



*Anne Castrodale Golovin*

BRIDGEPORT'S GOTHIC ORNAMENT *The Harral = Wheeler House*

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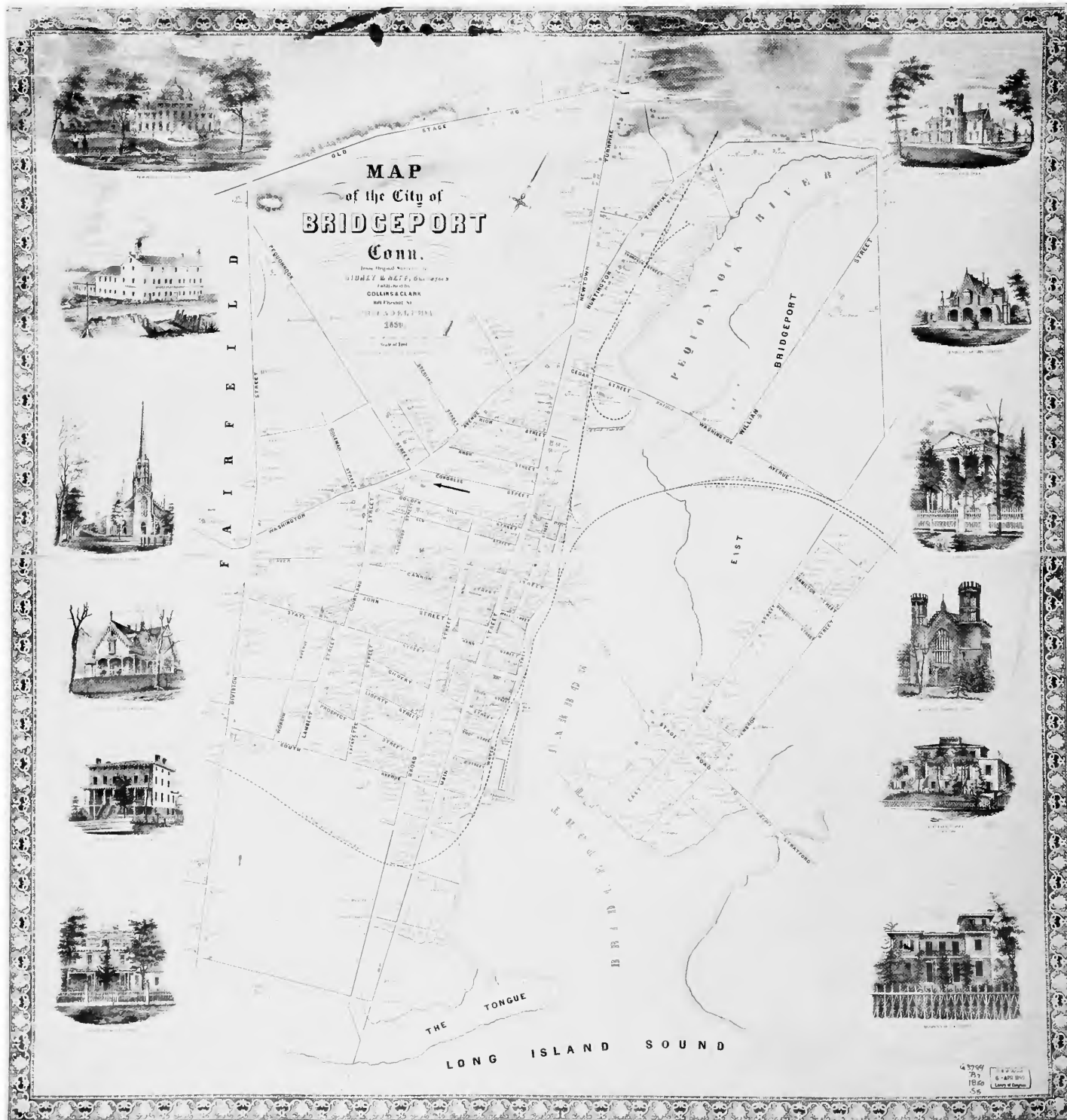


BRIDGEPORT'S GOTHIC ORNAMENT

*The Harral = Wheeler House*

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Figure 1. An 1850 map of Bridgeport, Connecticut, illustrating in vignettes at the top right and left corners the Harral House and P. T. Barnum's "Oranistan." Arrow in center shows location of Harral House. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.)



*IMPOSING DWELLINGS* in the Gothic Revival style were among the most dramatic symbols of affluence in mid-nineteenth-century America. With the rise of industrialization in this period, an increasing number of men from humble beginnings attained wealth and prominence. It was important to them as well as to gentlemen of established means that their dwellings reflect an elevated social standing. The Harral-Wheeler residence in Bridgeport, Connecticut, was an eloquent proclamation of the success of its owners and the excellence of the architect Alexander Jackson Davis. Although the house no longer stands, one room, a selection of furniture, original architectural designs, architectural fragments, and other supporting drawings and photographs are now in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution. These remnants of Bridgeport's Gothic "ornament" serve as the basis for this study. *AUTHOR.*—Anne Castrodale Golovin is an associate curator in the Department of Cultural History in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of History and Technology.

**B**RIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT, was fast becoming a center of industry by the middle of the nineteenth century; carriages, leather goods, and metal wares were among the products for which it was known. As was characteristic of developing industrial towns of this era, there was a considerable amount of building activity resulting from the rapidly increasing population. The Bridgeport *Republican Standard* noted in 1846 that ". . . an unusual number of dwelling-houses are going up, and there is a loud call for carpenters, masons, &c."<sup>1</sup> Local newspapers commented on current construction projects with wonder and pride. By November of 1847 it was observed that

. . . a great improvement in the manner of building is perceptible here and hereabouts. Not to

*speak of the Eastern glories of Iranistan, we have and are to have in this vicinity, many dwelling-houses worthy of particular notice as specimens of architecture. So say strangers who pass through Fairfield, or over our Golden Hill. The edifices recently erected, and those now in progress, add and will add greatly to the attractions of the latter locality.*<sup>2</sup>

Aside from "Iranistan," P. T. Barnum's "magnificent Oriental Villa" in Bridgeport which was completed in 1847,<sup>3</sup> the house begun in that year on Golden Hill for Henry Kollock Harral most intrigued the mid-century inhabitants of the city. A writer for *The Evening Star* of June 30, 1847, obviously pleased by what he saw, described an unnamed site but doubtless that of Harral.



*Figure 2.* As an “architectural composer,” Davis used details from actual Gothic buildings illustrated in books on architecture, arranging them in an original and picturesque manner. The departure from complete medieval models of construction was characteristic of the Gothic Revival style in mid-nineteenth-century America. A comparison of the Harral House with another Davis-designed residence reveals a close relationship between its front facade and that of the Waddell House in New York City (Figure 3) dating from 1844. Davis reversed his design for the Waddell dwelling, added a first-story window on one side and a veranda. By making these major changes—and some more subtle—Davis achieved a more pleasing balance in the front of the Harral House. (Smithsonian negative 61190.)

*There are workmen busy upon this estate. They are behind that grove of trees and they are engaged in rearing an edifice, which all know will add great interest to our lovely town. I cannot inform you what is to be the general style of the main building—but see those finished small ones. Everybody takes that pretty stable for a cottage of itself, and I do not wonder; I have always coveted it for my horse.*

Long before the house was finished, it was recognized that it would be an architectural attraction in Bridgeport.

