jr., c. 1848.

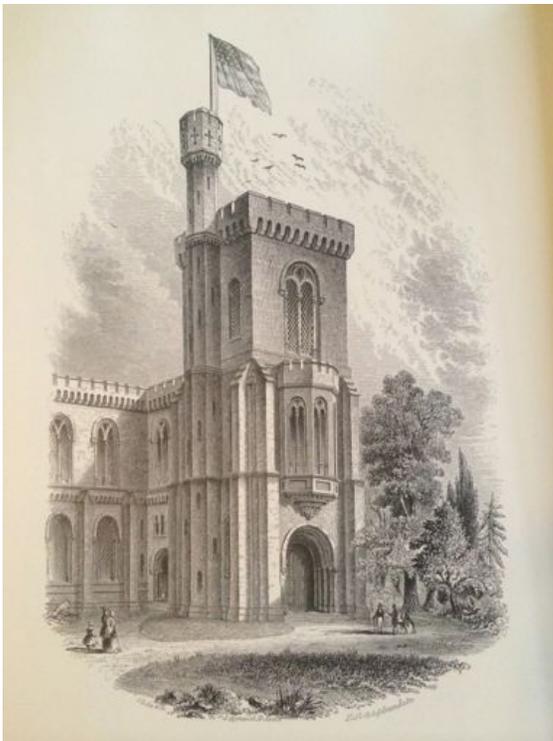


Figure 102. View of South Tower, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

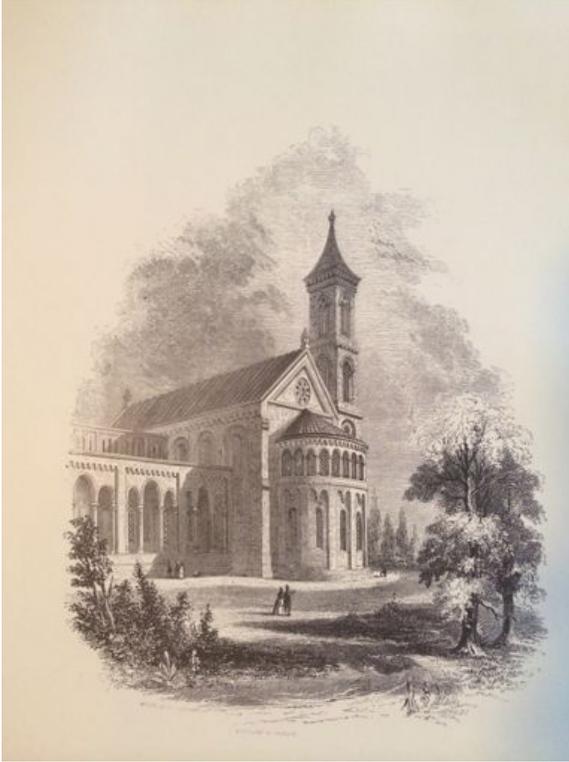


Figure 103. View of West Wing, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

