The Society for the Preservation of
Hudson Valley Vernacular Architecture

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John Stevens after accepting the Sheepdog Award from HVVA President Rob Sweeney.

John Stevens recipient of 2015 HVVA Sheepdog Award

Any active member or follower of the HVVA Newsletter knows John Stevens and his lifetime achievements in documenting historic architecture here in the Hudson Valley and elsewhere in the U.S. and Canada. After working on the newly-established Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings, John was employed by the Nassau County Museum in New York to plan the restoration of the ca. 1730 Minnie Schenck House. This project sparked his interest in Dutch-American buildings and led to an extensive, self-directed effort to record buildings associated with the Dutch settlement of America. His extensive work has been collected in his book, *Dutch Vernacular Architecture in North America, 1640-1830*, which HVVA published in 2005. John continues to work in the documentation and restoration planning of historic buildings and is a frequent contributor to the HVVA Newsletter, for which we are grateful.

Maggie MacDowell Lecture, Woodland Pond, New Paltz, February 20, 2016

HVVA President Rob Sweeney welcomes Kate Johnson to the podium.

The HVVA Education Committee invited Kate Eagen Johnson to be the presenter at the second annual winter lecture in a series created last year in memory of Maggie MacDowell. The title of the illustrated lecture was “Beauty and the Brick Revisited: Illustrated Books and Nineteenth-Century Domestic Design,” which came from an on-line exhibition Kate had organized for Historic Hudson Valley in 2002. The Education Committee was attracted to the topic because it would provide good background for some of the shifts in the design and decoration of vernacular architecture in the late 1800s. The Hudson Valley was at the center of the American Romantic Movement in that period, and it influenced all levels of art, architecture and lifestyle. The lecture provided HVVA members with some insight into how new designs and patterns of domestic life were incorporated into our vernacular architecture through a variety of publications aimed at owners and builders. Parts of this lecture are presented as an article in this issue.

Kate Johnson is a scholar and museum professional with extensive experience in the architecture and decorative arts of the Hudson Valley. After receiving a Master’s degree from the University of Delaware’s prestigious Winterthur Program in Early American Culture Studies, Kate was employed first as Registrar and then as Curator and Director of Collections at Historic Hudson Valley, a Westchester County museum that administers National Historic Landmarks spanning four centuries.

In 2011 Kate established her independent business HistoryConsulting.com. She provides the benefit of her extensive experience to museums and other cultural institutions as a guest curator, content and program advisor, and guide trainer. She also writes and lectures on a variety of historical and design topics. Since 2009, Kate has served on the United States Senate Curatorial Advisory Board for the Capitol, Washington, D.C.

Beauty and the Brick Revisited: Illustrated Books and Nineteenth-Century Domestic Design

By Kate Eagen Johnson

"Reader, look at this picture! Study its lessons." So Americans were commanded when seeking guidance about architecture and design during the mid-nineteenth century. Professional advisors used the new form of the illustrated book as a way to help Americans navigate a period of profound change. For the first time, through these books, the lay reader could enter a world where architecture, applied art, and ideas met. Professionals and amateurs, artists and artisans, builders and home-owners turned to these publications to learn about techniques and aesthetics as well as broader issues. Many of the titles referenced here are part of Historic Hudson Valley's library collection and have been used to preserve and interpret the museum's Landmark historic properties.[1]

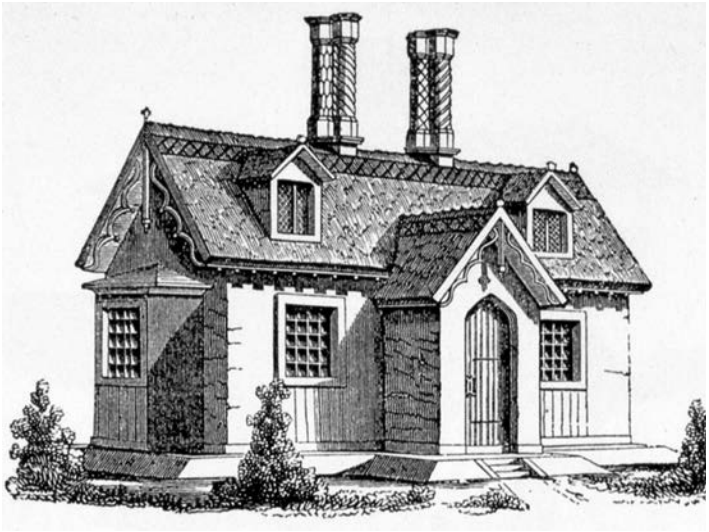

Fig. 1 – Gothic Cottage design in John Claudius Loudon, *An Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture; Containing Numerous Designs for Dwellings, From the Cottage to the Villa, Including Farm Houses, Farmeries, and Other Agricultural Buildings…* (London: 1833). All illustrations used in this article are from the collection of Historic Hudson Valley, Tarrytown, New York.

Ours is such an image-rich world that it hard to imagine the excitement these illustrated design books prompted when first issued. Critics predicted that the strides made in printing technology, combined with modern ideas about design, would lead to a flourishing of art and architecture, much as the printing press had helped spread the revival of Classical art and architecture throughout Europe during the Renaissance. According to the architect Samuel Sloan in his book *Sloan's Homestead Architecture*:

> The present rapid development and general application of the art of WOOD-ENGRAVING opens a field for the interchange of ideas by linear illustrations totally unheard of in former times. With these influences at work, guided by intelligent minds, among an industrious and energetic people, the future of American Architecture promises to take as high rank in the Art world as is allotted to the productions of any age or country.[2]

America's Introduction to Aesthetics

Cultural visionaries and boosters such as Samuel Sloan notwithstanding, Americans were hard pressed to put aside their pride in plainness to discuss the science of the beautiful or the philosophy of taste, in other words, aesthetics. The opportunities for learning about academic architecture, art, and design were limited during the earliest years of the United States. Certainly little existed in the way of formal schooling in the arts. Serious students who could afford to do so apprenticed with architects, builders, and artisans; learned through observation and travel; and read the limited printed sources imported from England.

Many Americans of this era held that art, by its nature, was aristocratic, anti-democratic, and even immoral. To some, art also smacked of Roman Catholicism at a time when there was a strong strain of anti-Catholic sentiment in the dominant culture.

Recognizing Americans' discomfort with aesthetics and the notion of taste in general, American design writers began to address the issue in earnest in the 1840s. They encouraged their countrymen and women to think about practical applications for aesthetic appreciation. How could such a skill be used to express individuality, insure economical expenditure when building, or provide benefit to family and community?

Key here is the American belief that productive citizens were not born, they were made, and nurturing and inspiring domestic surroundings could help cultivate moral fiber and instill shared ideals, and thus contribute the longevity of the nation. And so Americans overcame their reticence to discuss issues of beauty when it directly related to domestic design.

Through their publications, author-experts carried on a conversation about building's possibilities as a vehicle for expressing ideas and thus rising above the purely mechanical, the relative value of theory and "book learning" versus knowledge gained "on the job;" what was tasteful and suitable home design for people of various classes and interests as well as for the American character overall; what building styles and types best fit America's varied regional climates and terrains; the appropriate balance given to aesthetics versus function in home design; and the benefit of pleasing surroundings in influencing character. They employed the design encyclopedias and the architectural advice book to further their message.