The man for whom this house was being built was a newcomer to the city who “began the world poor.”<sup>4</sup> Henry Harral, born in 1808 in Savannah, Georgia, had learned the saddle and harness-making trade, probably in Newark, New Jersey. His





Figure 3. The Waddell House which was erected at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 37th Street, New York City. (Courtesy of I. N. Phelps Stokes Collection, Prints Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.)

business ability had been proven both in Charleston, South Carolina, and in New York before he went to Bridgeport in about 1836. In Bridgeport, he became associated with Philo C. Calhoun, and together they established a firm for the manufacture of saddles and harnesses. Although he had been a resident of Bridgeport for less than a decade, Henry Harral was elected mayor of the city in 1845 and subsequently served several one-year terms in this office. He was also a senator in the state legislature for one year.<sup>5</sup> His quickly gained prominence in city affairs, as well as his financial success, warranted an elaborate dwelling. By 1846, Harral

resolved to build a new home on his Golden Hill property overlooking Long Island Sound.<sup>6</sup>

At a time when builders more frequently than architects were responsible for the plan and appearance of houses, Harral employed an architect to provide him with designs for a villa and the necessary outbuildings. His choice may have been influenced by having seen the splendid William Waddell residence in New York City<sup>7</sup> (Figure 3), or possibly by architectural illustrations included in Andrew Jackson Downing's books *A Treatise on the Theory and Practise of Landscape Gardening . . . with Remarks on Rural Architecture* and

*Cottage Residences*.<sup>8</sup> Whatever the reason, he selected Alexander Jackson Davis (1803–1892) of New York, and directed that his house be designed in the “Gothic order.” Although Davis was competent in the Greek Revival and the Italianate styles, he was an undisputed master of the neo-Gothic style. Davis had gained invaluable experience during his partnership with the well-known architect and originator of the lattice truss, Ithiel Town, between 1829 and 1835 and later in 1842 and 1843. This alliance allowed Davis access to Town’s superb collection of architectural books—said to have been the best in the United States—which provided a basis for the formation of his Gothic vocabulary.<sup>9</sup>

Emerging for the first time from a tradition in which possibilities for whimsy and variety in architecture were limited, a taste for the picturesque was developing in America by the 1840s. Contemporary books of designs for domestic architecture published in the United States followed English prototypes.<sup>10</sup> They contained plans for modest as well as elaborate dwellings in various styles—Gothic, Italian, Elizabethan, and Swiss, to name a few. These widely consulted volumes were more than builders’ guides; accompanying the illustrations and descriptions of houses, there were often statements of the author’s philosophy of architecture, a declaration of the moral effects of buildings, and recommendations for interior finishing and furnishing.

Building a home was an acknowledged means of proclaiming one’s individuality. A. J. Downing, the most influential American advisor on the subject of domestic architecture during the decades bordering 1850, made this explicit.

*We believe not only that a house may have an absolute beauty of its own, growing out of its architecture, but that it may have a relative beauty no less interesting, which arises from its expressing the life and occupation of those who build or inhabit it. In other words, we think the home of every family, possessed of character may be made to express that character, and will be most beautiful (supposing the character good), when in addition to architectural beauty it unites this significance or individuality.*<sup>11</sup>

After stating that a villa<sup>12</sup> “should, above all things manifest individuality,” Downing specified

the styles and temperaments he considered compatible, concluding:

*. . . there are the men of imagination—men whose aspirations never leave them at rest—men whose ambition and energy will give them no peace within the mere bounds of rationality. These are the men for picturesque villas—country houses with high roofs, steep gables, unsymmetrical and capricious forms. It is for such that the architect may safely introduce the tower and the campanile—any and every feature that indicates originality, boldness, energy, and variety of character.*<sup>13</sup>

The residence designed for Henry Harral suited him well since he was

*. . . a man of great activity and energy, and in business matters had very few equals. . . . In every situation, public and private, he discharged his duties promptly and faithfully. He was always frank, open-hearted and liberal. He began the world poor, and though only in the forty-sixth year of his age, he died possessed of a handsome fortune. . . .”*<sup>14</sup>

The picturesque Gothic Revival style was indeed appropriate for a man of imagination in the 1840s. A house bristling with pinnacles, towers, battlements, and other irregularities in decoration as well as in conformation was a radical departure from the symmetrical designs which had dominated American architecture. The character of such mid-century dwellings was largely dictated by Downing and Davis. Of the “Gothic” houses erected in this country, Harral’s was one of the finest.<sup>15</sup>

Davis began working on the Harral commission in mid-February of 1846, first producing designs for the coach house and stable and “Studies upon a plan for dwelling.” He completed the coach house and stable designs on March 7. Five days later, a total of eleven drawings—plans and elevations for the house—was sent to Harral (Figures 2 and 11). By the end of that month, Davis had completed twenty drawings of such details as cornices, windows, ceilings, and finials, signifying Harral’s acceptance of the proposed villa.<sup>16</sup> At Harral’s request, Davis provided designs for a gate and an adjoining fence in June. The architect received two-hundred and sixty-five dollars from Harral for his services.<sup>17</sup> Two years later, Harral owed Davis an additional eighty-six dollars for drawings and visits to the site.<sup>18</sup> These are the only charges Davis



Figure 4. The brick walls of the house were stuccoed and scored to simulate stonework. The *Bridgeport Republican Standard* of August 1, 1848, reported that another house nearby was being stuccoed; this was done under the direction of a Mr. Gill from New Haven "... who has a high reputation in the *stucco* line. The finish and durability of his work have tended very much to change the opinion of the public in reference to the value of this material for building purposes. It is now preferred by competent judges, for the most expensive edifices." (Smithsonian negative 68114.)

is known to have made for his role in the execution of Harral's house.

Before the building was completed, Davis made at least five trips from New York City to Bridgeport—a three-to-five-hour steamboat ride. Since he sometimes stayed for several days, Harral provided diversions for Davis, including dinners in his home, walks, chess games, and carriage rides to the nearby idyllic town of Fairfield or to Barnum's opulent residence.<sup>19</sup> The first of these excursions to Connecticut was in September 1846.<sup>20</sup> Not until July 1847 did he return to the site.<sup>21</sup> The house was then in the early stages of construction. One month later, the *Republican Standard* explained to interested citizens the activity on the Harral property:

*Mayor Harral is building an extensive Castle on the lot attached to his present residence on Golden Hill.—It will be of the Gothic order, fronting about 76 feet and extending back about 100 feet, and*

*there are to be towers and what nots. The main tower will be some 60 feet in height.—The building, which is to be brick with stucco, will be completed by another summer. It will make a very handsome appearance.*<sup>22</sup>

By November, sufficient progress had been made to allow comment on the "magnificent view" from the tower:

*As the Tower is some 75 feet in height and on elevated ground, the view is a very extensive one, and the effect of the stained glass is to array the landscape in all manner of colors, at the pleasure of the beholder.*<sup>23</sup>

The *Republican Standard* noted on August 1, 1848:

*The large and handsome edifice erected by Ex-Mayor HARRAL is nearly completed, and the building now standing upon the lot is soon to be removed. There are few edifices in this part of the*



Figure 5. Accompanying this ink and wash drawing is a separate hand-lettered label bearing the following information: "English Collegiate Gothic Mansion of Mrs. Harral at Bridgeport, Ct. Alex. J. Davis, Architect." It is probable that this is the representation of the Harral House which Davis exhibited at the New York World's Fair in 1853 and at the National Academy of Design in 1865. (Courtesy of The Avery Architectural Library, Columbia University.)

*world to be compared with the new CASTLE. It has been built in the very best manner, under the direction of Mr. BEERS,<sup>24</sup> and when the lot is cleared and the grounds arranged it will add greatly to the attractions of our GOLDEN HILL.*

The house (Figure 4), when finished, was proclaimed by Downing to be a "very complete villa."<sup>25</sup> In Davis's words, it was "well executed," an expression of approval unusual for the architect.<sup>26</sup> He exhibited a drawing of the Harral residence at the 1853 World's Fair in New York City (Figure 5).<sup>27</sup> Probably it was the same drawing of "Mrs. Harral's house" which as late as 1865 was exhibited

at the National Academy of Design.<sup>28</sup> Davis's pride in the "English Pointed Style" dwelling is unquestionable.