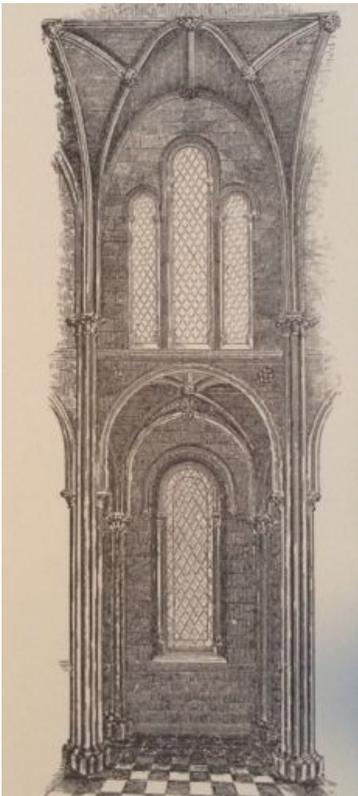


Figure 104. View of bay of Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

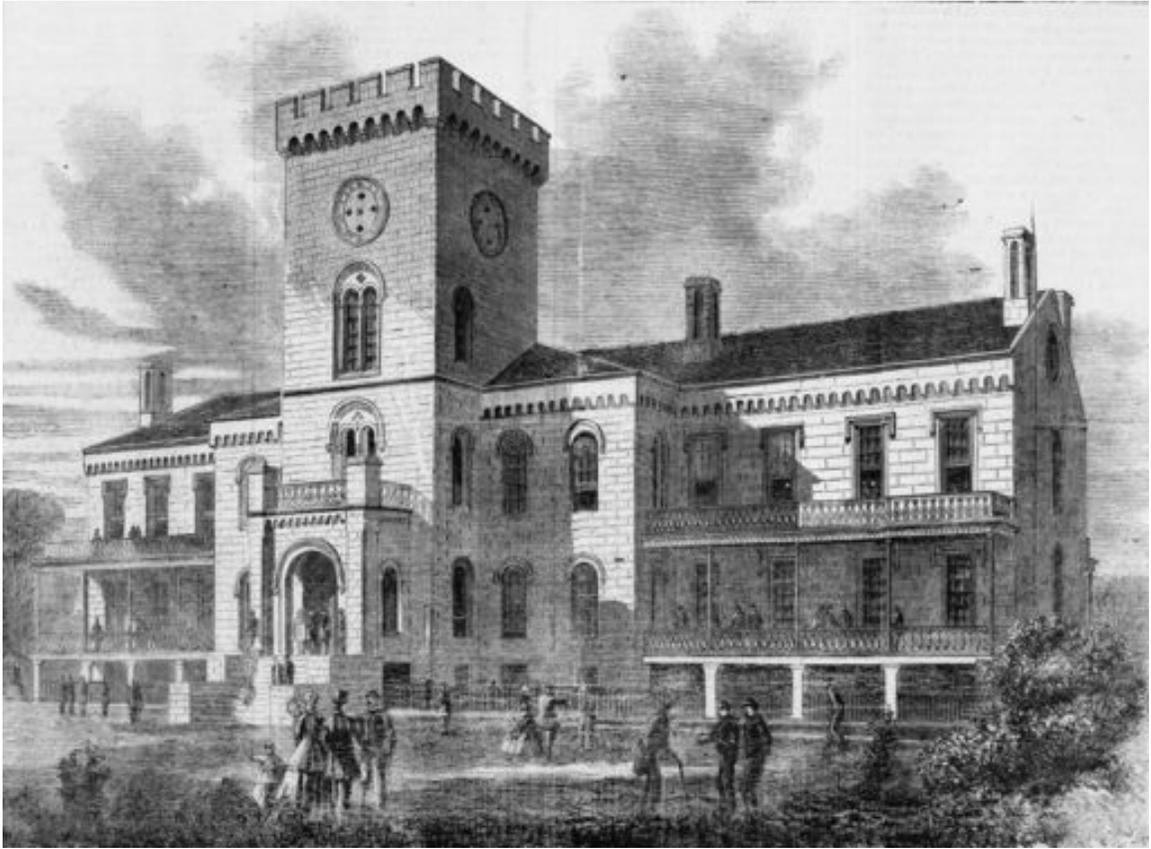


Figure 105. Scott Hall, Soldiers' Home, Washington, D.C., 1867.



Figure 106. Douglas Hall, Old University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill., c. 1860.



Figure 107. W. W. Corcoran, portrait.



Figure 108. *Corcoran Gallery of Art.*  
Frederic Schuler Briggs, c. 1870.



Figure 109. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.  
Grand picture gallery, second floor.



Figure 110. Corcoran Mansion, Washington, D.C.



Figure 111. Corcoran Building, Washington, D.C.



Figure 112. Hart M. Schiff House, elevation.  
Detlef Lienau, 1850.



Figure 113. New Louvre, Paris.  
Louis Visconti and Hector Lefeuil, photo, c. 1880.



Figure 114. Detail of Corcoran's monogram within roundel.  
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Figure 115. Detail of tympanum and pediment over main entrance. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Figure 116. Department of Agriculture Building, Washington, D.C., Adolf Cluss.



Figure 117. State, War, and Navy Building (now, Eisenhower Executive Office Building), Washington, D.C., Alfred Mullett.