Design Encyclopedias

The contributions made by the British landscape architect John Claudius Loudon to the specific genre of home and garden encyclopedias have rarely been surpassed. He is well known for authoring over thirty books including *Encyclopedia of Gardening* (1822) and for founding and editing four periodicals. Through his publications, he exerted influence throughout the English speaking world, reaching audiences as far away as Australia and the United States.[3]

Loudon's biographer (and wife) Jane Loudon considered his book *Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture* (1833) to be "perhaps the best and most useful" of all his works. With 1,000 pages of text, 2,000 woodcuts, and nearly 100 lithographs, it is noteworthy for its comprehensiveness and exploitation of graphics. Containing 150 designs for residences as well as an explanation of the fitness and propriety of particular types of buildings and furniture, Loudon's opus served as a prototype for the architectural advice book genre ***(Fig. 1)***. This particular book received mixed reviews in the United States. Andrew Jackson Downing noted that while it had "a very visible effect upon the taste for rural architecture in the United States," it was "rather too elaborate to suit our [American] popular taste."[4]

Loudon was not alone in crafting domestic encyclopedias read in America. Aside from English authors, America's Catherine Beecher penned a few, including *The American Woman's Home* (1869) which she co-wrote with her famous sister Harriet Beecher Stowe. What American "pioneer" leaving home on the way to distant climes, whether headed to the frontier or to the city, could resist acquiring such a valuable domestic bible? The need for such instructive publications during the nineteenth century speaks to shifts in population,

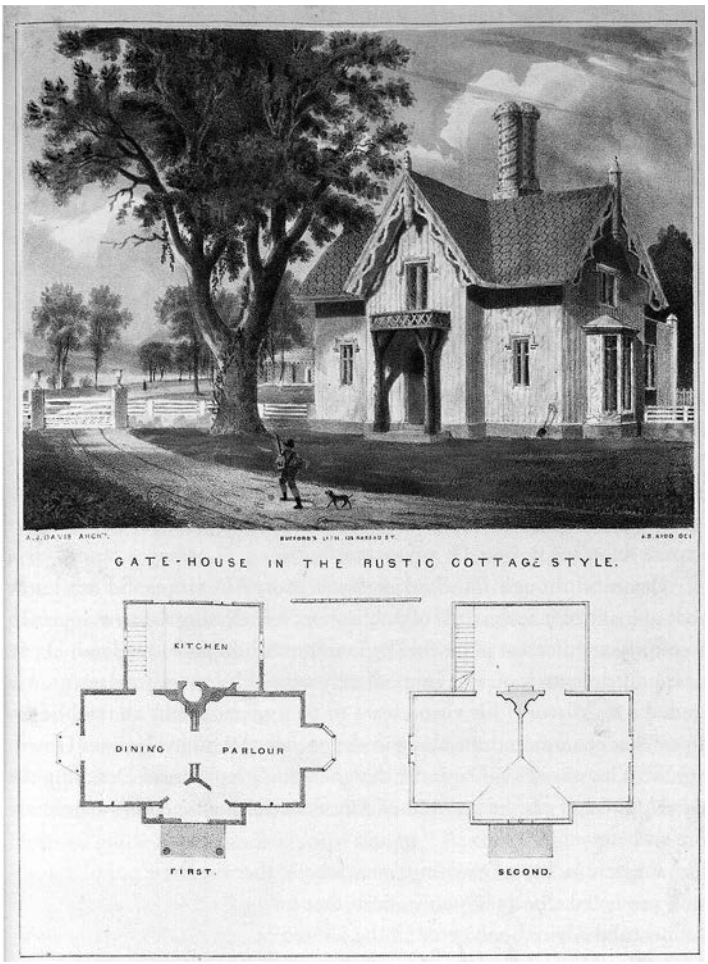

Fig. 2 – "Gate-house in the Rustic Cottage Style" in Alexander Jackson Davis, *Rural Residences, Consisting of Designs, Original and Selected, For Cottages, Farm-Houses, Villas, and Village Churches: With Brief Explanations, Estimates, and a Specification of Materials, Construction, Etc.* (1837). This structure once stood at entrance to Robert Donaldson's Blithewood estate in Annandale-on Hudson, where Bard College is located today.

Fig. 3 – "Picturesque in Landscape Gardening" in Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America; With a View to the Improvement of Country Residences…* sixth edition (1859).

with many young people moving away from their hometowns and therefore away from immediate access to their elders' wisdom.

This need also speaks to shifts in culture, with a growing middle class interested in adopting a "more genteel" lifestyle than was common in the eighteenth century and also facing expanding choices in regard to housing and consumer goods. For example, the centuries-old hall/parlor/kitchen concept was now made a bit more complicated by the appearance of specialized rooms such as the dining room and the home library. The Industrial Revolution in Europe and America made the manufacture and distribution of all kinds of building supplies, furnishings, and equipment possible leaving many an American to ask, "What is appropriate for a person like me?"

Architectural Advice Books

In these primers, writers continued the discussion of lifestyle and aesthetics *vis-à-vis* residential architecture and some even invited homeowners to join in the conversation. Architectural advice books were issued in two standard formats. One featured a series of model home designs with supporting text, sometimes with a few details and occasionally a cost estimate. The other featured similar plans as well as a more free-flowing discussion of architecture, landscape design, horticulture, and, to some extent, interior decoration and furnishings.

The arrival of architectural advice books coincided with a growing interest in the Romantic or Picturesque style, wherein mood and illusion were favored over the strict rules, proscribed forms, and limited ornamental orders of Classicism. Particularly noteworthy is Alexander Jackson Davis' *Rural Residences* (1837), a volume considered *avant garde*, not only because of its early promotion of Romantic-style architecture, but also because it was the first architectural publication produced in the United States with color illustrations in the form of hand-colored lithographs ***(Fig. 2)***. Partaking in a new approach to country architecture pioneered by Loudon and others in England, Davis's ideas and designs were not immediately understood by most Americans. Davis needed a translator and champion. Who better than Andrew Jackson Downing? Davis and Downing collaborated on both publications and estate commissions. Davis the designer/draftsman/lithographer and Downing the designer/writer/publisher crafted an ideal of American Romantic architecture and estate life ***(Fig. 3)***.

THE

Horticulturist,

AND

JOURNAL OF RURAL ART AND RURAL TASTE.

Vol. II. AUGUST, 1847. No. 2.

A FEW MILES east of Boston, boldly jutting into the Atlantic, lies the celebrated promontory of NAHANT. Nature has made it remarkable for the grandeur and bleakness of its position. It is a headland of an hundred acres, more or less, sprinkled with a light turf, and girded about with bold cliffs of rock, against which the sea dashes with infinite grandeur and majesty. No tree anciently deigned to raise its head against the rude breezes that blow here in winter, as if tempest-driven by Boreas himself; and that, even in summer, make, of Nahant, with its many cottages and hotels, a refrigerator, for the preservation of the dissolving souls and bodies of the exhausted population of Boston, in the months of July and August.

At the present moment, the interesting feature at Nahant, after the Ocean itself, is, strange to say, one of the most remarkable gardens in existence. We mean the grounds of the private residence of FREDERIC TUDOR, Esq., a gentleman well known in the four quarters of the world, as the originator of the present successful mode of shipping ice to the most distant tropical countries; and, we may here add, for the remarkable manner in which he has again triumphed over nature, by transforming some acres of her bleakest and most sterile soil into a spot of luxuriant verdure, fruitfulness and beauty.

To appreciate the difficulties with which this gentleman had to contend, or, as we might more properly say, which stimulated all his efforts, we must recall to mind that, frequently, in high winds, the salt spray drives over the whole of Nahant; that, until Mr. TUDOR began his improvements, not even a bush grew naturally on the whole of its area, and that the east winds, which blow from the Atlantic in the spring, are sufficient to render all gardening possibilities in the usual way nearly as chimerical as cultivating the volcanoes of the moon.

Mr. TUDOR's residence there now, is a curious and striking illustration of the triumph of art over nature, and as it involves some points that we think most instructive to horticulturists, we trust he will pardon us for drawing the attention of our readers to it at the present time. Our first visit to his grounds was made in July, 1845, one of the driest and most unfavorable seasons for the growth of trees and plants that we remember. But at that time, perhaps, the best possible one to test the merits of the mode

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Fig. 4 – First page from *The Horticulturalist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste*, Vol. II No. 2 (August 1847).