Harral's satisfaction with his "castle" is evident from the fact that he again consulted Davis in 1852 when he decided to add an office and library to the house.<sup>29</sup> Designs, produced at a cost of fifty dollars, were finished in September of 1853<sup>30</sup> and presumably construction was to begin the following year (Figure 6). Early in 1854, however, Henry Harral died of tuberculosis. Thus, Davis's design for a monument to Harral in Mountain Grove Cemetery was constructed rather than the library and office addition to the house.<sup>31</sup>

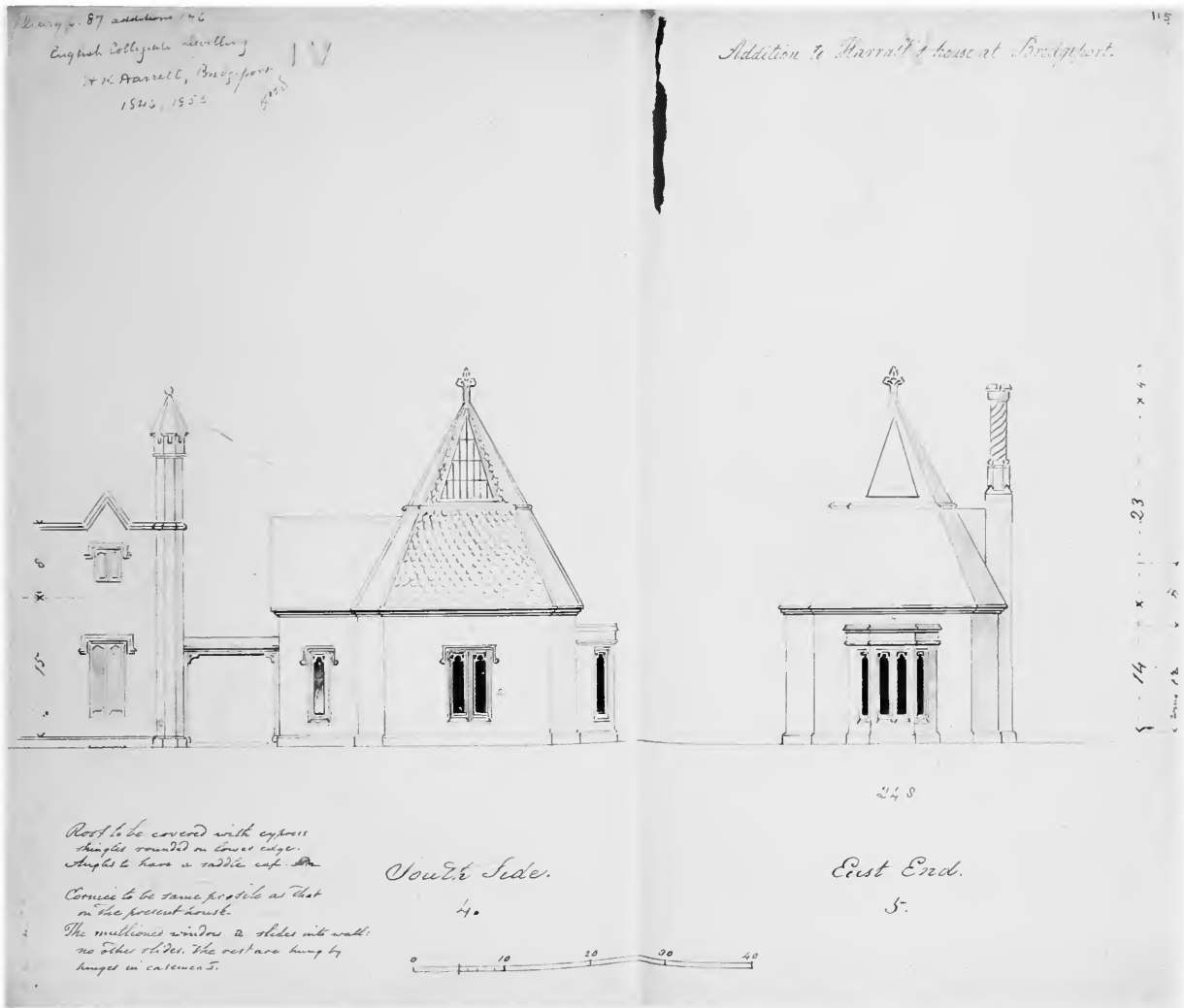


Figure 6. Davis designed a library addition for the Harral House in 1853 which would have complemented the existing structure. (24.66.1405[92]. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1924.)

**H**ENRY HARRAL'S WIDOW occupied the house until it was acquired in 1866 by Nathaniel Wheeler<sup>32</sup> who, in terms of prominence and business acumen, was an appropriate successor to ownership. Wheeler had learned his father's trade of carriage-making in Watertown, Connecticut, where he was born in 1820. At about the age of twenty-five, he recognized the economic potential in the manufacture of small metal items. Wheeler entered

this business and soon introduced machine methods to facilitate production. Allen B. Wilson's recently developed sewing machine came to his attention in 1850, and Wheeler boldly contracted to produce 500 machines in his Watertown shop. During the following year, the firm Wheeler, Wilson & Company was established. Larger facilities for making sewing machines were required by 1856, and the business moved to Bridgeport. Wheeler be-



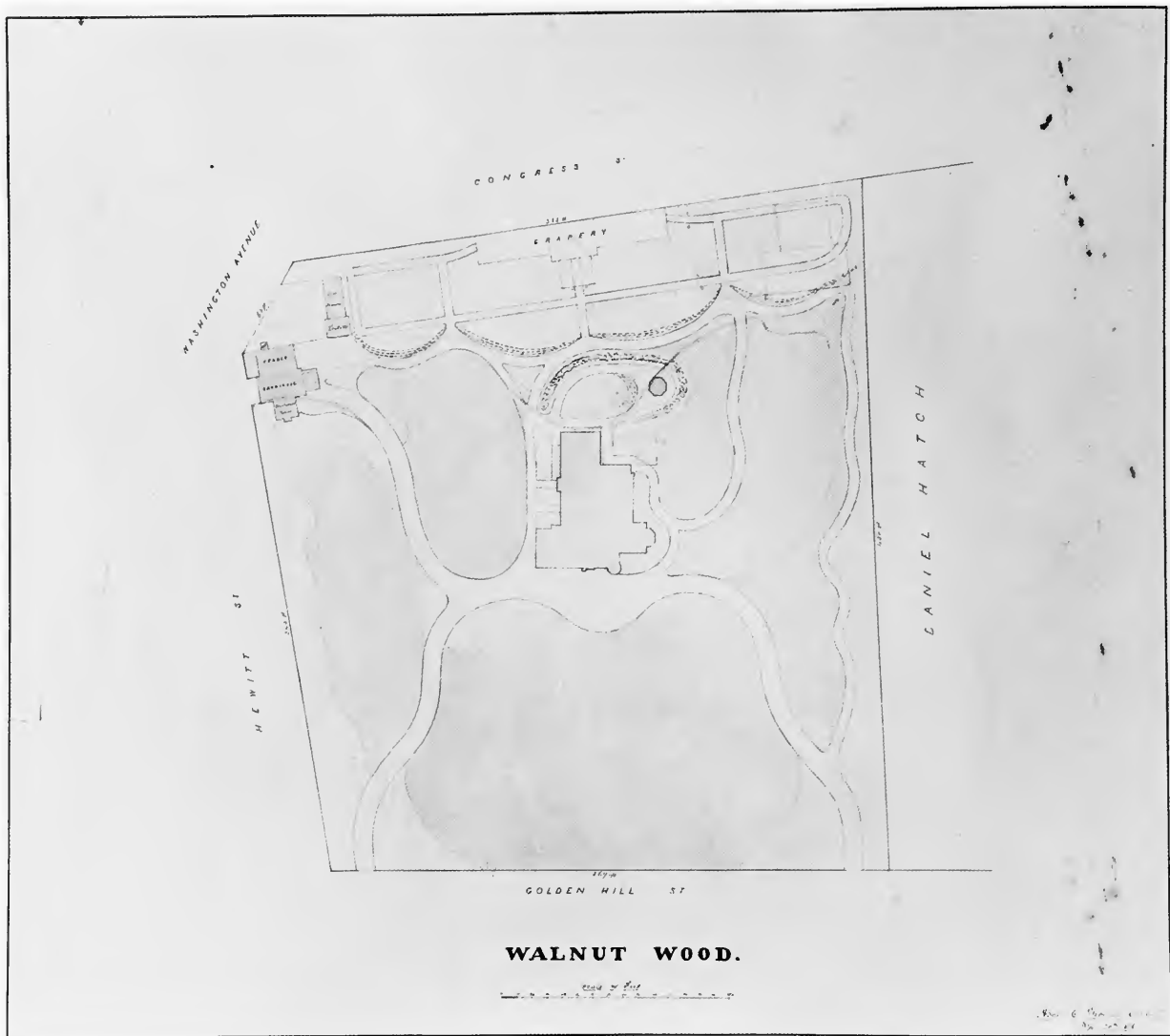


Figure 7. A topographical drawing in ink and watercolor of the Wheeler estate made by Abner C. Thomas in September of 1866 delineates the placement of buildings at the time Wheeler acquired it. Changes to the property—possibly proposed by the architects Lambert and Bunnell—were roughly sketched in pencil.

