



The Montauk Club: Opulence in Brooklyn

BY FRANCIS MORRONE



Photographs by Frampton Tolbert

Park Slope's Montauk Club opened in 1891. From then until the middle of the 20th century, Brooklyn boasted two clubs that a man had to be a member of to count as a true and prominent member of the community: the Montauk Club for the living, and Green-Wood Cemetery for the dead.

The Montauk Club's building, on Eighth Avenue and Lincoln Place, was the perfect expression of its purpose. In its size, style, and iconography the building proclaimed its role as the soul of its neighborhood. Designed by Francis Hatch Kimball (1845–1919), the club is a sumptuous earth-toned pile of Venetian details. It is often said that Kimball's model was the famed Ca'd'Oro on the Grand Canal, but closer inspection reveals the Palazzo Pisani Moretta to be the closer match. Either way, 1891 was a little late in the day for this sort of thing, and that, we may infer, suited the Brooklynites just fine.

The details—pointed arches, traceried openings, balustrades—are richly and crisply executed in brown sandstone and brown, orange, and red brick, with a great deal of terra-cotta trim. When the sun hits the building just right, that subtle spectrum of colors glows golden. This effect is enhanced by the projecting bays, loggias and balconies, the play of solids and voids that Kimball gave to his surfaces, and the varied skyline of high chimneys, copper-sheathed dormers, and sloping red-tiled roofs. The great Charles T. Wills, soon to build Manhattan's University Club on Fifth Avenue and 54th Street, was in charge of construction.

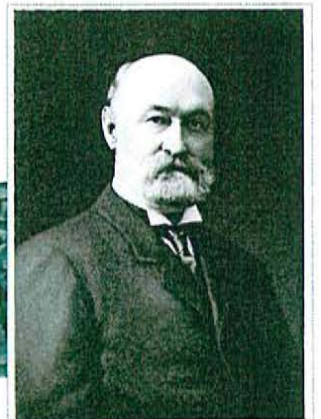
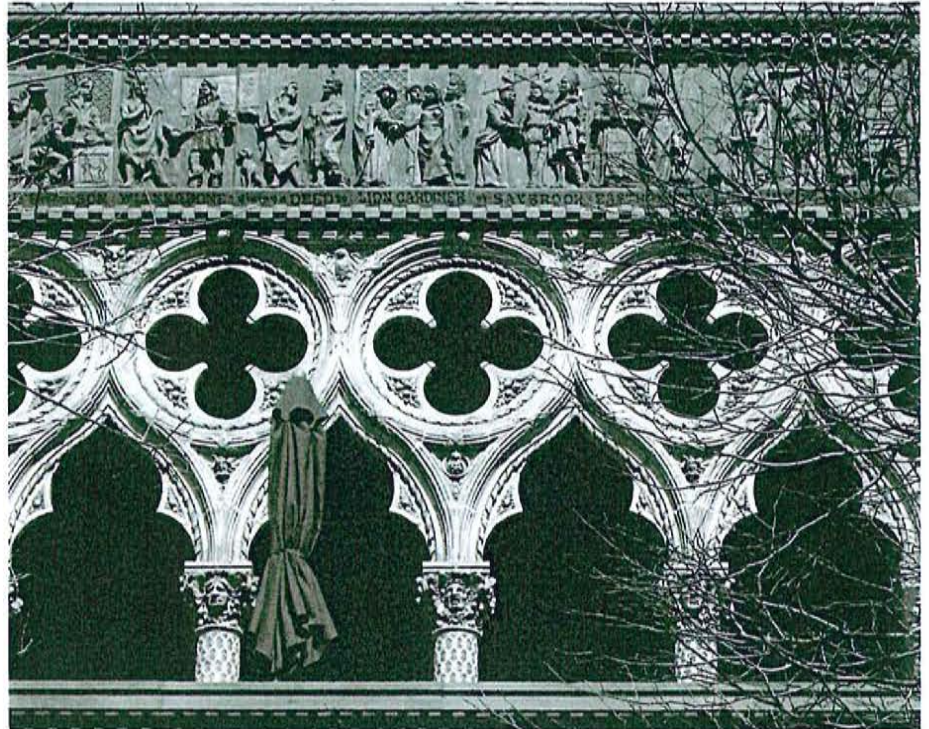
But it's the terra-cotta that's likeliest to rivet one's close-up attention. This kind of extensive decorative terra-cotta was only about ten years old when the Montauk was built. Wrapping around all three of the building's fully exposed sides above the third floor