Downing, a critic and theorist for a slightly more popular audience, produced a body of publications that set a tone and standard for the architectural advice book genre in the United States. Born in Newburgh, this self-made gentleman created his own model mansion and grounds called Highland Gardens. Downing served as a host and moderator of a nation-wide forum on American architectural and landscape design through his writings. His works included *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America* (1841, with many subsequent editions), *Cottage Residences* (1842), *The Fruit and Fruit Trees of North America* (1845), and *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850), as well as *The Horticulturist, and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste*, a periodical he edited from 1846 until his death in 1852 ***(Fig. 4)***.

Downing was passionate about rural domestic design. He never strayed far from discussing country residences,

Fig. 5 – Design VII "Symmetrical Cottage" in Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1861). This structure illustrates a number of the architectural features Downing promoted for cottages constructed of wood.

real and imagined, and how their components – architecture, landscape, plant materials, and interiors – came together in a unified statement. Downing believed that the American home should be functional yet beautiful, expressive in its design of the personal sensibilities of its occupants. He stressed that the detached, single family dwelling was the American ideal, that suitability was the governing design principle (that is, suitability to site and to the owner's social class), and that the Romantic style was generally preferable over the Classical.

Particularly notable is *The Architecture of Country Houses*. Downing presented designs for over 30 cottages, farmhouses, and villas as well as discussion of interior design and furniture, a subject not previously covered to any extent in an American home design book ***(Fig. 5)***.

For example, Downing highlighted “cottage furniture,” the refined turned and painted but economical pieces which he especially liked for country house bedrooms. He identified the influence of the attractive home in terms of personal redemption, character formation, and commitment to living the ethical life. He also believed it could serve as a springboard for enacting a program of social progress on a national scale.

Downing’s publications received mixed reviews. His friend and admirer the Swedish writer Frederika Bremer observed, “nobody, whether he be rich or poor, builds a house or lays out a garden without consulting Downing’s works; every young couple who sets up housekeeping buys them.” But praise was not universal. According to Downing scholar David Schuyler, if one looks at commentary on Downing’s *Cottage Residences* as an example, one reviewer opined that there were not enough designs for farmhouses while another wanted to see less expensive plans overall. The farm-life writer Solon Robinson observed, “Notwithstanding the high character and the adaptability of Mr. Downing’s works to the ‘upper ten thousand,’ the wants of the lower ten hundred thousand are not satisfied.” Downing scholar Adam Sweeting noted how the narrator of Herman Melville’s *Pierre* (1852) lashed out at genteel advice writers like Downing and the residences they promoted: “Such estates seemed ‘to defy Time’s tooth.’ They reject the encroachments of the present in favor of a still and permanent ‘eternity.’”[5]

Criticism notwithstanding, Downing’s peers considered his work the loftiest American expression this genre. After his unexpected death at age thirty-six, the result of a steam boat accident on the Hudson, there would be no lack of writers eager to assume Downing’s mantle and to build upon the foundation he had established.

Calvert Vaux, an English architect recruited by Downing as junior partner, was Downing’s obvious successor. Through *Villas and Cottages* (1857), Vaux exhibited an amazing familiarity with the tangled issues of home design and cultural identity which consumed a certain segment of Americans. He also made practical recommendations, urging them to give up their ceremonial parlors in favor of living rooms and to pay attention to good ventilation in bedrooms. The plans Vaux chose for *Villas and Cottages* were his own, the result of his collaboration with Downing and also with Frederick C. Withers ***(Fig. 6)***. Vaux is best known for his partnership with Frederick Law Olmsted in the creation of Central Park, but the content of *Villas and Cottages* accords him lasting recognition as an architectural and social critic.

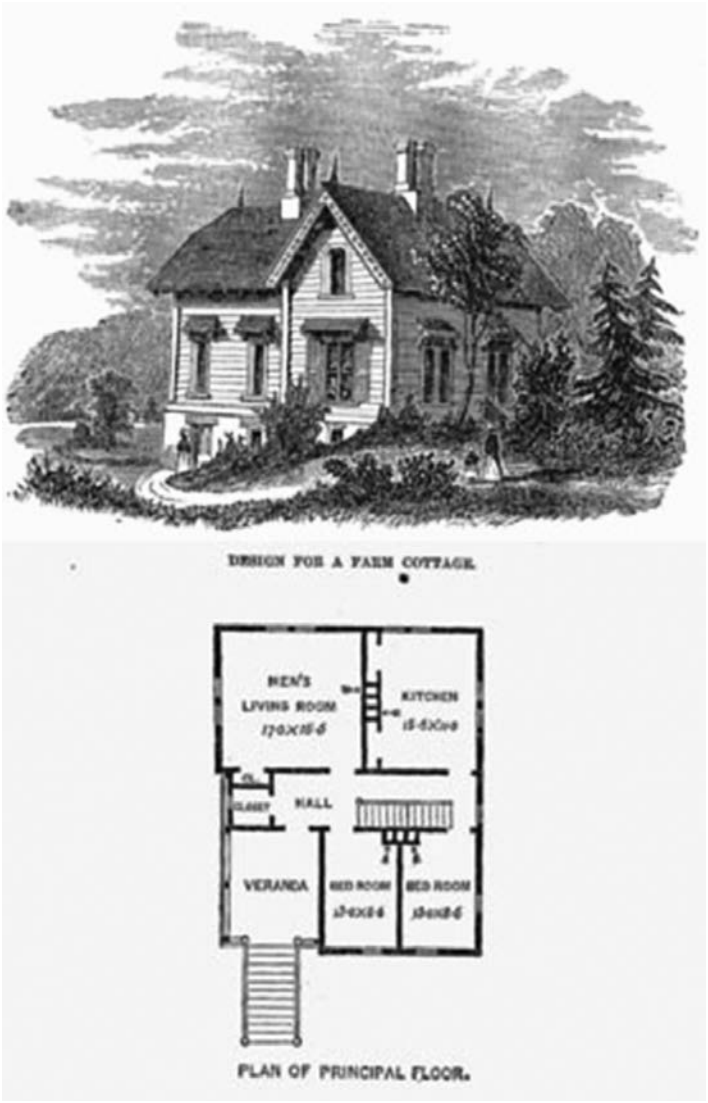


Fig. 6 – “Design for a Farm Cottage” in Calvert Vaux, *Villas and Cottages. A Series of Designs Prepared for Execution in the United States* (1857).

Samuel Sloan’s The Model Architect (1852), a cross between a pattern book and a “positioning piece” for this successful Philadelphia architect, contains full-page lithographs. In that book and in his *Homestead Architecture* (1866), Sloan’s discourse included domiciles, mostly Italianate or “Bracketed” in design, appropriate for the southern United States, a region to which Downing, Davis, and Vaux had paid little attention ***(Fig. 7)***. The title of the latter book refers to the potent symbol of the “old family place,” the homestead, an unerring moral compass throughout life. (Several other architectural writers including Gervase Wheeler also drew upon this particularly American emblem of pride and sentiment.)

Some advice givers addressed less wealthy readers. Typical of them is Charles Dwyer, who authored *The Economic Cottage Builder; Or, Cottages for Men of Small Means*, published in Buffalo in 1856 ***(Fig. 8)***.