Thomas, a civil engineer, made a similar drawing of Seaside Park in Bridgeport the following year which is in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution's Department of Cultural History in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of History and Technology. This bears, in addition to his signature, the stamp of Olmstead, Vaux and Company. Frederick Olmstead and Calvert Vaux were the noted landscape architects responsible for New York's Central Park. According to the *Bridgeport Daily Standard* of January 15, 1867, the drawing of Seaside Park was ". . . obtained and presented to the Park Commissioners by Mr. Nathaniel Wheeler at considerable expense, and is an example of public spirit worthy of special mention" and could be seen in the office of Lambert and Bunnell. (Smithsonian negative 71342.)

came one of the city's most affluent and respected citizens. Like Harral, he took great interest in improving Bridgeport and contributed time and

money to municipal projects. He was also involved in state politics, serving as a representative from Bridgeport to the state legislature for six sessions.<sup>33</sup>



*Figure 8.* Compared with Davis's plan for an addition to the Harral residence, the library built in 1866—seen in this photograph as the projecting bay at the back of the house—was undistinguished. Fortunately, however, it was compatible with the established architectural style. (Smithsonian negative 68115.)

The Gothic villa was as proper a setting for Nathaniel Wheeler as it had been for Henry Harral.

A topographical drawing made by Abner C. Thomas in September 1866 indicates the arrangement of buildings on the property at the time Wheeler purchased it (Figure 7). The name of the estate as noted by Thomas was "Walnut Wood," while an undated pencil sketch of the house by Davis is captioned "Harral's Walnut Grove" suggesting that this was the designation used by Harral.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps Wheeler chose to modify the name to reflect his ownership of the residence long associated with the Harral family. Since wal-

nut trees were a distinctive feature of the site, either title was appropriate.

The idea of adding a library to the house, originally proposed by Harral, was carried out by Wheeler in 1866. Should Wheeler have been aware of Davis's drawings for a library addition, he chose to ignore them. There is little doubt that he employed the local architects, Edward R. Lambert and Rufus W. Bunnell, known to have been working for him at this time, to design "A library two stories high, with a room 22 by 29 feet, with a handsome bay window on the east side . . ." <sup>35</sup> in a style compatible with the existing building (Figure 8). Lambert and Bunnell were responsible for



Figure 9. Davis's coach house and stable was replaced soon after Nathaniel Wheeler acquired "Walnut Wood." The *Bridgeport Evening Standard* of October 24, 1866 commented "We notice that Mr. N. Wheeler, has commenced to excavate for a new barn, for the Harral Place on Golden Hill. The barn is to be a splendid one, and was designed by those excellent Architects, Messrs. Lambert & Bunnell. The building is to be of pressed brick, with 50 feet front. The main part will be 54 feet on the side, with a wing 22 by 33 feet. The wing is to have 8 nice stalls. The carriage room will be 38 by 34 feet, and the harness room 10 by 14. The loft extends over the whole building." (Smithsonian negative 68112.)

planning Wheeler's new coach house and stable (Figure 9), which was started in October 1866, as well as a "plant house" and gardener's cottage on another of his properties.<sup>36</sup> No other major changes are known to have been made to the external appearance of the Wheeler estate. Four years after Nathaniel Wheeler's death in 1893, a history of Bridgeport was published containing the following comment on his role in the decorating of "Walnut Wood."

*The beautiful residence on Golden Hill, in which he [Nathaniel Wheeler] lived for so many years, and*

*where he breathed his last, is now occupied by Mrs. Wheeler and her sons. The artistic taste of Mr. Wheeler is displayed in the interior appointments of the spacious dwelling, and in the treatment of the surrounding grounds. It is to be hoped that the homestead may long remain as it now is—an ornament to the city he loved so well.*<sup>37</sup>

Wheeler's twin sons, William and Archer, lived in the house until their deaths in 1920 and 1956, respectively.<sup>38</sup> Approximately two years after Archer Wheeler died, Bridgeport's "ornament" was demolished.<sup>39</sup>

NUMEROUS ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS have acknowledged the importance of this house in the context of the American Gothic Revival style, but few have commented on its interior. Therefore, little attention has been given to the fact that major alterations were made to the original treatment of the interior. Rooms known to the Harral family were significantly different from those occupied by the Wheelers.<sup>40</sup> Since the edifice

no longer exists, an investigation of the subject is fraught with difficulties. A thorough analysis of the interior decoration as well as the structure itself can only be made by an architectural historian familiar with the house and present at the time it was razed and valuable information was uncovered.

The sole surviving room from the house (hereafter referred to as the Harral-Wheeler Bedroom) is installed in the Smithsonian Institution's Na-



*Figure 10.* The Harral-Wheeler Bedroom, now part of an exhibit "The Growth of the United States" in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of History and Technology, is the only surviving room from "Walnut Wood." On March 30, 1850, Davis noted in his journal that he had spent an evening at the Harral residence and "made suggestions in relation to H's painting interior walls. . ." The specifics of his advice are not known. In the absence of any information about the wall color first used in this room, a tint of fawn was selected for the reconstructed walls. The color fawn was repeatedly recommended by A. J. Downing. It was necessary to repaint the flat planes of the ceiling after the room installation was completed; the same ivory color was used as was present in two layers covering the plaster. The raised plaster ceiling ornament retains its original ivory-colored paint and gilding. The woodwork was repainted to simulate oak grain, its original treatment. The room has been photographed with a wide-angle lens through the curved viewing glass. (Smithsonian negative 72-3207.)