Figure 118. Sketch of "Entrance Pavilion in Colonnade," 1890. National Gallery of History and Art, Washington, D.C. (unrealized).

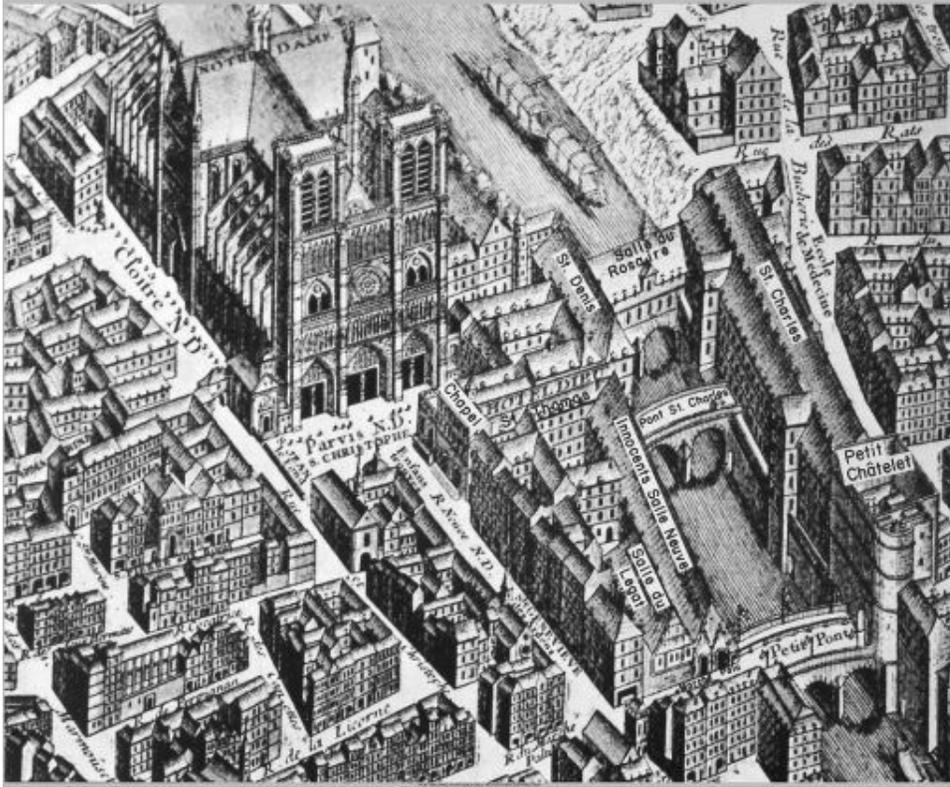


Figure 119. Aerial View of Île de la Cité showing Hôtel-Dieu (bottom right with major areas labeled). Detail of Turgot Map of Paris, 1739.