Embellishments

Francis H. Kimball, Master of Many Styles

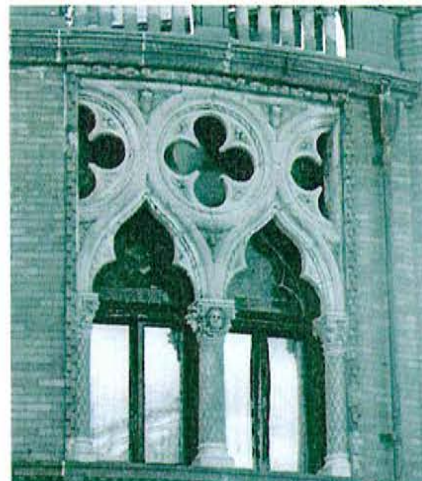
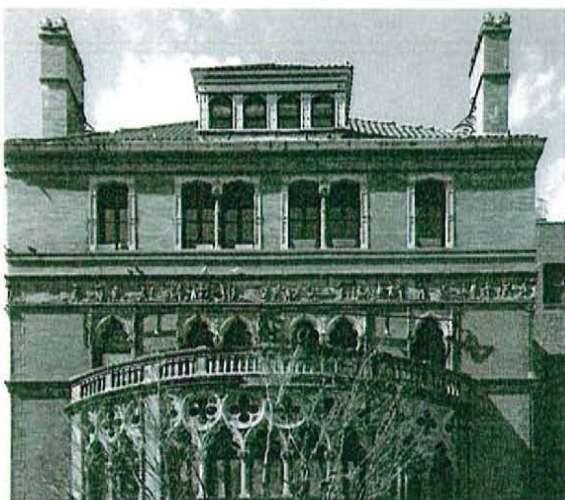
The 25 Brooklyn gentlemen who formed the Montauk Club in 1888 picked Francis H. Kimball (1845–1919) who had just finished the Corbin building in Manhattan, to build their clubhouse. At the time, Kimball was best known for his neo-Gothic constructions, and he designed the club in the Venetian Gothic style popularized by John Ruskin in his three-volume treatise, *The Stones of Venice* (1851–1853). Kimball was one of the pioneers of the use of ornamental terracotta in the U.S.

Starting in 1892, he formed a partnership with George Kramer Thompson (1859–1935), and their firm became influential in the design of skyscrapers in lower Manhattan. Among them were: the Manhattan Life Insurance Building (1893–94, now demolished); the Empire Building (1895–98) at 71 Broadway, the first skyscraper with a full iron and steel frame set on pneumatic concrete caissons; and the neo-Gothic Trinity and U.S. Realty Buildings (1904–07) at 111 and 115 Broadway, adjacent to Trinity Church. When Kimball died in 1919, the *New York Times* described him as “the father of the skyscraper” because of his technical innovations and work on many of the early skyscrapers in downtown Manhattan.



Francis H. Kimball

Francis H. Kimball, architect
of the Montauk Club.
Photograph courtesy of the Library
of Congress



All photographs of the Montauk Club by Frampton Tolbert

Newly Designated Victorian Landmarks and Historic Districts

BY ANTHONY W. ROBINS

Anthony W. Robins, an author, lecturer and tour leader, is a former VSNY board member. His website is www.anthonywrobins.com.

Since our last issue, the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission has designated four Victorian landmarks, one Victorian interior landmark and one Victorian historic district. The following information is based on the Commission's designation reports, all available online from its website.

BROOKLYN

FOURTH (NOW 88TH) POLICE PRECINCT

298 Classon Avenue (aka 414-20 DeKalb Avenue)
George Ingram, Brooklyn Department of City Works, 1889-1890; extension, Thomas E. O'Brien, 1924-26.
Civil engineer Ingram, asked to develop a basic form and style for new precinct houses in the City of Brooklyn, designed this Romanesque Revival-style structure.



Fourth (now 88th) Police Precinct, 298 Classon Avenue, Brooklyn. Photograph by Christopher D. Brazee, courtesy of NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission

LONG ISLAND BUSINESS COLLEGE BUILDING

143 South 8th Street
William H. Gaylor, 1892
Henry C. Wright commissioned this building to serve as a new home for his Williamsburg training school for clerical workers.

MANHATTAN

NO. 39 WORTH STREET

Isaac F. Duckworth, c. 1866; D.D. Badger's Architectural Iron Works, cast-iron foundry.
Duckworth designed this cast-iron-fronted store-and-loft building in the Italianate and Second Empire styles for James Smith, a prominent manufacturer of fire engines.