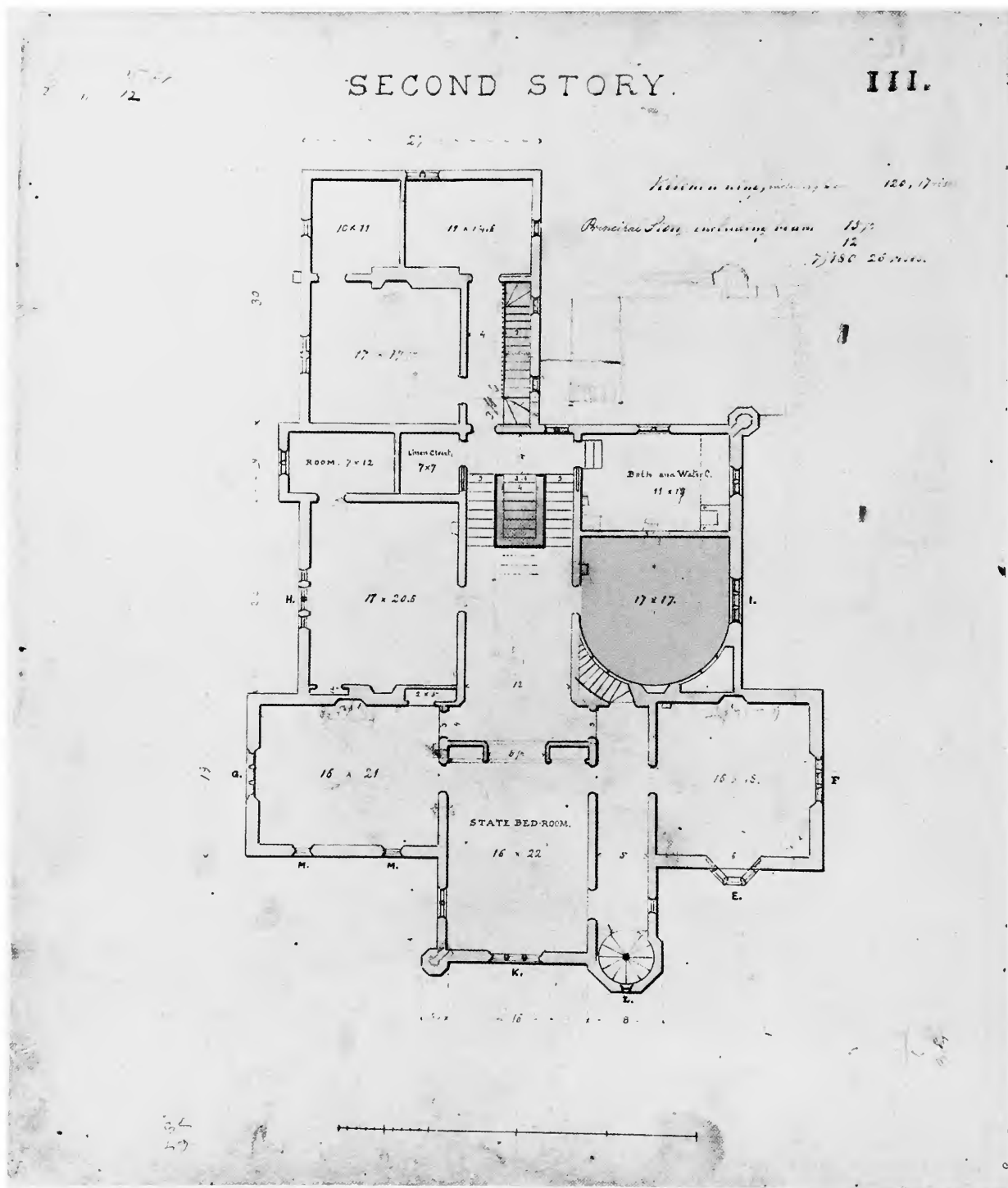


Figure 11. The original location of the Harral-Wheeler Bedroom in this plan of the second story of the house is shown in a darker tone. The other drawings by Davis for the house in the Smithsonian Institution's collections include plans for the cellar, principal story, attic and roof, as well as elevations for the east and west sides and a longitudinal section. (Smithsonian negative 64485.)



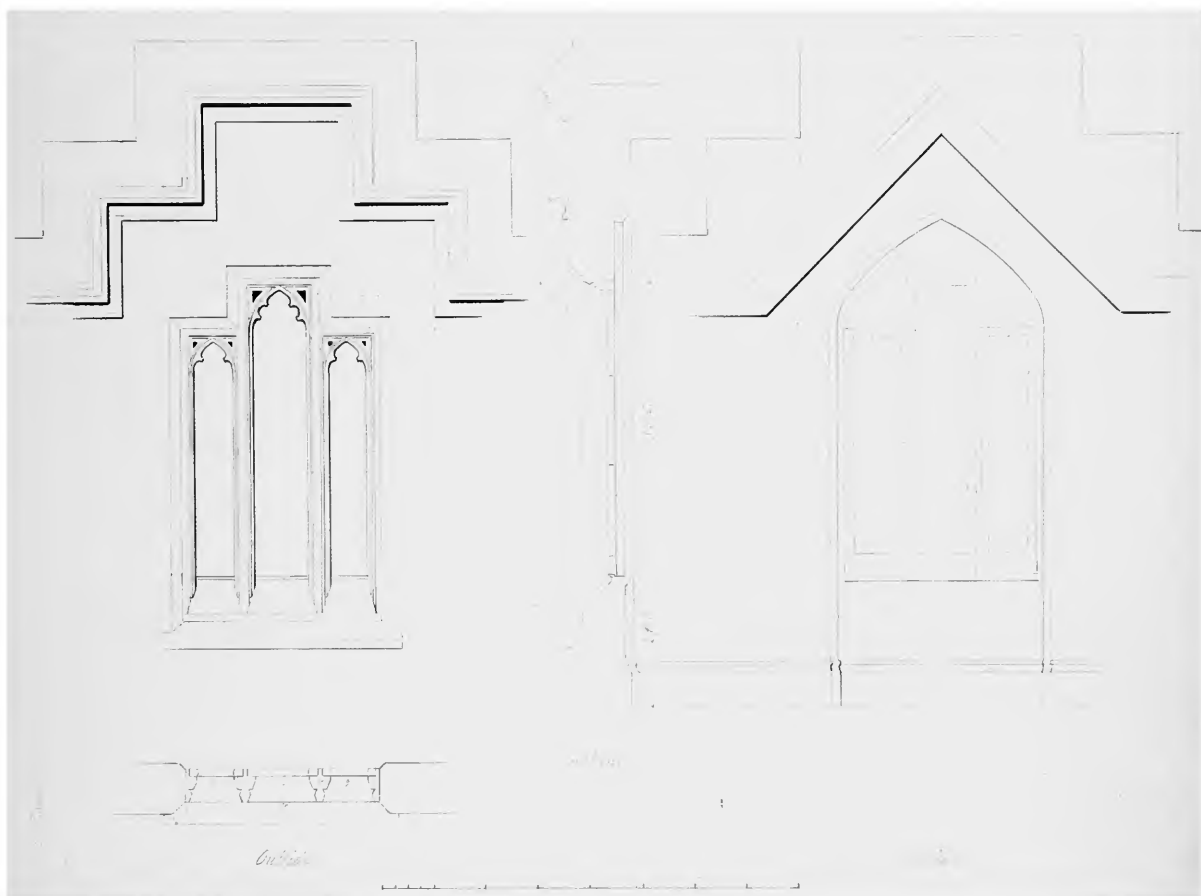


Figure 12. Davis's design for the window frame of the Harral-Wheeler Bedroom. (24.66.650. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1924.)

tional Museum of History and Technology (Figure 10). It was the east central bedroom on the second floor. A study of this room is aided by architectural fragments, photographs, manuscripts and drawings,<sup>41</sup> and by contemporary Bridgeport newspaper accounts.

While admittedly not the most elaborate of the rooms designed for Harral, this bedroom illustrates the degree of finesse and originality with which the interior was executed. The lack of repetitiveness characteristic of the exterior was also apparent inside the house. No two rooms were alike; their shapes, sizes, and ceiling conformations differed for the sake of novelty. The Harral-Wheeler Bedroom was interestingly contrived. Its tent ceiling

does not follow the structural framework, and the curved fireplace wall is superimposed on a square room leaving one corner to accommodate a stairway to the attic and the other to serve as a closet.

Contemporary architects and advisors about interior decoration had recommended that the house's interior should be finished in a style consistent with the exterior.<sup>42</sup> Davis's designs for the doors, windows, fireplaces, and "timber open work" ceilings of "Walnut Wood" were compatible with this point of view. Downing, whose ideas about architecture were allied with those of Davis, advocated the use of exposed beams in Gothic residences, and, indeed, they appeared in most of Harral's rooms. If the beams were not made of oak, then Downing ad-

vised that they be painted in imitation of oak or some other native wood. Oak graining was used in the bedroom during the Harral occupancy; the painted grain was found on the woodwork under layers of pink and of ivory-colored paint. No trace of graining remains on the ridge piece, but it would be logical to assume that it was intended to appear as a wooden support and would, therefore, have been grained accordingly. The inclined planes at either side would have been painted "some pleasing neutral tone" or grained to have the appearance of boards, according to the dictates of Downing.<sup>43</sup>

The Rococo scroll and cartouche plaster ceiling ornamentation of the Harral-Wheeler Bedroom is a departure from the prevailing style. Since Victorians were capable of combining styles with no offense to their sensitivities, this mixture of decorative motifs could date from the time when the house was built. Support for this possibility is provided by Gervase Wheeler, a Philadelphia architect who published house-pattern books. In a discussion of the Gothic style, he quotes "another writer" who stated: "The introduction of stucco has been the ruin of correct Gothic; . . ." Wheeler continues with his comment:

*. . . and, perhaps, now it is an open question whether, in detailing the embellishment of a villa in such a style, it were not safer for the architect to trust in no way to this material and mode of decoration; at all events, until the plaster-decorators have purer models for their cast-work—it would be better to trust to simple mouldings rather than to the exaggerated foliage and vulgar ornamentation now so much the rage.*<sup>44</sup>

The Rococo ceiling detail could be a reflection of the first owner's taste rather than that of the architect. Davis mentioned the second-floor ceilings in his journal entries, but no reference was made to plaster decoration. In November 1847, Davis went to Bridgeport "to direct about ceilings of upper rooms. (timber open work.)" and in March 1850, he "made suggestions in relation to H's painting interior walls," again without reference to plaster decoration.<sup>45</sup> Should the Rococo ornament not have been original to the ceiling, when would it have been applied?