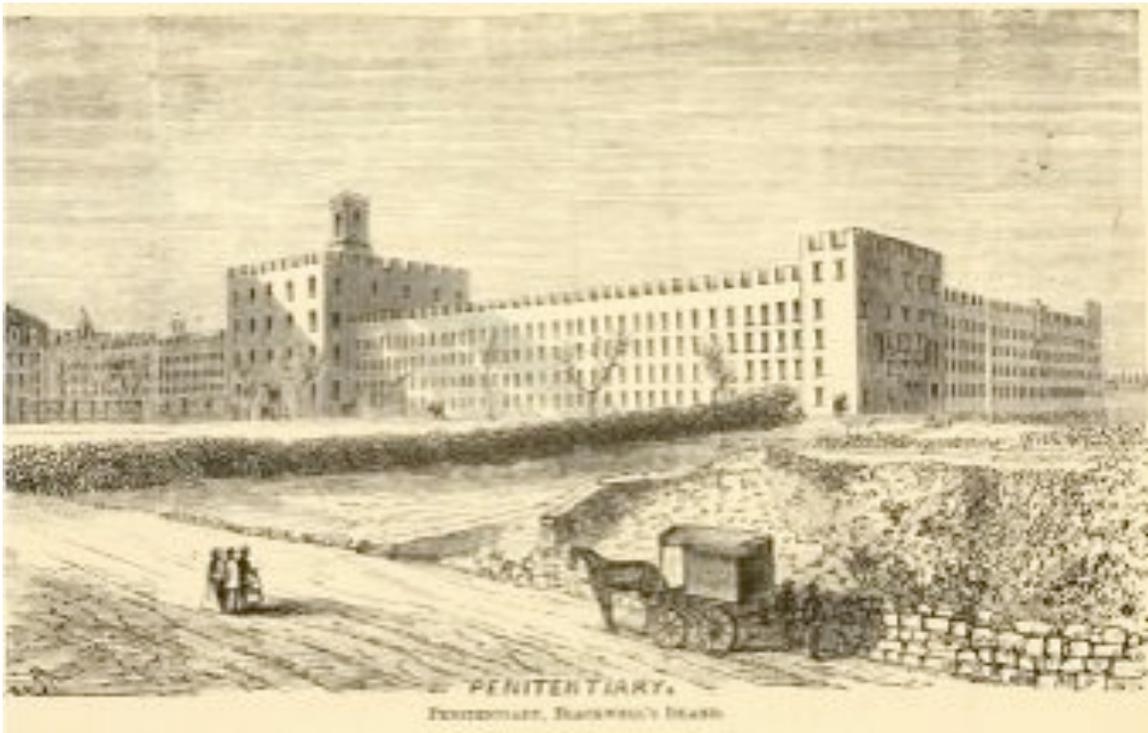


Figure 120. Island Penitentiary.

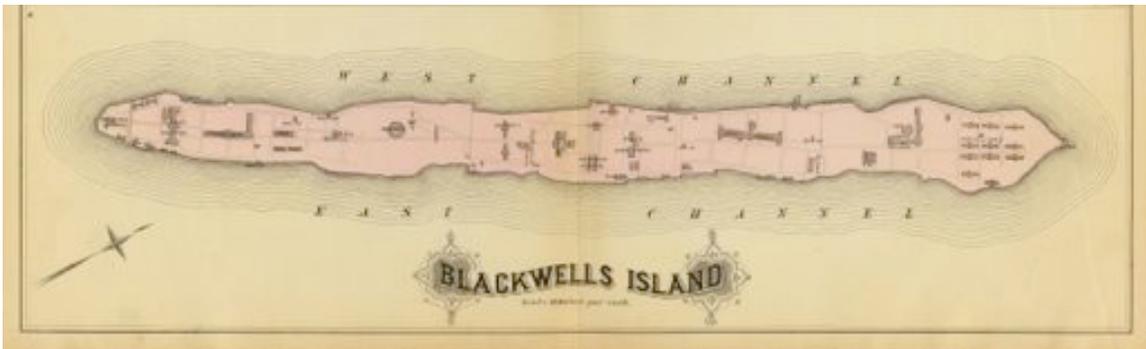


Figure 121. Map of Blackwell's Island, 1879.



Figure 122. *Blackwell's Island*. Edward Hopper, 1928.

