



Historical Society of the Nyacks

Newsletter

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The Emery Brothers: Marshall and Henry

by Gini Stollendorf, Editor

Two men who left a lasting mark on the architecture of the Nyacks were Marshall and Henry Emery, born in the Albany, New York, area in the late 1800s. Both graduated from Columbia University's School of Architecture and in time they would form the architectural firm of Marshall B. & Henry G. Emery, initially based in New York City. During their partnership, they designed many churches, schools, and hospitals in the New York City area and throughout the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys.

The Bowery Mission at 227 Bowery in Manhattan, established in 1879 and one of the Emerys' earliest designs, was the third rescue mission founded in the United States. In 1908, the mission purchased a five-story coffin factory and the Emery firm was chosen to redesign the building for its new purpose. The Emerys' remodel included a chapel, kitchen, meeting room, and rear entrance where bread lines would form. They designed the stained glass windows for the building and had a marble speakers' platform installed, which was often used by William Howard Taft when he was in New York City.

Nineteenth- and early-20th-century architecture in the United States was a series of revivals with most originating in Europe. The Emerys designed a number of churches and public buildings in the Nyacks: in 1895, St. Anne's Roman Catholic Church, on



Illustration of First Reformed Church by Bill Batson, author/artist of Nyack Sketch Log, which appears every Tuesday on NyackNewsandViews.com

the corner of Third Avenue and Jefferson Street, in the Gothic Revival style; in 1896, in the Colonial Revival style, the original Nyack Hospital (still standing on hospital grounds), as well as a number of its later additions.

By the early-20th century, Henry Emery had moved to South Nyack. He designed a house for himself and his family at 254 Piermont Avenue in the Tudor style with some Colonial Revival features. Technology was burgeoning at this time in U.S. history and a central vacuuming system was incorporated into the house.

The Emery firm designed a number of other residences in the Nyacks, including two on

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Message from the President

by Win Perry, AIA, Society President

Architecture is one of the most enduring clues to history. It helps us visualize how people of various periods lived, what delighted them, what was fashionable, what they could afford, and how they chose to express themselves. The designers of the Nyacks—architects, builder-designers, and those who built from the ubiquitous pattern books or stock plans from the lumber yards—were squarely in the mainstream of American architecture, with occasional local variations. While not nationally or internationally famous, the architects working in Nyack made faithful and often creative use of the various "Revival" styles that followed one another and overlapped during the 19th- and early-20th centuries: Greek, Romanesque, Gothic, Italianate, Second Empire, Queen Anne, Colonial, and others. And they participated in the movement that broke away from historical antecedents, trying to find an original American architecture based on functionalism and the nature of materials, as seen in the Stick Style, Shingle Style, Arts and Crafts Movement, and ultimately the various branches of Modern Architecture and Post-Modernism.

This issue of the Newsletter features an article on one of the historical styles that left its characteristic imprint on the community, and one on the architectural firm that was responsible for the largest share of our public buildings and many outstanding homes and commercial buildings. If you look closely at the buildings described here you may sense things that you may not find in history books about the people who designed them or commissioned them.

If you're curious about the history and design of your house, I suggest you hire Hugh Goodman, our local architectural historian, to research it and write it up for you. You can see his resume at www.linkedin.com/in/hughgoodman59 and you can contact him at 845.260.1836, or by email at GoodmanHPA@mail.com. His charge is reasonable and his work is thorough.

Support Local History and Join the Society: See back page or visit: www.nyackhistory.org

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Emery Brothers, continued

South Broadway: number 171 South Broadway and, in the Arts and Crafts style, 139 South Broadway. Another Arts and Crafts-style house is located at 100 North Franklin Street, between Sickles Avenue and Haven Court (now with an honorary street sign that reads: Hezekiah H. Easter Boulevard). While the Emerys were designing private homes, they continued to design churches and public buildings.

In 1901, the First Reformed Church on South Broadway, between Burd and Church Streets, had outgrown its original wooden structure. The new and present church, designed by the Emerys in the Gothic Revival style, was built with bricks from Haverstraw. The clock tower for the newly-designed building became an immediate landmark for ships on the Hudson River. Also by the Emerys, St. Paul's Church on the corner of North Broadway and Division Avenue was designed in 1910 in the Romanesque style.

When the proposal for a new library building for Nyack was submitted and approved by Andrew Carnegie, the Emery brothers were chosen as the architects. The Nyack Library was designed in the Arts and Crafts style and built in 1903; the original structure remains and is one of only a few surviving original Carnegie library buildings in the tri-state area.

In December 1920, Marshall Emery died at age 54 of complications from pneumonia. Henry continued the architectural business and was the architect of the Tudor-style YMCA building at 37 South Broadway, which opened in 1927.

In 1934, Henry formed a partnership with another Nyack architect, George Schofield. Out of this collaboration came Christie Hall, designed in 1946,

Why and Where a Style Born in the Sunny Italian Countryside is Found in Nyack

by Robert Silarski, AIA, Principal, S&Co. | Architecture + Design

In the early 19th century, the formal vocabulary of Italian Renaissance architecture was synthesized with picturesque aesthetics to become what we know as the Italianate style of architecture. Belying its origins beneath the warm Mediterranean sun, the Italianate, or “bracketed,” style is sometimes considered a rebellion against the rigid, formal classicism that preceded it. The style’s broad eaves provided shelter from the Italian sun, its loggias (covered porches) provided a cool place of respite from which a view could be appreciated, and its irregular massing and delicate detailing were a delight to the eye.

The architect John Nash’s “Cronkhill” (c. 1802) in Shropshire, England (Fig. 1), is considered to be the first fully-developed example of the Italianate style. It’s a delightful mishmash of elements, with two towers—one rectangular and the other cylindrical—and a corner loggia.