NO. 41 WORTH STREET

Isaac F. Duckworth, c. 1865; D.D. Badger's Architectural Iron Works, cast-iron foundry.
Duckworth designed the neighboring cast-iron-fronted store-and-loft building in a Venetian-inspired Italianate style for Philo Laos Mills, prominent dry-goods merchant and founder of Mills & Gibb.

STEINWAY & SONS RECEPTION ROOM AND HALLWAY

first floor interior, Steinway Hall, 109-113 West 57th Street (aka 106-116 West 58th Street); Warren & Wetmore architects, 1924-25, Walter L. Hopkins lead designer.
One of New York's most impressive neo-Renaissance style interiors, with a double-height octagonal rotunda for the Steinway showroom, now joins the previously designated exterior as a city landmark.

SOUTH VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT

bounded by West 4th Street and Washington Square on the north, LaGuardia Place on the east, West Houston Street on the south, and Sixth Avenue on the west.
The approximately 250 buildings in the district—which effectively extends the southwest corner of the existing Greenwich Village Historic District—include row houses, tenements, commercial structures and institutions. Among them are late Federal-style houses on Bleecker Street; Gothic Revival houses on MacDougal Street; Greek Revival houses on MacDougal and West 4th streets; neo-Grec, Queen Anne and Renaissance Revival tenements on various streets; and the Mills House No. 1 on Bleecker Street, designed by Ernest Flagg.



ABOVE: Swift elevation; Rose Parlor and oblique Main Building front facade. © Sara Durkacs; Vassar College Ely Hall (1889, William Tubby); Avery Hall (1867, John A. Wood); Original 1861 section drawing of Main Building (1864, Charles S. Farrar); Vassar College Chapel Tiffany window (c.1905); Thompson Memorial Library (1905, Allen & Collens); Bardavon Opera House original sole dressing room, restored proscenium, street facade

In Case You Missed It...



The group in front of one of the last extant Andrew Jackson Downing-designed structures, the 1851 gatehouse at Springside Landscape Restoration. © James Russiello



Bardavon Opera House (1869, J. A. Wood).
© James Russiello



Top-hatted historian Carl Ballenas led a special All Souls' Day tour of Maple Grove Cemetery, Kew Gardens, (opened 1875). © Jeff Sholeen

MATTHEW VASSAR'S POUGHKEEPSIE, OCTOBER 2013



The remarkable exposed roof structure and Clayton & Bell stained glass of Christ Episcopal Church (1888, William Appleton Potter).
© James Russiello

BELOW: Christ Church Elevation insert. © Sara Durkacs; First Congregational Church of Christ (1859); Matthew Vassar Jr. residence (c.1850); the Vassar Temple, now Second Baptist Church (c.1830); Dutchess County Courthouse (1860, Richard Upjohn) with inset of the original elevation of Christ Episcopal Church (1888, William Appleton Potter), nave interiors, and Clayton & Bell stained glass window. © James Russiello





is Renwick Jr. with inset photo of Main Building Rose Parlor and oblique front facade, front elevation (1865); Swift Hall facade original elevation detail and facade (1902, York & Sawyer); Maria Mitchell Observatory (J.A. Wood). © James Russiello

Continuing the campus theme set by last spring's Princeton tour, the VSNY's visit to Matthew Vassar's Poughkeepsie had members following the footsteps of the British-born Victorian industrialist, brewer of his eponymous ale (once the most popular in the nation), civic-minded philanthropist, ardent abolitionist, and champion of women's education. The Vassar family arrived shortly after independence and built up a brewery empire on the banks of the Hudson. The epitome of the Victorian self-made man, Vassar (1792-1868) ran away from home and returned wealthy in time to help his family take command of its struggling brewery and brickyard businesses, and eventually became a civic leader.

Vassar is primarily remembered today for founding his eponymous college, the first liberal arts college chartered to educate women with a curriculum comparable to those of Harvard and Yale. He financed and supervised the college's founding, erecting what was then the largest building in North America, the Main Building, built in 1861-65 to designs by James Renwick Jr. (1818-1895) who at that time was also erecting the Corcoran Gallery Building (now Renwick Gallery) in Washington, both modeled after the Palais des Tuileries in Paris (destroyed 1871), which Vassar had admired on his European Grand Tour.