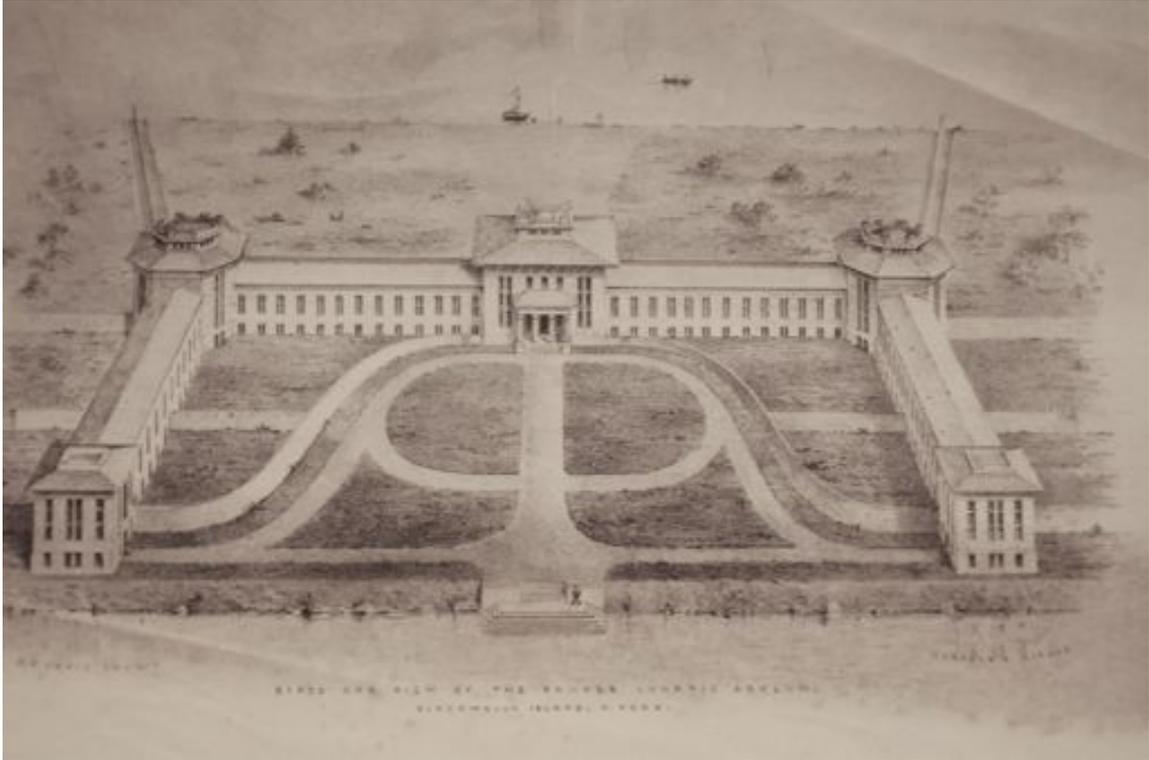


Figure 123. Lunatic Asylum, perspective as intended, A. J. Davis.



Figure 124. Postcard showing original lighthouse.



Figure 125. Workhouse.



Figure 126. View of workhouse from East River.

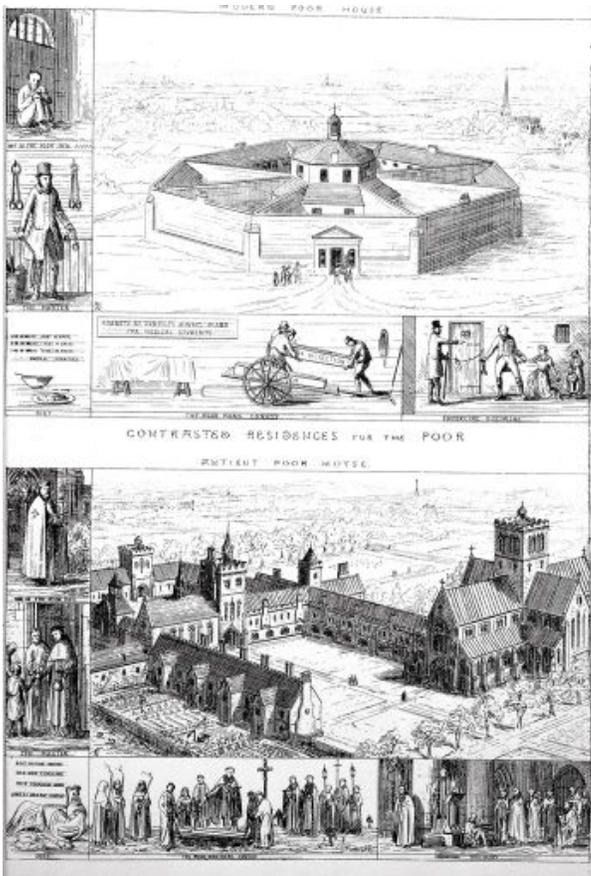


Figure 127. "Contrasted Residences for the Poor." A. W. N. Pugin, 1836.



Figure 128. Workhouse showing Gothic tracery on windows.  
Photo, Jacob A. Riis, c. 1890.



Figure 129. Smallpox Hospital (“Renwick’s Ruin”).