Enough information has been pieced together from scattered references to prove that the decorative scheme of some rooms was altered twice dur-

ing the nineteenth century. "Walnut Wood" was first "modernized" in 1866 and 1867. Responsibility for changes in the painted wall and ceiling decoration (Figure 13) can be attributed to two painters from New York City—Henry Duettmann and Edward Engle.<sup>46</sup> Evidence of Duettmann's presence in Bridgeport is found on a section of a false purlin from the "State Bedroom" bearing two markedly different types of painted decoration—a simulated walnut grain covered by a polychromed design designated as "Moorish." A penciled inscription on the side of this fragment reads: "Henry Duettmann from New York City painted this House in the Yaer [sic] of the Lord 1867." Represented on the purlin is grained decoration in keeping with the Gothic style intended by Davis, and a colored decorative scheme more fashionable in the 1860s which was preferred by the second owner. Edward Engle is mentioned in the *Bridgeport Evening Standard* of April 3, 1867, as having been "engaged the past winter in the house of Nathaniel Wheeler. . . ." <sup>47</sup> Since Engle is known to have "supervised" the frescoing of the French Theatre on Fourteenth Street in New York,<sup>48</sup> perhaps his role at the Wheeler residence was again supervisory with Duettmann working as an assistant. The effect of the completed renovation was conveyed by an account in the *Bridgeport Evening Standard* of a celebration occasioned by the marriage of Edward Harral, the son of the first owner, and Julia Crissy, the sister of Mrs. Wheeler, in June 1867.

*A wedding party, probably the largest and most elegant ever known in this State, occurred last evening at the residence of Nathaniel Wheeler, Esq., on Golden Hill. . . . The splendid residence of Mr. Wheeler, attracted universal attention and admiration. Its location is unsurpassed, the grounds are large and well adorned, and the house is appropriate for the place. It was recently purchased and remodeled by Mr. Wheeler. All that good taste could suggest and wealth secure has been applied to the adornment of this elegant residence. It is no easy task to furnish the interior of such a house in a manner suitable to its location, without, at least in some point offending the eye by exuberance or inappropriateness, but we think it has been remarkably successful in the present instance. Perhaps the ceilings are too ornate in one or two of the rooms, but generally they are exceedingly fine.*

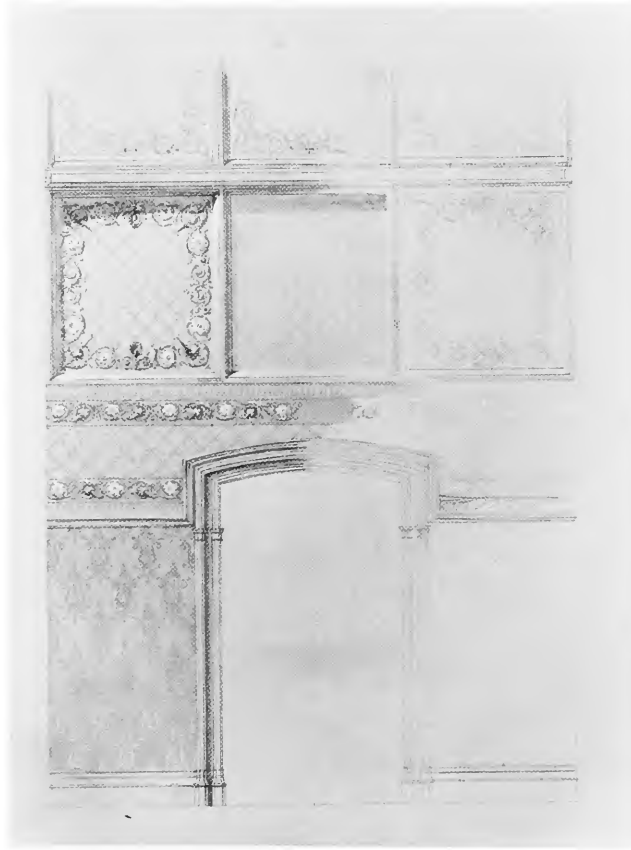


Figure 13. The painted wall and ceiling decoration recorded in this early photograph of the east drawing room was probably applied when the house was remodeled in 1866 and 1867. Two painters from New York City—Edward Engle and Henry Deuttmann—were responsible for the interior painting done at that time. (Smithsonian negative 68113.)

*There is that air of cheerfulness and comfort everywhere apparent, which comes not of wealth, but of taste, and is found not alone in any particular class of houses, but which always surrounds and cheers those who are within them. . . .*<sup>49</sup>

Before the end of the century, portions of the house were again transformed. Eleven ink, pencil, and watercolor designs for embellishing the walls and ceilings of major rooms still exist (Figure 14). Again, eclecticism—the recurring theme in a consideration of “Walnut Wood”—is apparent in these designs. One of the drawings bears the stamp of “A. Kimbel & Sons, Nos. 7 and 9 East 20th Street,

New York,” indicating that they were executed sometime between 1883 and 1894 when the firm was at this address.<sup>50</sup> Although Anthony Kimbel and his sons were specified in the New York City directories as cabinetmakers and furniture dealers, they obviously were involved in interior decorating. The redecoration of at least one room was based on a drawing from this group (Figure 15). In 1889, Mrs. Wheeler had two sets of furniture re-covered in Bridgeport and, shortly thereafter, she purchased locally a large quantity of fabric along with accessories to upholstering or drapery making. A hall carpet was acquired in 1892 in New York City. In the same year, Mrs. Wheeler went to Philadelphia



*Figure 14.* This pencil and watercolor design, executed by A. Kimbel and Sons of New York City, was used in the east drawing room of "Walnut Wood" when it was redecorated sometime between 1883 and 1894. The delicate design proposed for the ceiling and wall above the picture molding was applied to the principal wall area as well (Figure 15). (Smithsonian negative 68110.)

and purchased furniture from George W. Smith and Company, a firm which designed and manufactured "artistic furniture" and imported French and Italian furnishings as well.<sup>51</sup> The Kimbel drawings and Mrs. Wheeler's concern with the furnishings probably indicate a general refurbishing of the interior in the late 1880s and early 1890s.

It is doubtful that there were subsequent alterations to the house, despite a notation written in pencil beside Henry Duettmann's signature on the purlin fragment: "Gus Lindhall, E. J. Colborne, Hugo Erickson, Alex Peterson redecorated side walls Feb. 1923 For John F Fay." Archer Wheeler, the owner at that time, stated in 1933 that the interior of the house had not been changed in any significant way since his father's occupancy.<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, the term "redecorated," used by the painters working for a Bridgeport upholsterer and decorator John Fay,<sup>53</sup> probably can be interpreted as repeating or touching up an already established design.

This study of changes made to the house interior has revealed no definite indication as to when the plaster scroll and cartouche decoration was applied to the Harral-Wheeler Bedroom ceiling. It positively indicates, however, that the character of at least some of the rooms was altered substantially after "Walnut Wood" was acquired by Wheeler. Since the revival of the Rococo style was fashionable from the 1840s through the 1860s, the molded plaster work could have been applied by Harral or during Wheeler's redecorating spree in 1866 and 1867.<sup>54</sup>



Figure 15. This is the only room for which photographs have been located showing two decorative schemes. For comparison, see Figure 13 for the earlier appearance. (Smithsonian negative 72-2933.)



MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY writers on the subject of interior decoration advocated that furniture should correspond to the style of architecture surrounding it.<sup>55</sup> A problem existed in furnishing a Gothic residence, as Downing admitted, since:

*Well-designed furniture in this [the Gothic] style is rarely seen in this country, and is far from common on the other side of the Atlantic. . . . There has been little attempt made at adapting furniture in this style to the more simple Gothic of our villas and country houses in America. Yet we are confident this may be done in such a manner as to unite a simple and chaste Gothic style with forms adapted to and expressive of our modern domestic life.*<sup>56</sup>

Downing recommended Burns & Tranque [Trainque] and Alexander Roux, all of whose premises were on Broadway in New York City, as the best sources for furniture in the Gothic mode.<sup>57</sup>

The Smithsonian was the recipient of an unusual selection of Gothic Revival furniture from “Walnut Wood” including a bed, dresser, nightstand, couch, two side chairs, and two arm chairs.<sup>58</sup> The first three of these forms are especially notable in view of Downing’s comment that “Elaborate bedroom furniture in the Gothic style is seldom seen in country houses in the United States.”<sup>59</sup> As is typical of furnishings of this style, none of the pieces has a medieval prototype. Only the decorative elements imposed on each form give it Gothic character.