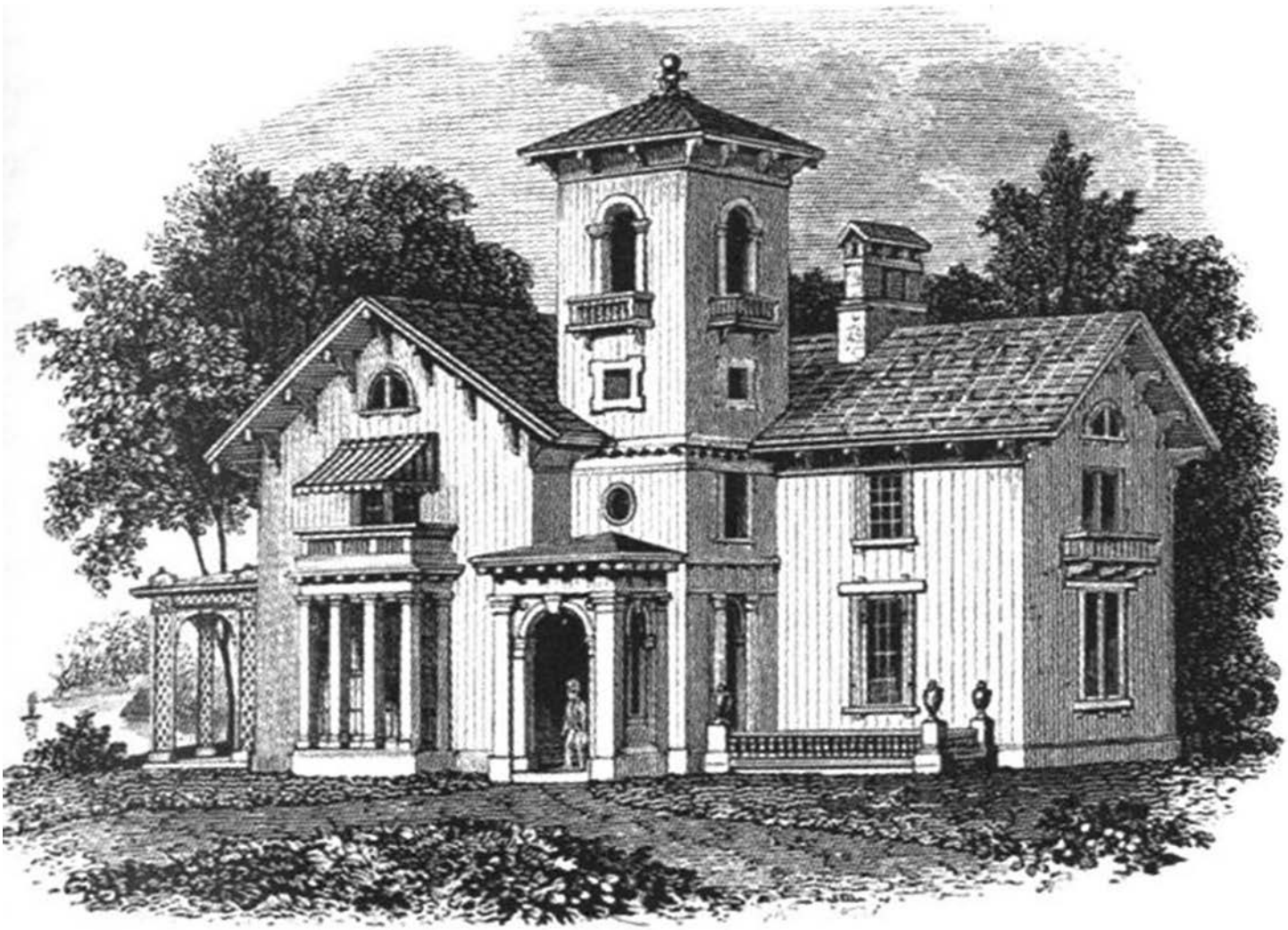


Fig. 7 – "Irregular Villa in the Italian Style" in Samuel Sloan, *The Model Architect. A Series of Original Designs for Cottages, Villas, Suburban Residences, Etc. Accompanied by Explanations, Specifications, Estimates, and Elaborate Details. Prepared Expressedly for the Use of Projectors and Artisans Throughout the United States*. Vol.1 (1852).

In a similar vein is *Village and Farm Cottages* (first edition printed in 1856), by Henry W. Cleaveland and the Backus Brothers, partners in a New York architectural firm. (Cleaveland is of particular local interest because he spent the latter years of his life in Poughkeepsie.) Their book contains information about a range of house types—including the small cottage and the duplex, the latter a form which ran counter to Downing's ideal of detached homes ***(Fig. 9)***. More important, Village and Farm Cottages is considered the first publication which offered pre-drawn house plans through mail-order. For an additional fee of three to five dollars, readers could obtain lithographed working drawings and printed specifications for their favorite house model. More modest than the works of Loudon or Downing, Dwyer and Cleaveland and the Backus Brothers helped a broader swath of Americans incorporate aesthetic considerations into the design of their homes.

Summary

During the mid-nineteenth century, people living in the United States faced the challenges of creating a nation and bestowing upon it an identity. They saw the institution of the American Home and the lessons learned there as key to managing this transformation. Americans were on the move, both geographically and within the class system during an era marked by economic opportunity and by economic panics and depressions. They were not always confident about their place and affiliation and what was appropriate and suitable for them.

Lacking a firm grounding in art education, and faced with new architectural styles, larger dwellings, more specialization in room use, and greater availability and variety of consumer goods, some self-conscious citizens of the young nation turned to professionals to guide them

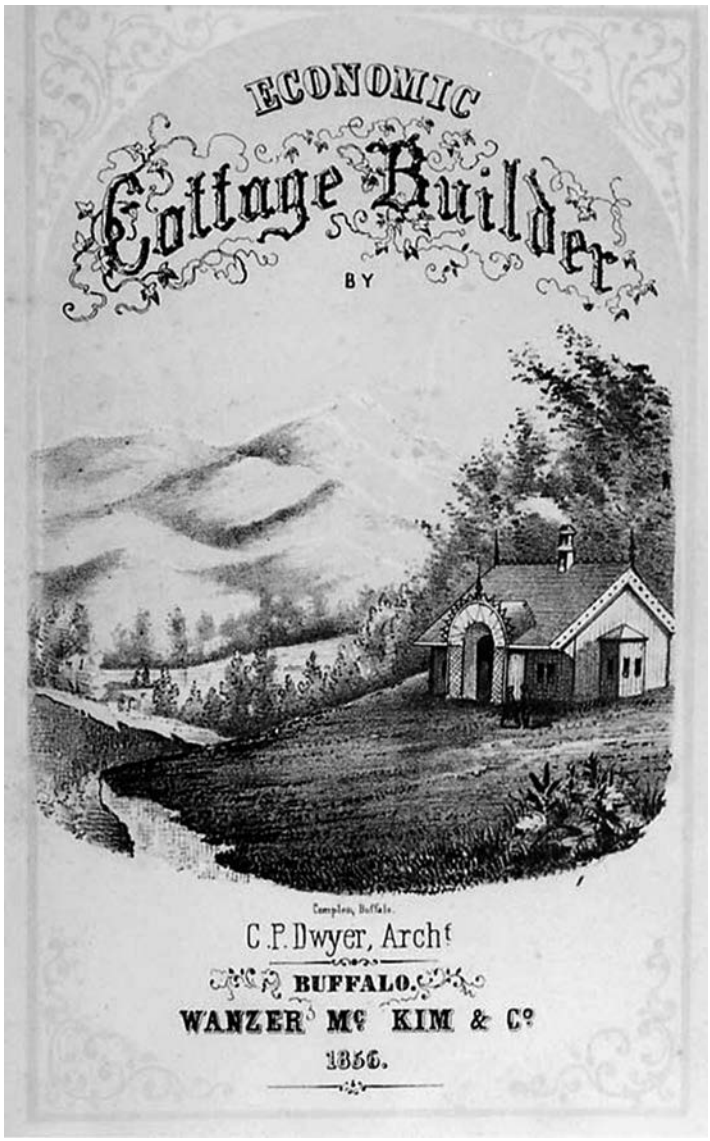


Fig. 8 – Title page from Charles P. Dwyer, *The Economic Cottage Builder: Or, Cottages for Men of Small Means*, (1856).

Fig. 9 – Henry W. Cleaveland, William Backus & Samuel D. Backus, "Design XX: Farm House." *Village and Farm Cottages: The Requirements of American Village Homes Considered and Suggested; with Designs for Such Houses of Moderate Cost*. (1857).

through the labyrinth of taste. A cadre of advisors came to the rescue, urging Americans to overcome their ambivalence about discussing aesthetics, assuring them that an appreciation of art and architecture was essential, particularly as it applied to the home. These experts chose the illustrated publication as their medium. A trail of surviving material culture including houses in a Downingesque style and photographs of decorative interiors—speaks to the impact of these publications.