Why did the Italianate style migrate to America and, in particular, Nyack? As was usually the case in the 18th and 19th centuries, and even to some degree today, the Americans took their style cues from the English. The Italianate style was “of the moment” and clearly resonated with many Americans who may have seen themselves as the architectural vanguard in the mid- to late-19th century. The Italianate style’s near-flat roofs and abundance of wood detailing, however, made it spectacularly unsuited in many ways to the climate of the northeastern United States. This unsuitability was trumped by its combination of pleasing and interesting forms and details, its suitability for many different building materials (e.g., brick, wood, or stucco), as well as budgets and, of course, its popularity in England, all of which combined to make the style a “must-build” for Americans.

The Industrial Revolution enabled elements common to the style, such as its elaborate repetitive brackets and architraves, to be mass-produced and thus far more affordable, and the development of transportation networks could take these items to places far from where they were made.

Where are Italianate houses found in Nyack? Certainly the best-known

Signature elements of the Italianate style

- ◇ Low-pitched hipped or flat roofs
- ◇ Imposing cornice structures supported by brackets
- ◇ Detailed architraves, or casings, surrounding the windows and doors
- ◇ Tall first-floor windows
- ◇ Glazed doors
- ◇ Balconies with Renaissance balustrades
- ◇ Loggia (covered porch/walkway)
- ◇ Belvedere (lantern tower)
- ◇ Asymmetrical floor plans

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on the campus of Nyack College.

Although he was retired by 1949, Henry Emery’s kindness to others and interest in local organizations led him to design a home for the Nyack Community Ambulance Corps at 251 North Midland Avenue as a gift to the community. When he died at his home in South Nyack in 1956, the family asked that “in lieu of flowers, contributions could be sent to the Corps.” Henry Emery is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery, Nyack.

Italianate, continued

house in the river towns and all of Rockland County, Pretty Penny (Fig. 2), illustrates many of the Italianate style's most interesting features. The irregular massing, the belvedere and the elaborate corbels, or brackets, that give the style its nickname are all present here in a very pleasing composition.

Number 117 North Broadway (Figs. 3 and 4) exhibits a fine loggia across its front, with tall first-floor windows, elegant corbels, and a belvedere. A small addition at the south is completed in the French Second Empire style, which postdates the Italianate style. The two are similar in some ways, with the most prominent difference being the mansard roof atop the later style.

The detailed architraves, broad eaves, and clustered columns mark this Second Avenue home (Fig. 5) as Italianate. Note the loggia on the east side of the house that once had river views. It's a beautiful example of the style, except for the modern greenhouse addition!

Burd Street's Hotel St. George (Fig. 6), once a hotel, now offices, consists of an original building with two subsequent additions. All three exhibit slightly different versions of the same Italianate style, differing in their bracket styles, window sizes and casings, and several other minor details. The prominent loggia, which was demolished by the 1960s, was rebuilt to recall the original, and received a Historic Preservation Merit Award from the Historical Society of Rockland County in 2004.

Now home to Hickory Dickory Dock, formerly a funeral home and before that a private residence, this South Broadway building (Fig. 7)



Figure 1: Cronkhill



Figure 2: Pretty Penny



Figure 3: 117 North Broadway



Figure 4: 117 North Broadway



Figure 5: Second Avenue



Figure 6: Hotel St. George



Figure 7: South Broadway



Figure 8: Lower DePew Avenue



Figure 9: Upper DePew Avenue



Figure 10: DePew House

Continued on next page

Italianate, continued

exhibits many of the features that made the Italianate style so charming: an assemblage of varied masses with low-pitched and flat roofs, a loggia, paired brackets, and even a little Juliet balcony, all combine to create an attractive, interesting, composition.

This former home on lower Depew Avenue (Fig. 8), now offices and apartments, exhibits the articulated architraves above the main floor windows, which make them appear taller and more imposing, and the belvedere facing the river. The structure probably once had an elaborate porch, or loggia, across its front façade, before it was moved from the corner of First Avenue and North Broadway to its present location.

Although this upper Depew Avenue house (Fig. 9) has been stripped of much of its detail, several signatures of the Italianate style remain: irregular massing, the tower element in the foreground, the simple loggia, and, of course, the brackets.

The Historical Society's headquarters at 50 Piermont Avenue opposite Memorial Park (Fig. 10) is one of Nyack's very best examples of the Italianate style. Its wraparound loggia, its tall windows surmounted by pediments, its corbels, and finally, the belvedere, form a memorable composition, in many ways as striking as (and more accessible than) Pretty Penny.

These and many other examples show that the Italianate style flourished in 19th-century Nyack. Even though the style may be unsuited to our climate, many fine examples of the style are alive and well today, due no doubt in some measure to the miracle of modern roofing systems, but in all likelihood due more to the style's idiosyncratic but lasting appeal to those who own them.



Dollhouse Raffle Benefits Local History

On Dec. 22, 2011, Joanne Bentley, with the help of a young Nyack Library patron, drew the winning ticket for our Dollhouse Raffle, which belonged to Freda Robinson!

The dollhouse was made by Joanne's sister, Helen Norman, who had made a career of designing and crafting Victorian dollhouses. The Historical Society wishes to thank Joanne for the donation, the Nyack Library for displaying the dollhouse, and all of those who purchased raffle tickets.

Donations to the Society totaled \$890.

Newsletter of the



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VISIT OUR MUSEUM

THIRD SATURDAYS
1-4 P.M.

FEATURING

TALLMAN FACTORY PIANO
ST. GEORGE HOTEL RECEPTION DESK
10 ENLARGED PRINTS OF EARLY GLASS PLATE
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UNTIL MARCH 1

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an exhibit by the Society
and the Nyack Library
Curated by Patricia
Condello and Karen Kennell