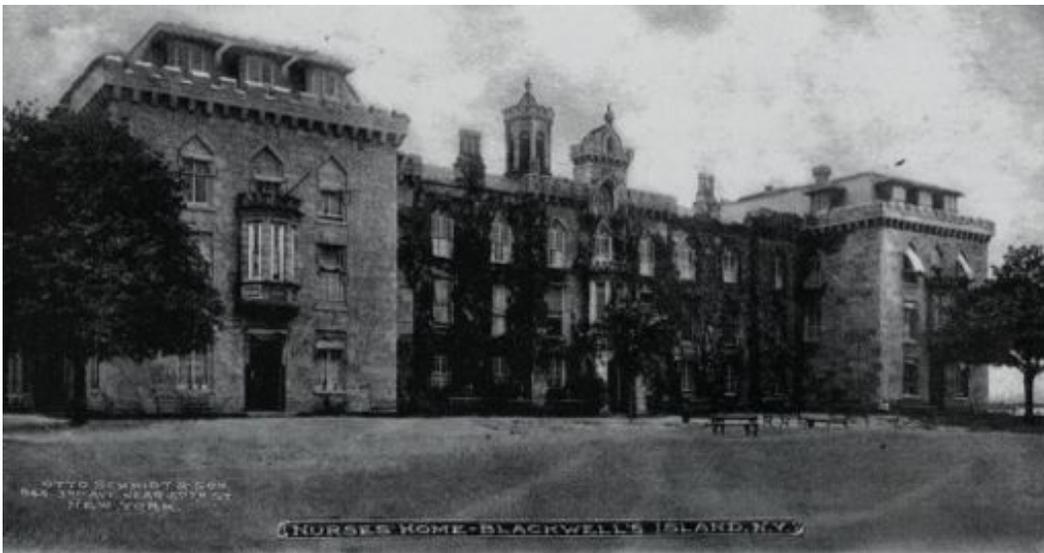


Figure 130. Smallpox Hospital as Nurses’ School and with additional wings.