We see echoes of these same concerns today in Americans' general unease with cutting-edge architecture and art and their continued reliance on pronouncements made by arbiters of taste in the media. Similarly, current issues relating to local and national legislation of taste stir up passionate arguments about who decides what is appropriate, acceptable, or beautiful. Clearly, the debate continues.

ENDNOTES

[1] This article is drawn from the online exhibition "Beauty & the Brick: Illustrated Books and Nineteenth-Century Domestic Design" (https://www.hudsonvalley.org/beauty/index.html) and the accompanying catalog *Beauty & the Brick: Illustrated Books and Nineteenth-Century Domestic Design*, Tarrytown, NY: Historic Hudson Valley, 2002.

[2] Samuel Sloan, *Homestead Architecture, Containing Forty Designs for Villas, Cottages, and Farm Houses, with Essays on Style, Construction, Landscape Gardening, Furniture, Etc. Etc. Illustrated With Upwards of Two Hundred Engravings*. second edition (Philadelphia, PA: J.P. Lippincott, 1867), v.

[3] John Claudius Loudon and the *Early Nineteenth Century in Great Britain*, Elisabeth MacDougall ed. (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1980), 4. According to A. J. Downing, Loudon's *Encyclopedia of Gardening* and *Encyclopedia of Agriculture* were considered "standard works" in the United States. [*Gardener's Magazine* as quoted in Ann Leighton, *American Gardens of the Nineteenth Century, "For Comfort and Affluence,*" (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts, 1987), 148.]

[4] "An Account of the Life and Writings of John Claudius Loudon," *John Claudius Loudon*, 9-43, 32. Loudon, 1; Gardener's Magazine as quoted in Leighton, 148-149.

[5] David Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste, Andrew Jackson Downing 1815–1852* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1999) 72, 70-71. Adam Sweeting, *Reading Houses and Building Books: Andrew Jackson Downing and the Architecture of Popular Antebellum Literature*, 1835-1855 (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1996) 161.

From a Magistrate's Library

By Ken Krabbenhoft

Despite his prominence in the early history of the Hudson Valley town of Wiltwyck (now Kingston, NY), Gysbert van Imbroch is hardly a household name among students of Dutch colonial history: his story is overshadowed by the careers of more powerful men like Peter Stuyvesant and Johannes de la Montagne, respectively Director and Vice-Director of the Dutch West India Company. It is nevertheless a story that deserves to be told, for it gives us unique insight into the political and religious conflicts that made the wilds of North America an attractive destination for European colonists.

There is controversy about the place and date of van Imbroch's birth. The earliest trustworthy document refers to him as a surgeon from Aachen in the German duchy of Jülich, only twenty-five miles from the Dutch border.[1] At an unknown date he moved or returned to the Netherlands, where he lived until his departure for New Amsterdam in 1652. He practiced surgery there until 1656, when De la Montagne, also a surgeon, summoned him to Fort Orange (Albany) to be his assistant. Marriage to Montagne's elder daughter, Rachel de la Montagne, followed a year later. Around 1660 the couple moved to the as yet unchartered village of Wiltwyck and built a house on the footprint now occupied by the Matthewis Persen House, where they raised their three children.

In Wiltwyck, van Imbroch prospered as a surgeon-barber and merchant, and was named one of the town's three magistrates. He and Rachel witnessed the June 1663 invasion of Wiltwyck by the Esopus Indians that sparked the Second Esopus War. Neither of them were hurt, but Rachel was kidnapped and ransomed three months later with the help of Mohawk intermediaries. The information she supplied about the Indians' fortifications and military strength contributed to the success of the retaliatory strike that ended the Esopus tribe's threat to the Dutch colony. Rachel died in October 1664 and Gysbert in August 1665.[2]

Many details about van Imbroch's judgments in the Wiltwyck court, not to mention Rachel's capture, are readily available. When it comes to his life in Europe, however, the biographical file is pretty much empty. We don't know exactly when he left Aachen or where he studied surgery, and the only thing we know about his family life in Germany and the Netherlands is that he was joint owner, with a sister, of a house in the Duchy of Jülich.[3] Research in German and Dutch archives can undoubtedly clear up many of these questions, but what about the thoughts and feelings that motivated van Imbroch's potentially traumatic departure from the homeland? If we had to rely solely on archival data, we could do little more than assign him to general, depersonalized categories of human experience.

Fortunately we are not limited to the archives, because van Imbroch left a unique chronicle of his innermost life in the form of a private library. That such a library existed at all in the Hudson Valley is remarkable; even more unusual is the fact that, thanks to the household inventory drawn up on September 2, 1665, a week after his death, we know what his books were about, and we know the actual or probable places and dates of publication of most of them, the books themselves having been lost long ago.

The library consisted of forty-eight titles – not much by modern standards, but in 1665 it betokened wealth and education. Books were expensive: they were sewn together and bound by hand, and they had to be brought or ordered from Europe. There was no printing press at all in New York until 1693, and importation to the colony doubled or tripled their cost.[4] Because, with one exception, all of van Imbroch's books were either certainly or probably published before 1652, he most likely brought them with him to the New World. The exception is a hymnal, which may technically have been the property of the Reformed Church.

Finally, we need to remind ourselves that in the seventeenth century the number of people with critical literacy (that is, those who could read and understand abstract or literary texts) was a minority within the minority of people who could read at all. In 2014, UNESCO estimated that eighty-three percent of the adult population of the world was literate.[5] In van Imbroch's time, the number of Europeans who could sign their names (let alone read a book) is thought to have been between twenty and thirty percent of the population.[6] Of the nine men who signed the "Resolution of the Inhabitants of Esopus" petitioning official status for the town in 1658, for example, only five could sign their names.[7]

Almost all of van Imbroch's forty-eight books were either written in Dutch or are Dutch translations of German, French, English, Italian, or Latin originals. Five of them are in the original German, and one is in French – a catechism that may well have belonged to his French Huguenot wife Rachel.[8] The twenty-two books about religion are almost half the library. This percentage was typical for the time. The other categories are medicine and mathematics or accounting, with fifteen titles, and history, with five. The remaining six are about gardening, farming, and social customs.

This essay focuses on the first category: religion. In order to place van Imbroch's interests in context, a brief excursus on into the political and religious situation on the Dutch-German border ca. 1652 is in order.

Politics: The Thirty Years War

It's not too much to see in van Imbroch and his fellow-colonists a foreshadowing of the current immigration crisis in Europe: like refugees fleeing violence in the Middle East, van Imbroch abandoned his native Germany to escape the danger and uncertainty created by the extraordinary savagery of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648).The war began as a Protestant uprising against Catholic rule but soon devolved into a power struggle between vested political interests on both sides of the religious divide.[9] The citizenry of the northern German provinces where the War was principally fought were equally at risk from the violence of marauding soldiers on both sides of the conflict. Troops came from a variety of nations and were often impressed regardless of their religion, not infrequently converting and reconverting for the sake of convenience. The religious lines became so blurred in the constantly shifting allegiances of warring parties that nominally Catholic or Protestant generals ended up commanding mercenary forces from all backgrounds.

As noted above, van Imbroch was from Aachen, where most of the German rulers of the Holy Roman Empire were crowned for seven hundred years. The area was primarily Catholic, but both Catholics and Protestants were bound to the Netherlands by "close confessional, cultural, and economic ties," which had been strengthened by the immigration from both the Protestant and Catholic regions of the Netherlands in the course of decades of fighting between Dutch rebels and the Spanish crown.[10]

Ironically, the Thirty Years War reversed the direction of emigration. The Twelve Years Truce (1609-1621) between the Dutch and the Spanish made the Netherlands a refuge for Germans anxious to avoid the fighting unleashed in their homeland. These dates help us theorize about van Imbroch's movements. If he was in his sixties when he died in 1665, he would have been a young man in 1618, toward the end of a period of peace and prosperity in the Netherlands – a period when the Dutch economy's hunger for immigrant labor created a national population that was only half native Dutch.