It has been claimed that this furniture was in the house from the time of the Harral occupancy; however, evidence has not been located to indicate for whom, by whom, or when it was made. Differences exist within the group suggesting that two makers are represented. The chairs are constructed of eastern white pine, yellow poplar, and soft ma-

ple, but painted to simulate walnut grain (Figures 17 and 18). Except for the maple graining applied to the panels of the bedstead and the seat rails of the couch, these pieces are finished in the same manner as the chairs (Figures 16 and 19). Underneath the painted surface, however, is another layer of graining which resembles oak. That the set was intended to appear as oak is explicit from directions found in a barely legible inscription penciled on the front of the back panel under the upholstery of the two side chairs: “Oak to match bedstead.” When the overpainting of the oak graining took place is unknown. By contrast, black walnut and sugar maple are the primary woods of the dresser and nightstand (Figures 20 and 21). The painted furniture was executed in a heavier, less elegant fashion than the case pieces. This evidence suggests that the two types of furniture were procured from different sources and at different times in the history of the house.

There is no known record of Davis having designed furniture for “Walnut Wood” as he had for the dwellings of John Herrick, Samuel Lyon, Philip Paulding, Joel Rathbone, and others.<sup>60</sup> None of Davis’s drawings contained in the major collections of his papers correspond to these pieces.<sup>61</sup> The chairs could have been an American craftsman’s version of a side chair illustrated in Loudon’s *An Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture* as figure 2016. The bedstead is directly related to another constructed of oak at “Lyndhurst,” a Davis-designed villa near Tarrytown, New York, which was completed in about 1842. Its first owner, Philip Paulding, requested Davis to provide designs for furniture; this might also have been done by the second owner, George Merritt, who purchased the house in 1864.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, it is not known when the bed was first acquired or whether it was designed by Davis. The headboard, end posts, and finials are too simi-

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Figures 16 through 19. The bed, arm chairs, side chairs, and couch were originally painted to resemble oak and subsequently regrained to simulate walnut, and, where there were recessed panels, maple. This furniture, now in the Smithsonian Institution, was probably made for the large first-floor bedroom or for the state bedroom on the second floor, in which case it all could have been used as a coordinated set. The presence of a couch or lounge in a bedroom was not unusual; however, couches were also used in the dressing room adjoining a bedroom.



*Figure 16.* The Gothic Revival bedstead was placed in recent years, prior to the demolition of the Harral-Wheeler House, in the west central bedroom. Height:  $103\frac{1}{4}$  inches; length:  $87\frac{1}{2}$  inches; width:  $68\frac{1}{2}$  inches. (Smithsonian negative 72-2934.)



*Figure 17.* Height:  $55\frac{3}{4}$  inches; width:  $27\frac{3}{4}$  inches; depth:  $26\frac{1}{2}$  inches (Smithsonian negative 71-1691).



*Figure 18.* Height:  $50\frac{7}{8}$  inches; width: 24 inches; depth:  $22\frac{3}{4}$  inches (Smithsonian negative 77454).



*Figure 19.* Height: 55 inches; width: 75¼ inches; depth: 35 inches (Smithsonian negative 67876).

*Figures 20 and 21.* The primary woods of the dresser and night stand are black walnut and sugar maple. The drawer pulls on these pieces are not original. The measurements in inches of the dresser are: height, 93; width, 53½; and depth, 26. Measurements in inches of the night stand are: height, 32¼; width, 24¾; and depth, 18½. (Dresser, Smithsonian negative 61207A; night stand, Smithsonian negative 61207.)







Figure 21.

lar to be explained as coincidental. Both bedsteads share a resemblance to an unidentified design published in Downing's *The Architecture of Country Houses*.<sup>63</sup> No documented furniture or designs have been located that are relevant to the case pieces.

The room and furniture from "Walnut Wood" are displayed in "The Growth of the United States," an exhibition hall in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of History and Technology which is designed to portray the development of American culture. The bedroom is located in a portion of this exhibition hall devoted to the period 1750–1851. With the rise of industrialization during the latter part of this era, an increasing number of men from humble beginnings such

as Henry Harral and Nathaniel Wheeler attained wealth and prominence. It was important to them as well as to gentlemen of established means that their dwellings reflect an elevated social standing. Imposing dwellings in the Gothic Revival style, of which "Walnut Wood" is an example, were among the most dramatic symbols of affluence in mid-nineteenth-century America. The Smithsonian Institution's Harral-Wheeler Bedroom, the Gothic Revival furniture from the house, and, of equal significance, the original designs by Davis, the architectural fragments, and other supporting drawings and photographs, form a notable reminder of the Gothic "ornament" which crowned Golden Hill in Bridgeport.<sup>64</sup>

## NOTES

1. *Republican Standard* (Bridgeport, Connecticut), May 19, 1846.
2. *Ibid.*, November 23, 1847.
3. *Ibid.*, November 9, 1847.
4. *Republican Farmer* (Bridgeport, Connecticut), May 16, 1854.
5. Samuel Orcutt, *A History of the Old Town of Stratford and the City of Bridgeport, Connecticut*, Part 2 (New Haven: Press of Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1886), pp. 715-719. *Genealogical and Family History of the State of Connecticut*, vol. 4 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1911), pp. 1724-1726. *Republican Farmer*, May 16, 1854.
6. Harral purchased the home in which he had been living from the Reverend John Blatchford in 1836, the year that he began accumulating property in Bridgeport. Bridgeport, Connecticut, Bridgeport City Hall, Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Deed Book 6, p. 105.
7. The Waddell House was designed by A. J. Davis.
8. Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America; With a View of the Improvement of Country Residences . . . With Remarks on Rural Architecture* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1841). Downing, *Cottage Residences; Or, A Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage Villas, and Their Gardens and Grounds. Adapted to North America* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1842).
9. Jane B. Davies, "Alexander J. Davis, Architect of Lyndhurst," *Historic Preservation*, vol. 17, no. 2 (March-April, 1965), pp. 54-59.
10. The most influential of these English publications in the United States was John Claudius Loudon's *An Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture; Containing Numerous Designs for Dwellings, from the Cottage to the Villa . . .* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman, 1833). Although focused on wooden construction, an interesting study of American theories about architecture in this period is found in "Romantic Rationalism and the Expression of Structure in Wood: Downing, Wheeler, Gardner, and the 'Stick Style,' 1840-1876" by Vincent Scully in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 35, no. 2 (June 1953), pp. 121-136. For a compilation of house pattern books, see Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *American Architectural Books: A List of Books, Portfolios, and Pamphlets on Architecture and Related Subjects Published in America before 1895* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1946, 3d edition).
11. Downing, *Rural Essays* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Company, 1853), pp. 207-208.
12. Of this term, Downing explained: ". . . what we mean by a villa, in the United States, is the country house of a person of competence or wealth sufficient to build and maintain it with some taste and elegance. . . . The villa, or country house proper, then, is the most refined home of America—the home of its most leisurely and educated class of citizens." Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses; Including Designs for Cottages, Farm Houses and Villas . . .* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1850), pp. 257-258. It should be noted that a villa need not be located in the country.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
14. *Republican Farmer*, May 16, 1854.
15. For a discussion of the Gothic Revival style within the context of Victorian America, see Alan Gowans, *Images of American Living* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1964), pp. 287-365; Carroll L. V. Meeks, *The Railroad Station: An Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), provides a provocative analysis of eclecticism and the picturesque styles of the nineteenth century. Interest in reviving the Gothic style arose in England decades before the movement gained popularity in the United States. For information about the English Gothic Revival in architecture, see Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival; An Essay in the History of Taste* (London: John Murray, 3d edition, 1962).
16. New York Public Library, A. J. Davis Papers (hereinafter referred to as NYPL-DP), Daybook (1827-1853), [p. 325].
17. *Ibid.*, [p. 329]. An itemization of Davis's work for Harral is also found in the following source: New York, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, A. J. Davis Papers (hereinafter referred to as MMA-DP), vol. 1 (24.66.1400), p. 87.
18. NYPL-DP, Daybook [p. 363].
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 334, [347], 348, 354, [355], 356, [363], 370.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 334.
21. *Ibid.*, [p. 347].
22. *Republican Standard*, August 10, 1847.
23. *Ibid.*, November 23, 1847.