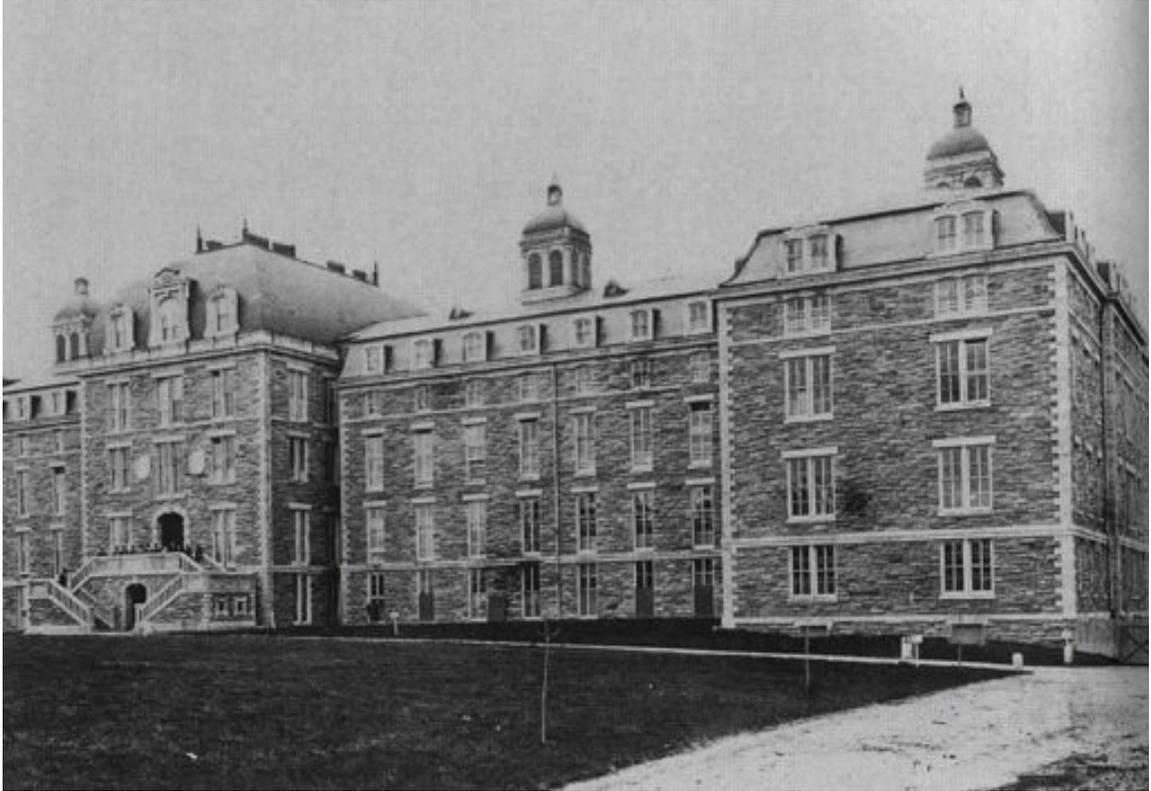


Figure 131. Charity Hospital.

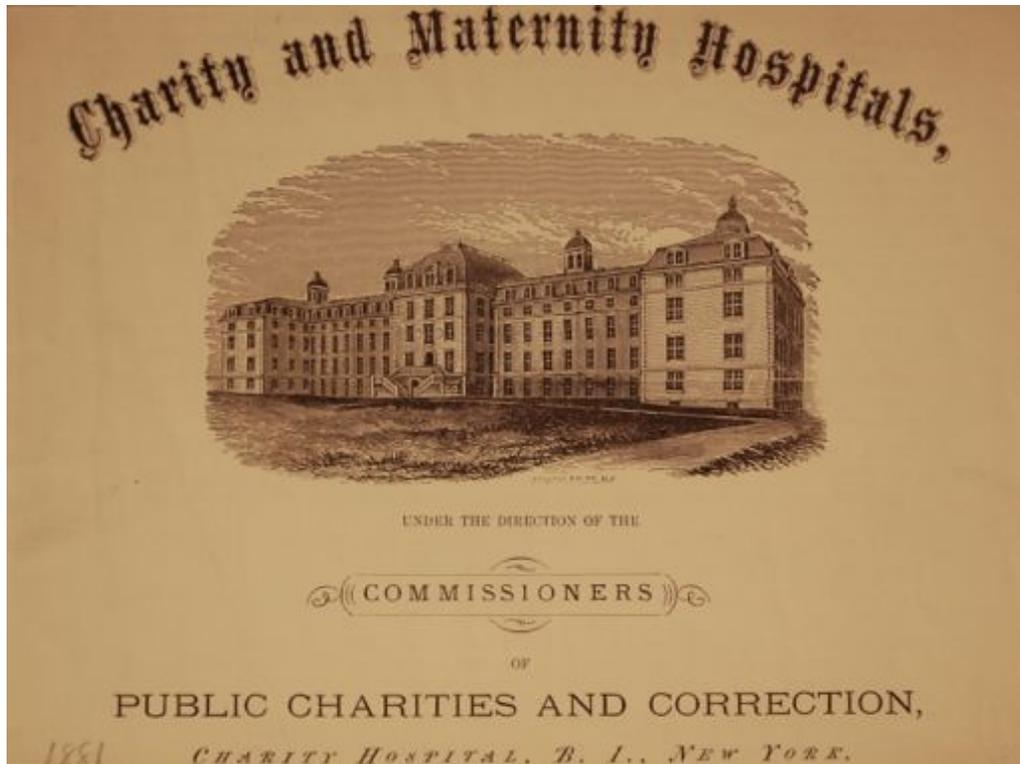


Figure 132. Charity Hospital



Figure 133. Department of Public Charities and Corrections Building, 1869.



Figure 134. Design for Stations of the Cross, St. Patrick's Cathedral. Bertram G. Goodhue, draftsman, 1888.



Figure 135. Design for Altar of St. Veronica, St. Patrick's Cathedral. Bertram G. Goodhue, draftsman, 1889.