The relatively easy cultural and linguistic changeover and the proximity of Aachen to the Dutch border could go a long way toward explaining van Imbroch's decisions to move across the border. He may have been in the Netherlands only a few years before fighting between the Dutch and the Spanish broke out again, but by then there was no going back to Germany, where the war was raging. There's every reason to think that he may have lived in the Netherlands for upwards of thirty years, studying surgery and setting up a practice, engaging in commerce, and becoming a member of the Reformed Church. Even if his residence there was not long, by the time he left for New Amsterdam, van Imbroch was as Dutch as Dutch could be.

Religion: What the Library Tells Us

In the colony as well as in the Netherlands, the Reformed Church had a legal monopoly on public worship. At the same time, as in any confession, the believers' degree of adherence to doctrine was varied. Data indicates that about half of a typical Reformed congregation in the New World were official members; the other half consisted of casual practitioners or "sympathizers" *(liefhebbers)*.[11] Only members were allowed to receive the Eucharist.

The relevance of this to Gysbert van Imbroch's story has to do with his job as a magistrate, which included enforcing the prohibition of heterodox Christian practices. It was therefore understandable that membership in the Reformed Church was required of all magistrates. It was, in fact, the first of the ten requirements listed by Pieter Stuyvesant in his "Instructions for the Court of Justice in Wiltwyk."[12]

In the Netherlands, as in all of Western Europe at this time, religious persecution was the norm rather than the exception. The most recent scholarship has pointed out that religious tolerance as we understand it today was not only nonexistent, it was simply inconceivable.[13] In Europe, the Reformed Church's persecution focused on certain groups, in particular Catholics, Arminians, and Anabaptists. The Anabaptists were treated with special ferocity, constituting the majority of the 2,000 people executed for heresy in the Netherlands between 1550 and 1600 (to put this in perspective, this is ten times the number of executions by the Spanish Inquisition in the same period and about half the total 3,000-5,000 victims in its two-hundred year existence).[14]

This is a fearsome backdrop to the religious politics in New Netherland, where fortunately nothing remotely comparable took place, in large part because there weren't that many heretics among the overwhelmingly Reformed population. It nevertheless indicates that the pressure to conform was real. Surely it was an incentive for a magistrate like Gysbert van Imbroch to heed Peter Stuyvesant's insistence on the primacy of the Reformed Church. In private, however (this is where his library comes in), van Imbroch ventured onto controversial ground to cultivate more nuanced judgments of contemporary Christianity. At least this is what his reading material seems to suggest, as it ranged from the most strident anti-Catholic apologetics to highly unorthodox alternatives to mainline Protestantism, with a bit of everything in between.

Four books will give a good idea of the range of van Imbroch's interests in this area. The first of them reminds us

that the Protestant Reformation was not just a theological and liturgical event: it was a schism that, in the minds of early-modern Europeans, threatened the very identity of Western culture, which had been forged and maintained by a united Christianity for a thousand years. Our twenty-first century suffers from similar fears and anxieties. We know all too well how they can erupt in misunderstandings, rage, and vilification of the perceived enemy. We also know that in print and other media this fear and anger translates into slander that is as devoid of decency as it is of intelligence.

Van Imbroch's library contained an unfortunate example of this in Filips van Marnix's *The Beehive of the Holy Roman Church* (1569).[15] Van Marnix, Lord of St. Aldegonde and Lord of West-Souburg, was a highly-placed official in Flanders and the Netherlands. *The Beehive* of the Holy Roman Church was his most popular book, going through at least ten editions in Dutch between 1569 and 1665 ***(Fig. 1)***.

Van Marnix has nothing new to say about theology or polity; he is content to rehash disagreements between the Reformed and the Catholic Churches regarding scriptural interpretation, the nature of grace, justification, and so forth. The narrative is cast in the voice of a purportedly "Catholic" apologist who misquotes, decontextualizes, and distorts Catholic history and theology in order to incite blind anger at the Church of Rome.

In a contemporary English version, Van Marnix boasts to the reader that his words "wil make thee privy to all the practices of the Babylonicall beast, Rome I mean, the den of dragons and Divels', for in it 'the very secrets of the Romish are so discovered […] that very babes& sucklings may behold their abominations, & spit at their villanous practises, to themselves advantageous, to the Church of Christ offensive, & to the glory of God nothing more derogatory," etc.[16] His book, he says a few pages later, "if it were translated into other tongues, by the industry of the learned, as it is in none, but in Dutch and English…would increase choller so abuda[n]t in the Pope, the Coledge of Cardinals, Monasteries of Monkes, Fraternities of Fryers, Nests of Nuns, as whole handfuls of Helleborus, or pounds of Colloquintida [bitter apple] can never avoyd: and (wot you what?) that wil pull downe their mother the holy Church upon her knees, with thought and sorrow," etc.[17] We get the picture.

By substituting lurid prose for serious argument, Van Marnix does a disservice to serious Christian polemics on both the Catholic and Protestant sides of issues that have been the subject of ecumenical outreach ever since. The question is, why would an apparently judicious man like van Imbroch have a book like this in his library? Is Van Marnix's inflammatory prejudice a reflection of his own thoughts, or a way of keeping himself up to date with popular outrage? It has been suggested that it wasn't his personal possession at all but an item for sale in his shop.[18]

Fig. 1 – Title page of Filips Van Marnix, *The Beehive of the Holy Roman Church* (1569).

We may never know for sure, but other critiques of Catholicism in van Imbroch's library bespeak a calm, abstract, and rational view more consonant with what we would like to imagine the character of a magistrate and member of the Reformed Church to have been. We find the quieter tone of engagement in a book listed in the inventory as P. Paulus van Venetian's *Confession of Faith*.[19] A search of library catalogs in the United States and the Netherlands has turned up no book with this title, but it has revealed that Father Paulus van Venetian (in Italian, Paolo da Venetia) was the pseudonym of Paolo Sarpi, OSM (Friar Servants of Mary), an important figure in the intellectual life of the Church in the first quarter of the seventeenth century.

A Venetian by birth, Sarpi wrote a number of tracts accusing Pope Paul V of overstepping his authority when, in 1606, he excommunicated the Republic of Venice for asserting

the right of secular tribunals to approve gifts of real estate to the Church. This sounds terrible to modern ears but at the time was the equivalent of threatening to sue. It had little effect on the daily life of Venetians, clergy or laity, and was settled peacefully, with the Church conceding the inefficacy of excommunication as a negotiating tool. The point had been made, and Venice respected the Church's need to save face.

The focus of Sarpi's criticism was not the Papacy per se but the Papacy's unwillingness to allow secular oversight of the clergy's right to inherit non-ecclesiastical property, as this conflicted with canon law. The whole episode has been rightly understood as an opening salvo in the battle over the separation of Church and State – presumably a topic of interest to Gysbert van Imbroch, who as magistrate could be called on to make decisions about similar cases.

Sarpi begins his comments by reviewing the legal precedent set by a Venetian law according to which real estate left to the Church had to be sold within two years; if not, a civil magistrate was empowered to make the sale. In 1605, the Senate of Venice changed the law to forbid any citizen of that city or state from "selling, donating, or in any other way transferring real estate to an ecclesiastical person without permission from the Senate." [20] Sarpi notes that Popes had tacitly tolerated similar practices for three hundred years, including Paul V's predecessor Clement VIII, and wonders why Paul is making such a fuss.