24. This may have been Jonathan Beers to whom there are scattered references in the Davis Papers. *Finning's Bridgeport Town and City Directory and Annual Advertiser for 1855-6* lists a Jonathan Beers as a lumber merchant.

25. Downing mistakenly referred to Harral as "Mr. Harold, at Bridgeport, Ct." Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, p. 386.

26. MMA-DP, vol. 8, (24.66.1407), p. 7 verso. Information in letter to writer from Mrs. Jane Davies, New York, June 30, 1968.

27. New York, New York, Columbia University, The Avery Architectural Library, A. J. Davis Papers (hereinafter Avery-DP), H, "Work of Alexander J. Davis, Architect and Artist, Drawings Exhibited."

28. Ibid., Daybook (1853-1869), pp. 228, 230. There is a signed drawing among the Davis Papers at the Avery Library (Z-2) which may be the one which Davis sent to the 1853 New York Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations and to the National Academy of Design. A hand-lettered label accompanies this drawing: "English Collegiate Gothic Mansion of Mrs. Harral at Bridgeport, Ct. Alexr. J. Davis, Architect." The fact that it is noted as Mrs. Harral's residence indicates that the label was used after Henry Harral's death on May 10, 1854.

29. NYPL-DP, Daybook, [p. 453].

30. Ibid. [pp. 467, 473, 476]. MMA-DP, vol. 2, (24.66.1401), p. 146. For drawings see vol. 6, (24.66.1405), p. 111-119.

31. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 146, Avery-DP, Daybook, pp. 18, 19.

32. Bridgeport City Hall, Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Deed Book 31, p. 727.

33. Grace Rogers Cooper, *The Invention of the Sewing Machine*, United States National Museum Bulletin 254 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968), pp. 27-30. *Dictionary of American Biography*, Dumas Malone, editor (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), vol. 20, p. 52. *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White & Company, 1899), vol. 9, p. 460.

34. Avery-DP, 16-1, "Harral's Walnut Grove, Bridgeport, Ct." The Abner C. Thomas topographical drawing of "Walnut Wood" is in the Department of Cultural History collections in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of History and Technology.

35. *Bridgeport Evening Standard*, October 24,

1866. Edward R. Lambert appears in the first Bridgeport city directory of 1855, in which he is noted as an architect. Rufus W. Bunnell is not included in this source until 1862 by which time the Lambert & Bunnell partnership had been established. The partners continued to be listed in the city directories until 1901 when only Lambert is listed; he is last included in the 1903 directory. The library addition probably was sketched in pencil by Lambert & Bunnell on the drawing of the principal floor plan by Davis now in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution.

36. *Bridgeport Evening Standard*, October 24, 1866; November 7, 1866.

37. *The Standard's History of Bridgeport*, George Curtis Waldo, compiler, (Bridgeport, Connecticut: The Standard Association, 1897), p. 138.

38. Information from Miss Ellen Wheeler, Fairfield, Connecticut, a descendant of Nathaniel Wheeler.

39. The demolition of the house was completed in July 1958.

40. The following publications include references to the house interior which imply that no changes were made to its decoration: Edna Donnell, "A. J. Davis and the Gothic Revival," *Metropolitan Museum Studies*, vol. 5, part 2 (1936), pp. 212-221; Wayne Andrews, "A Gothic Tragedy in Bridgeport?" *Antiques*, vol. 72, no. 1 (July 1957), pp. 50-53.

41. The Smithsonian Institution is fortunate to have an important collection of nine architectural drawings of the house by A. J. Davis, eleven drawings for wall and ceiling decoration, a group of early photographs of its interior and exterior, inventories of the contents from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all donated by Miss Ellen Wheeler. Photographs of the house were given by Mr. Eli Roffwarg. In addition, a large collection of architectural fragments from the house was presented to the museum by the Bridgeport Historical Society. The woodwork, mantle, and ceiling of the room were the gift of the City of Bridgeport.

42. M. Field, *Rural Architecture; or, Designs for Villas, Cottages, etc., in the Italian, Gothic, Elizabethan, Old English, and Swiss Styles . . .* (New York: Miller & Company, 1857), p. 32. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, pp. 364-365.

43. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, pp. 386-387.

44. Gervase Wheeler, *Homes for the People, in Suburb and Country; the Villa, the Mansion, and the Cottage, Adapted to American Climate and Wants* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1855), pp. 133-134.

45. NYPL-DP, Daybook [pp. 355, 402].

46. Henry Duettmann is not listed in the New York City directory for 1866 or 1867; however, there is a painter, Henry Duttman, included in the directory for 1866. It is probable that his name was misspelled or anglicized. *New York City Directory, 1866* (New York: John F. Trow, 1866). Edward Engel is noted in the city directory of 1867-1868 as a decorator and fresco painter with an office at 13 East 19th Street and a residence at 470 Sixth Avenue. *The New York City Directory, 1867-8* (New York: John F. Trow, 1867).

47. This newspaper spells his surname "Engle," while in the New York directory it is "Engel."

48. *Bridgeport Evening Standard*, April 3, 1867.

49. *Ibid.*, June 13, 1867.

50. Information from a survey of New York City directories.

51. The following bills are in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of History and Technology, Department of Cultural History: Henry Meyer to Mrs. N. Wheeler, October 24, 1889; Downer & Edwards to Mrs. Nat'l Wheeler, November 11, 1889; C. J. Vieu & Co. to Mrs. N. Wheeler, March 4, 1892; George W. Smith & Co. to Mr. Nathaniel Wheeler, April 20, 1892. Bridgeport City Hall, Wheeler Room, Letter from George W. Smith & Co. to Mrs. Nathaniel Wheeler, April 9, 1892.

52. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Print Department. Letter from Archer C. Wheeler to a staff member of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 31, 1933. It should be noted that a fragment of plaster from the ceiling of the west central bedroom (Figure 16), a room in design most like the Harral-Wheeler Bedroom, was given to the Smithsonian for analysis by Dr. Robert Fritz. A decorative canvas covering applied to the ceiling concealed at least three other ornamental treatments of this area. The sample is not large enough to allow a reconstruction of the painted patterns for which there is definite indication on the two outer layers, but it provides absolute evidence of more decorative schemes in at least one room of the house than can be accounted for by newspaper accounts, manuscript material, and drawings located by the writer. Report from the Smithsonian Institution's Conservation-Analytical Laboratory, CAL. NO. 1126.

53. *Bridgeport City Directory for 1923* (Bridgeport, Connecticut, 1923).

54. No paint layer is discernible between the applied decoration and the flat ceiling surface; however, should there have been a layer of paint on the ceiling before the raised ornament was applied, it could probably have been easily removed. This was the case when the ceiling was repainted after its installation in the National Museum of History and Technology.

55. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, p. 408.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 440.

57. *Ibid.* Dianne D. Hauserman, "Alexander Roux and His 'Plain and Artistic Furniture'", *Antiques*, vol. 93, no. 2 (February 1968), pp. 210-217.

58. Except for the couch and the two side chairs, this furniture was donated to the Smithsonian Institution by the City of Bridgeport. The couch and side chairs were the gift of Mrs. William Finney, a descendant of Nathaniel Wheeler.

59. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, p. 442.

60. For information about furniture designed by A. J. Davis, see Stanley Mallach, "Gothic Furniture Designs by Alexander Jackson Davis." Unpublished master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1966.

61. Although Roger Hale Newton has stated that "Joseph Byrnes executed the designs for woodwork and furniture, including the handsome Gothic bedroom suites in curly maple and rosewood which are still there [in the Harral-Wheeler House] and for which some of the original drawing exist"; such drawings have not been located. Roger Hale Newton, *Town and Davis, Architects: Pioneers in American Revivalistic Architecture, 1812-1890* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), p. 274.

62. John Pearce, "Changing Taste and the Evolution of the Furnishings at Lyndhurst," *Historic Preservation*, vol. 17, no. 2 (March-April, 1965), [pp. 60-67]. See illustration of bedroom on page [67]. Helen Duprey Bullock, "Paulding's Manor or Paulding's Folly: The 1838-64 Era of Lyndhurst," *Ibid.*, p. 71.

63. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, fig. 280, p. 447.

64. The author wishes to acknowledge the generous assistance of Jane B. Davies during the preparation of this paper. Mrs. Davies is working on a comprehensive analysis of the architectural designs of A. J. Davis.

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