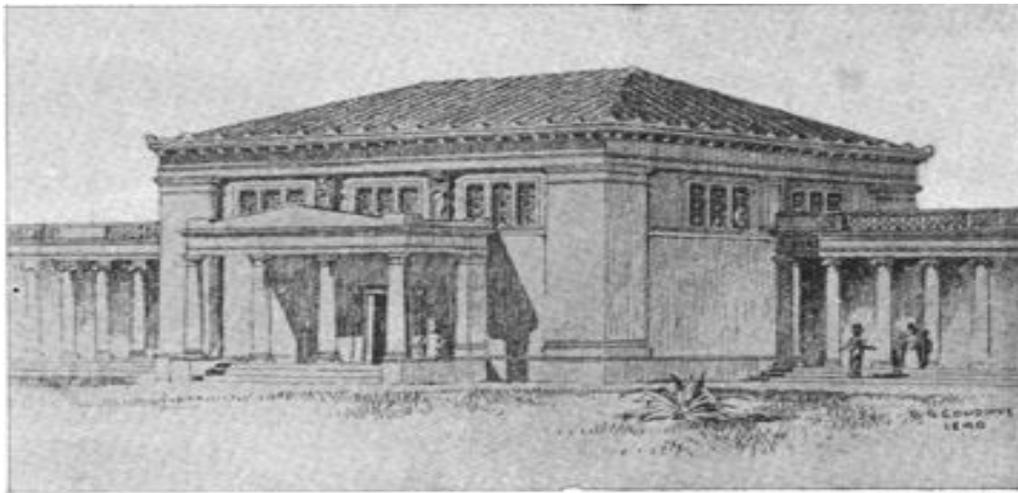


Figure 136. Sketch of "Greek Theatre," Bertram G. Goodhue, draftsman, 1890. National Gallery of History and Art, Washington, D.C. (unrealized).

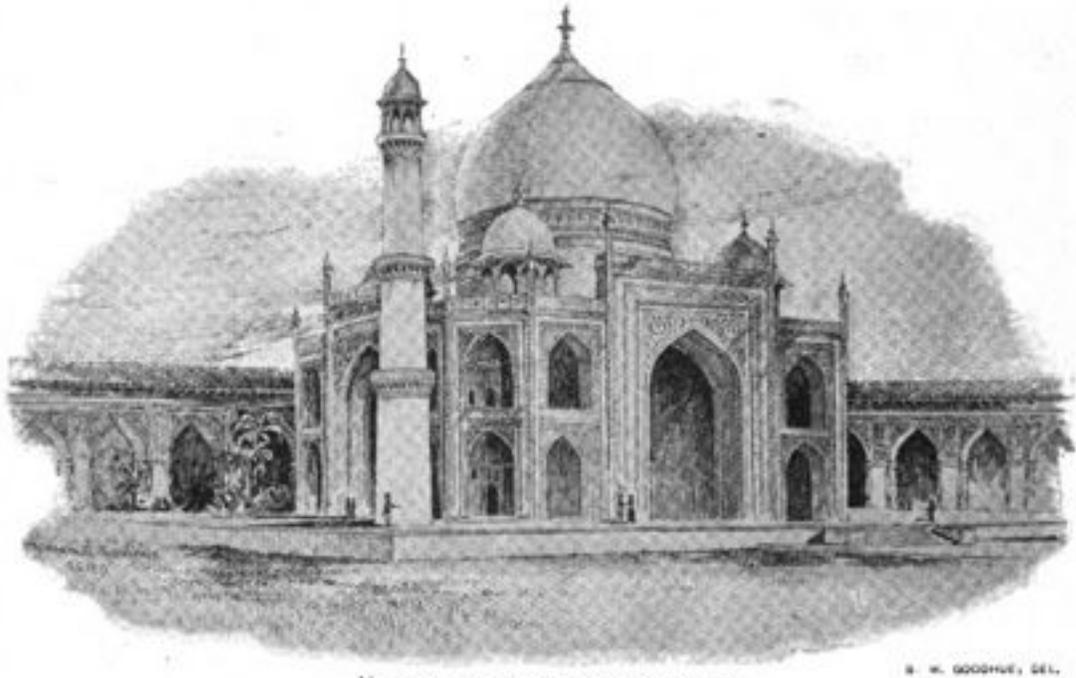


Figure 137. Sketch of "Taj Mahal for Mogul Court," Bertram G. Goodhue, draftsman, 1890.  
National Gallery of History and Art, Washington, D.C. (unrealized).