In any event, no one was surprised about the form Paul V's response took, and no one was surprised by the diplomatic outcome. The point here is the dramatic contrast between two kinds of religious discourse in Gysbert van Imbroch's library: on the one side Van Marnix's shrill demagoguery, on the other Sardi's straightforward, objective appeal to tradition and practicality. Sardi was known for his sharp tongue, but he knew when to keep it in check.[21]

Van Imbroch's library also testifies to his sense of the importance of Christian spiritual practices that transcend debates over theology and worldly polity. His copy of Jean Taffin's *The Marks of the Children of God, or Consolations for their Suffering* speaks to an ecumenical tradition of prayer and meditation.[22] Born in modern-day Belgium, Taffin was a French-speaking minister of the Reformed Church who served in France, Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands. The slender volume of *The Marks of the Children of God* consists of thirteen easily memorized precepts that speak to believers living in a Europe beset with conflict and uncertainty.

Taffin reminds his Calvinist readers that although they are among the elect that God has chosen for salvation, they are predestined to suffer the ills and misfortunes of human life like everybody else. This is difficult to accept, of course, but Christians must always assume that their suffering is proof of God's love rather than his condemnation, for only those who embrace suffering in the name of Christ will know "the great and incomprehensible happiness of Eternal life promised to the children of God." [23] This call to humility and perseverance is found in several of van Imbroch's religious books, not counting Bibles, catechisms, and psalm books. They stress the Christian's calling to bear the effects of mundane strife and overcome them with faith and virtue.

Sarpi and Taffin were firmly grounded in their respective confessional traditions – even Sarpi, despite his manifestly Protestant leanings, died a friar of the Servants of Mary. It therefore comes as something of a shock to find a book like Sebastian Franck's *The Golden Arch* in van Imbroch's library.[24] It is a tome one most definitely would not expect to find in the library of a sworn defender of the Reformed Church ***(Fig. 2)***.

Educated by Dominicans at the University of Tübingen, Franck was an ordained Catholic priest before converting to Lutheranism. It wasn't long, however, before his idiosyncratic views alienated him from mainstream Protestantism and eventually led to his being kicked out of Strasbourg and Ulm before settling in Switzerland. A quick perusal of the *The Golden Arch*'s 319 folios of small Gothic type reveals that despite his eccentricities, Franck's thinking was systematic and astonishingly erudite. The topics are conventional enough: the three Persons of the Holy Trinity; Satan and God's angels; original sin and the Fall from grace; justification and predestination; divine revelation, sin, and the Commandments; faith and works; hope and the love of God; and the lessons of the Cross. It's when it comes to the practice of virtue that Franck proves himself an enemy of organized Christianity in all of its forms, and explains why Luther called him the Devil's mouthpiece.[25]

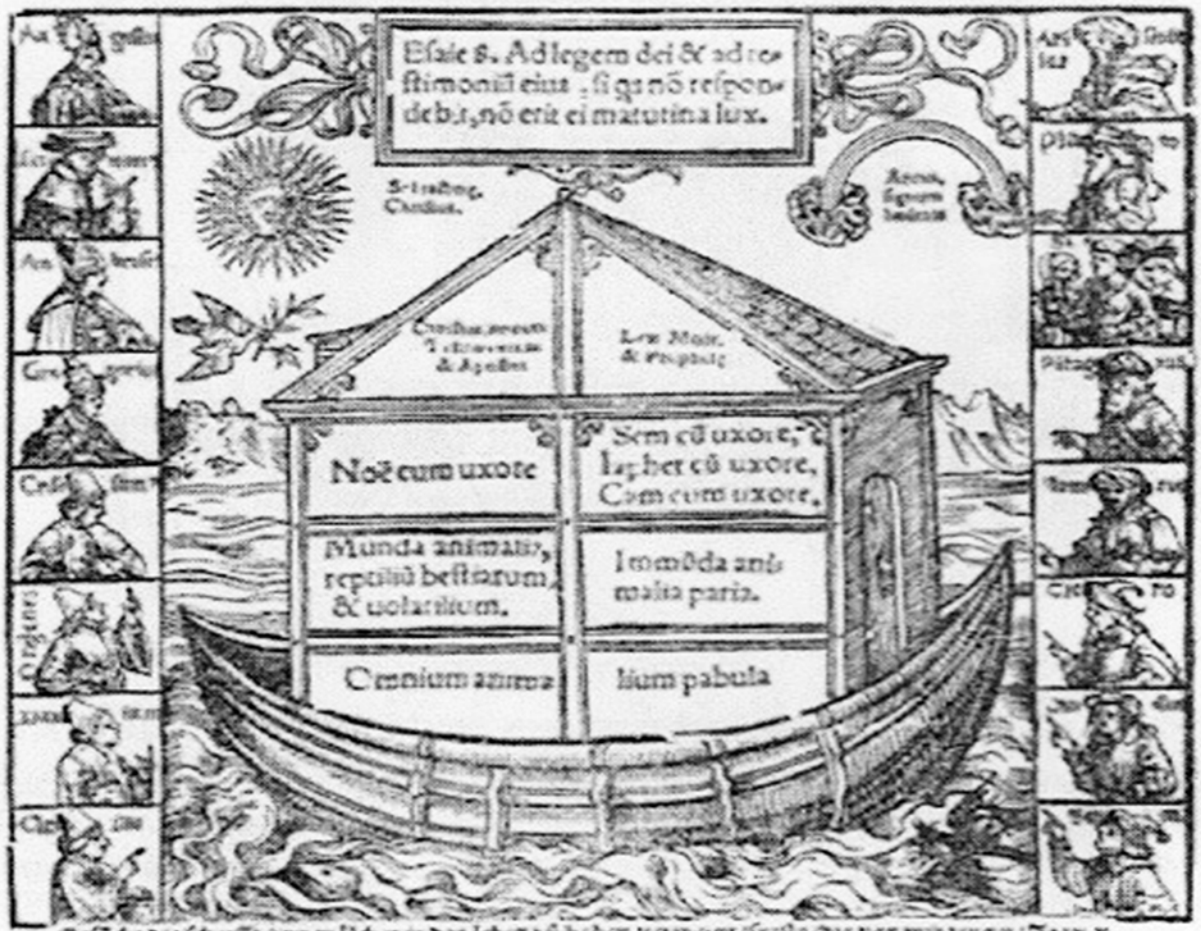
A few quotes from other writings make this clear. In a letter from 1531 he wrote: "We must unlearn all that we have learned from our youth up from the papists, and we must change everything we have got from the Pope or from Luther and Zwingli." A year earlier, in his *Chronicle and Description of Turkey*, he had spoken of a new faith, an invisible church "which will dispense with external preaching, ceremonies, sacraments, bann [sic] and office as unnecessary [and] gather among all peoples an invisible, spiritual Church in the unity of the Spirit and of faith, to be governed wholly by the eternal, invisible Word of God, without external means." [26]

Franck seems never to have doubted that such a faith could be rigorously Christian and at the same time utterly individual. He speaks of "a Communion outside of which there is no salvation, no Christ, no God, no comprehension of Scripture, no Holy Spirit, and no Gospel" but that nevertheless is solely the product of each individual's unique encounter with God, something that "he knows himself in the ground of himself." Many scholars call this "mystical"

Die Guldin Furch

darein der kern vnnd die besten haupt-
sprüch/der Heyligen schrifft/alten Lerer vnd
Väter der kirchen/Auch der erleuchten Heyden vñ Philosophen/für vñ vber die gmein
stell der schrifft (daran der hafft vñ satz vnserer seligkeyt ligt/vñ darin der Christen glau
bē als in ein angel geet) getragen/verfasset vñ eingeleibet sind/Ja viler männer vnd zeit
gen Gottes/gleiche ainhällige schrifftmässige anzaig/vñ bede für gelert vñ vn-
gelert/so nit all bücher mögē habē/oder vor vnnütz nit alles durchle-
sen/Gmeine libricy vñ Teutsche Theologey zůsamē tragē/
durch Sebastian Francken von Werd.

Mit einem Register alles innhalts.



Erforschet die schrifft/inn welcher jr das leben ů haben vermaint/sy ist/die von mir zeuget/Joan.v.
Die Heyligen Gottes leut/haben geredt/getrieben vom Heyligen geyst. 2ᵗ

M. D. XXXVIII.

No. 43. Franck. Die Guldin Arch. 1538.