Members toured the campus arboretum (first planted in 1865) and other campus buildings such as the Old Observatory (1864) designed by a mathematics professor as a classroom and residence for astronomer Maria Mitchell (1818-1889), the first American to view a comet. Highlights of the tour

included works by architect William Tubby of Brooklyn, Allen and Collins, and several buildings by York & Sawyer. Dr. Nancy Bisaha, chair of the history department, showed off the renovated Old Infirmary designed by York & Sawyer and spoke about legendary department chair Lucy Maynard Skinner (1853-1927), who fought the male establishment and stressed the importance of social history. Noted Andrew Jackson Downing scholar Dr. Harvey K. Flad, professor emeritus of geography, led the group around the college's Loeb Art Museum and showed off its collection of Hudson River School paintings, some depicting Matthew Vassar's 1851 Springside estate. The estate, one of the only extant Downing-designed landscapes, is now conserved as Springside Landscape Restoration. Dr. Flad led us through the restoration and then on a bus tour through downtown Poughkeepsie and the Southside Historic District.

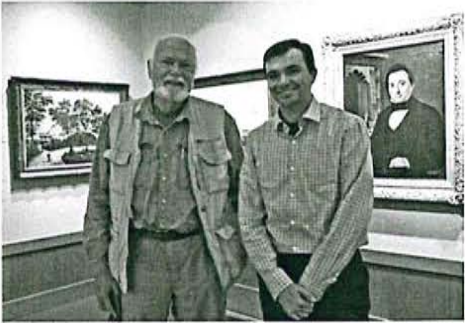
The group lunched in an 1880s New York Central Railroad icehouse-turned-restaurant overlooking the Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Bridge (1886-89), the first bridge to cross the Hudson River. In a surprise development, the minister of the Anglican Rite Church of the Holy Comforter (1860, Richard Upjohn) welcomed us into its sanctuary and spoke about the space.

Then the group raced to the Bardavon Opera House for a behind-the-scenes tour. Opened in 1868, it is the oldest continuously operating theater in New York State, and has been graced by such notables as Edwin Booth, Sarah Bernhardt and Helen Hayes. The tour was given a grand sendoff with a reception at the private Greystone House hosted by Ken Snodgrass, executive director

of Locust Grove Estate, the home of Samuel F.B. Morse. Ken served excellent wine, but for the brave, there was Vassar Ale, still brewed by the college once a year on Founder's Day. How did this Victorian draught taste? Well, over three decades later, Pabst won the award as "America's Best" in 1893, but as the school chant goes: "And so you see, to old V.C. / our love shall never fail. / Full well we know that all we owe / to Matthew Vassar's ale."



King of the Greystone Castle, Ken Snodgrass graciously hosted the reception. © James Russiello



Dr. Harvey K. Flad and James Russiello at the Vassar College Loeb Art Museum with a portrait of Matthew Vassar and his Hudson River School landscape painting collection in background. © Sara Durkacs

1903, W.J. Beardsley), site of the where what became the Bill of Rights was first ratified; the tower, interior nave, door detail, chancel, and rectory cast-iron fence of the often-locked Anglican Rite Church of the Holy Comforter



Passings



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF TIM LYNCH

CATHARINE LYNCH

The Victorian Society New York lost a great friend and supporter recently when Catharine Lynch passed away on November 27, 2013, in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. A dedicated former board member of the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society (as it was then known), Catharine also participated in Victorian Society Scholarship Fund and Alumni Association events. Known as "Miss Hospitality" or "Miss Sherry," Catharine could be found pouring libations at the Chapter's receptions at St. Thomas Church after lectures at the Donnell Library.

Known for her wit and winning ways, Catharine was the head librarian of ABC's News Library and was highly respected by the correspondents for all the television networks; she retired in the early 1980s. Her encyclopedic knowledge contributed to her reputation as a brilliant conversationalist.

A native Pennsylvanian, Catharine came to New York in the 1940s to attend Vassar College and later work at ABC News. After her retirement, she volunteered at the New York Public Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, St. Vincent Ferrer Catholic Church, Bellevue Hospital and various charitable consignment stores.

Catharine's family and VSNY members celebrate the joy and curiosity that she brought to all aspects of her life.

New Board Member



© JAMES RUSSIELLO

JAMES RUSSIELLO

A native New Yorker, James earned a BA in History with Urban Studies and Art History minors from Vassar College (NY), and an MSc in the Conservation of Historic Buildings with distinction from the University of Bath (UK) where he graduated first in his class concentrating on adaptive reuse of historic religious properties. He spent several years roaming towns and rural countryside as a historic building recorder and project editor for the Wexford, Monaghan, Antrim, and Tyrone county surveys in Ireland and Northern Ireland, all published. He returned to England as a researcher for the West London garden suburbs of Bedford Park and Brentham, for a 15th-century Bristol city parish church, and for a small Gloucestershire and Somerset conservation firm, as well as volunteering at the National Churches Trust. He studied architecture in Copenhagen, lime-mortar pointing in Wales, and attended the Victorian Society in America's summer schools in London and Newport; he also serves on the VSA's board. Since his return to New York, he has worked as a rights and permissions specialist and photo editor for the publisher John Wiley & Sons, Inc. When dealing with copyright issues, James prefers the Victorians to 20th-century figures, as the 19th-century luminaries' work is often old enough to have passed into the public domain without restrictions.



Founded in New York City in 1966, the Victorian Society in America is dedicated to fostering the appreciation and preservation of our nation's 19th-century heritage as well as that of the early 20th century (1837-1917). The Victorian Society New York (VSNY), the oldest of numerous chapters now flourishing throughout the U.S., is an independent nonprofit organization affiliated with the national Society.

Membership contributions at any level help to provide the foundation for all that we do—from our lecture series, walking tours and excursions to our grant and awards programs honoring worthy preservation projects in New York. Members also help provide scholarships to the Victorian Society in America Summer Schools for advanced study. Donations to the Margot Gayle Fund make possible monetary grants for preservation and conservation of Victorian material culture in our region.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Victorian Society New York gratefully acknowledges the generous support of members, individuals, firms, and sponsors that further the Chapter's mission to preserve, protect and promote our Victorian heritage.

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Named for Daniel D. Badger, the Circle honors organizations, businesses and firms who make a generous commitment to help support our activities and further our mission. Badger, working under the name Architectural Iron Works, was one of the major forces in creating cast-iron architecture in the U.S.

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In-kind Contributors

The Graphics Office
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List as of May 20, 2014

The Mystery of the Silver Florin

We were not quite sure what to make of the coin that arrived in the mail at the VSNY offices. The envelope arrived unmarked, without a name or a return address; inside, taped to a plain sheet of paper, was a British 1849 florin coin with a note below in block printing that read "Victorian Society Donation Department." What was a Victorian florin, and who was our unknown benefactor?

We did a little research, and found that the florin was issued in 1849 at the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign as part of an attempt to convert to a decimal currency. It was worth 1/10 of a pound, or two shillings, at the time. The silver coin had been a bit of a shock—even to Queen Victoria herself—as the letters D G (for *Dei Gratia*, meaning "by the grace of God") had been omitted on the back, and it was called the "godless florin." The mistake was quickly corrected the following year, and versions of the florin continued to be minted until 1968, when it was replaced by the ten pence coin. Although we now know more about our florin, we still are looking for its mysterious benefactor.



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Lecture to benefit the Margot Gayle Fund, *Inventing the Modern World: Decorative Arts at the World's Fairs, 1851-1939*, by Jason Busch, Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs and Museum Programs at the St. Louis Art Museum and former chief curator and Alan G. and Jane A. Lehman Curator of Decorative Arts and Design at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. Photographs by James Russiello

MONTAUK CLUB, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

is a terra-cotta frieze depicting the history of the Montauk Indians of Long Island. A terra-cotta panel above the second floor on the Lincoln Place side shows Lion Gardiner's purchase of eastern Long Island land from the Montauk sachem. Best of all is the terra-cotta frieze over the arch above the main entrance on Eighth Avenue: a marvelous vignette of top-hatted and frock-coated Victorian gentlemen laying the clubhouse's cornerstone in 1889.

Unlike most other gentlemen's clubs, the Montauk allowed members' wives to dine on the premises. On Eighth Avenue, a small entrance to the left of the main entrance allowed members' wives to ascend directly to the third-floor dining room, bypassing and thus not disturbing the club rooms' atmosphere of male sanctuary. The top two floors contained guest bedrooms. Those floors have been converted to condominium apartments, while the lower floors remain a private club.

In 1971, the *New York Times* reported "Montauk members trace the present relative lack of influence of the private club, which was founded in 1888 by 25 of Brooklyn's wealthiest citizens, to the general decline of the once prestigious Park Slope neighborhood." Well, that decline has reversed. Park Slope is now nearly as affluent as it was in the 1890s, and if private clubs no longer enjoy the prestige they once did, the Montauk has brighter prospects than it has had in a long time.

Francis Morrone is an architectural historian. His 11 books include *An Architectural Guidebook to Brooklyn* (Gibbs Smith, 2001).