Fig. 2 – Title page of Sebastian Franck, *The Golden Arch*.

despite the fact that Christian mysticism has always been rooted in membership in the "ecclesia" and its doctrine. Others have called it a foreshadowing of Deism.

However that may be, it is difficult to explain Franck's presence in Gysbert van Imbroch's library as anything but a sign of the wide net cast by the magistrate's personal engagement with questions of faith and an intellectual curiosity grounded in religious orthodoxy.

The Magistrate in Court

Something's missing. In focusing on political and religious matters, this essay has lost sight of Gysbert van Imbroch the citizen of a frontier outpost on the edge of an unchartered wilderness. We've gotten a good look at him as a man of faith, feelings, and intellect, but his daily life took place on the very different level of material existence.

He lived in a one- or two-room house with his wife and three children, in a tiny hamlet where livestock roamed the streets and there was no garbage collection. All of the family's earthly belongings, food, farm implements, and supplies were kept in an unheated garret over the living space. Van Imbroch had neighbors both European and Native American, a boss, colleagues at work, and customers at the store he ran and the tavern he operated with his brother-in-law William de la Montagne.

He had left behind a populous, strife-ridden and war-torn Europe, but Wiltwyck was hardly a haven of peace and civility. Its inhabitants were constantly hauling each other before him and the other magistrates to settle debts, demand pardon for insults, and basically figure out how to live with each other and the Esopus tribe.

Nobody went to court over partisan politics or religion. In July 1655, Evert Pels complained that on Friday he had to chase twenty-three of Aert Martensen Doorn's pigs off his fenced land, and on Monday thirty more; Doorn countered that his fence was in as good shape as Pels'. Tomas Harmensen accused van Imbroch himself of smuggling wine into town through his property; van Imbroch counterclaimed that he did so with Harmensen's permission and threatened to fine him for calling him a usurer. Van Imbroch and fellow-magistrate Tjerck Claesen de Wit were often at each others' throats for late payment or getting short-changed.[27] And so forth.

We need the history of ideas and institutions to understand History with a capital H, but it's in stories and anecdotes about people like Gysbert van Imbroch that we find our common humanity.

ENDNOTES

1 Jaap Jacobs cites a notarial document in the Stadsarchief Amsterdam, dated May 2, 1657, which refers to Van Imbroch as "surgeon from Aachen." Private correspondence, April 13, 2014.
2 Peter R. Christoph, Kenneth Scott, and Kenn Stryker-Rodda, eds., *New York Historical Manuscripts, Dutch, Kingston Papers, Vol. 1, Kingston Court Records, 1661-1667*. (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1976), p. 246.
3 Jacobs correspondence.
4 Jaap Jacobs, *The Colony of New Netherland. A Dutch Settlement in Seventeenth-Century America* (Ithaca NY:Cornell UP, 2009), p. 222.
5 UNESCO (2014). "Statistics on Literacy." http://unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/…/literacy/.../statistics, March 30, 2016.
6 Robert A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe* (Longman, 2002), p. 21.
7 *The Dutch Records of Kingston, Ulster County, New York: Esopus, Wildwyck, Swanenburgh, Kingston. 1658-1684. Part 1: May 31, 1658-November 18, 1664, Esopus-Wildwyck*. Revised translation by Samuel Oppenheim (Cooperstown NY: New York Historical Association, 1912), p. 2.
8 Christoph et al, *Kingston Court Records*, pp. 568-569.
9 Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2009), pp. 9-10.
10 Ibid., pp. 827-835 and 230.
11 Joyce Goodfriend, *Before the Melting Pot. Society and Culture in Colonial New York City, 1664-1730* (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 1992), p. 89, and Evan Haefli, *New Netherlands and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2013), p. 35.
12 Susan Stessin-Cohn. *Wiltwyck: A Look at Life in a Dutch 17th Century Ulster County Town*. Kingston, NY: Ulster County Clerk's Office, s.d. [2010], p. 37.
13 Evan Haefli, *New Netherlands and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty*, pp. 1-19 and R. Po-Chia Hsia and H.F.K. van Nierop, eds, *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge UP, 2002), passim.
14 Although Catholics in the Netherlands were left alone in areas where they were allowed to bribe the authorities with so-called "recognition money," they weren't numerous enough in the colony to avail themselves of this option. See Christine Kooi, "Paying Off The Sheriff (pp.87-91), Henk van Nierop, "Sewing The Bailiff in a Blanket" (pp.102-111) and Samme Zijlstra, "Anabaptistism and Tolerance (p.112) in Po-Hsia & van Nierops, eds., *Calvinism and Religious Toleration*. and Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition* (New Haven CT: Yale UP, 1997), p. 98, For Spanish Inquisition statistics, see https://en.wikipedia.org/Spanish_Inquisition, March 30, 2016, and Kamen, p. 203.
15 Original Dutch text: *De byen-corf der H. Roomscher Kercke*. Van Imbroch's copy is Amsterdam, 1657.
16 Quotations here are from the English translation by George Gilpin: *The Beehive of the Romish Church, a worke of all good Catholikes to be read, and most necessary to be understood. Wherein the Catholke Religion is substantially confirmed, and the Heretikes finely fetcht over the coales* (London,1636), fo. 3v-4r.
17 Van Marnix, ibid., Preface, unpaginated.
18 Jacobs, *The Colony of New Netherland*.
19 The title appears in English in the library inventory, but the book was undoubtedly a Dutch translation of Latin tracts written ca. 1606.
20 Paolo Sarpi, *Considerationi sopra le censure della Santità di Papa Paulo V. contra la serenissima republica di Venetia* (Venice, 1606), fo. 5r-7r.
21 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paolo_Sarpi.
22 Original French title: *Des marques des enfans de Dieu, et des consolations en leur afflictions* (Pons, 1597 [1585]). Van Imbroch's copy is a Dutch translation from the French: *De merckteeckenen der kinderen Gods, ende vertroostingen in hare verdruckingen* (S.l., 1614).
23 Taffin, 1592, Articles 1, 6, and 8-10.
24 *Die guldin arch* (Augsburg, 1538). Van Imbroch's Dutch copy is: *Die Guldē Arcke* having misread Dutch "arcke" (ark) as "harp," no doubt the fault of somebody else's of sloppy handwriting.
25 Reference is to the Bern 1569 edition of *Die guldin arch*. The Luther quote is from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sebatian_Franck, March 30, 2016.
26 This and the following citations are from Rufus M. Jones, "Sebastian Franck: an Apostle of Inward Religion," *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (London: MacMilliam & Co., 1914), p.49.
27 Christoph et al., *Kingston Court Records*. pp. 243 and 179.

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John Green House the Focal Point of HVVA March Study Tour

Built in 1819, the John Green House is the oldest standing sandstone dwelling in the city of Nyack in Rockland County. Green was a lumberman who played a major role in Nyack's commercial development. Located near Unstable and threatened with demolition, the John Green Preservation Coalition formed and persuaded the bank that was foreclosing on the property to give it to them. The John Green House is one of four threatened historic houses in Rockland County that are the subjects of the film This House Matters made by filmmakers Tina Traster and Lennon Nersesian, who also are members of the John Green Preservation Coalition. They believe the film can serve as a subject for the discussion of preservation action in other communities. For more information go to http://www.thishousematters.com/movieposter.jpg.

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It's All About Place

Historic Red Hook's Second Annual House and Barn Expo

When: Sunday, June 19, 11:00 am to 4:00 pm
Where: Elmendorph Inn, 7562 North Broadway, Red Hook
Admission: FREE *(no reservations required)*

A free "info fair" about how to preserve, restore and re-use your old house, barns or outbuildings. There will be hands-on demonstrations, presentations by people who have done it before, and useful takeaways. Drop by any time with your questions and photos for "show and tell" with the experts – experienced artisans, designers, planners and preservationists. There'll be live music and tasty food, too. For more information go to www.historicredhook.org or call 845-758-1920.