

"A Noble and Dignified Stream"
The Piscataqua Region in the Colonial Revival, 1860–1930
 Sarah Giffen and Kevin Murphy, editors

Publisher: Old York Historical Society; 1992
Edition: 1000
Trim Size: 8.5" x 11"
Pages: 256 text plus 8-page full-color insert
Composition: 11/12 Minion by Bruce Kennett

Presswork: 1/1 with 200-line halftones
Interior Stock: Starwhite Vicksburg 80 text
Printer: Thomson-Shore (text); Penmor (insert, jacket)
Binding: Smyth-sewn, full cloth, foil stamping, jacket
Binder: Thomson-Shore

Interdisciplinary in content, this book examines the literature, art, architecture, gardens, and early historic preservation projects that flourished in the Piscataqua area of southern Maine and coastal New Hampshire during the Colonial Revival. Six essays are accompanied by 205 illustrations (8 in full color). Throughout the book I used decorative elements from Sarah Wyman Whitman, noted designer of the period who created covers for many important writers including Sarah Orne Jewett, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Celia Thaxter. The Centaur typeface used for display was designed in New England during this period. The very complex composition scheme involved basal text, extracts, and copious end notes following the catalog items.

This book was awarded the 1992 Stephen Harvard Prize for Excellence in the Book Arts.

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A Boston critic provides yet another source for Fernald's neoclassical style. A description of murals at the Essex Country Club in Hamilton, Massachusetts, which from photographs appear startlingly similar to the murals at Hamilton house, reads:

In These Excellent Works by George P. Fernald, the Artist has Cleverly Bent Himself to the Particular Requirements of Mural Decoration—Taking a Leaf from the Book of [Pauis de] Chavannes, He Has Gone Back to the Classic for his Subjects and Has Handled Them in the Light and Deft Manner of the Master—The Drawing is Strong but the Artist Has Kept to the More Restrained Color Scheme Required in This Style of Art.¹¹

Having accomplished a tour de force of Mediterranean classical imagery in the dining room, the Tysons seemed determined to give equal importance to an American colonial past and engaged George Porter Fernald to paint another mural in the parlor. In the Piscataqua region at the turn of the century, examples of Georgian and federal-period architecture had become as important as the temples of Greece and the ruins of Rome. Americans seeking a classical past became passionately interested in the homes of their ancestors from hardly more than a century before. Sarah Orne Jewett had called this eighteenth-century commercial and social network “the river aristocracy.”

Again the artist turned to an historic wallpaper for inspiration. Dufour’s “Monuments of Paris,” printed first in 1815 and pictured in *Old Time Wall Papers*, proudly depicts the neoclassical, Renaissance revival buildings constructed during the Napoleonic wars.¹² The cityscape extends horizontally along the Seine. By placing the viewer on the left bank, the composition provides a foreground, then a long strip of river in the middle ground, broken occasionally by large trees.

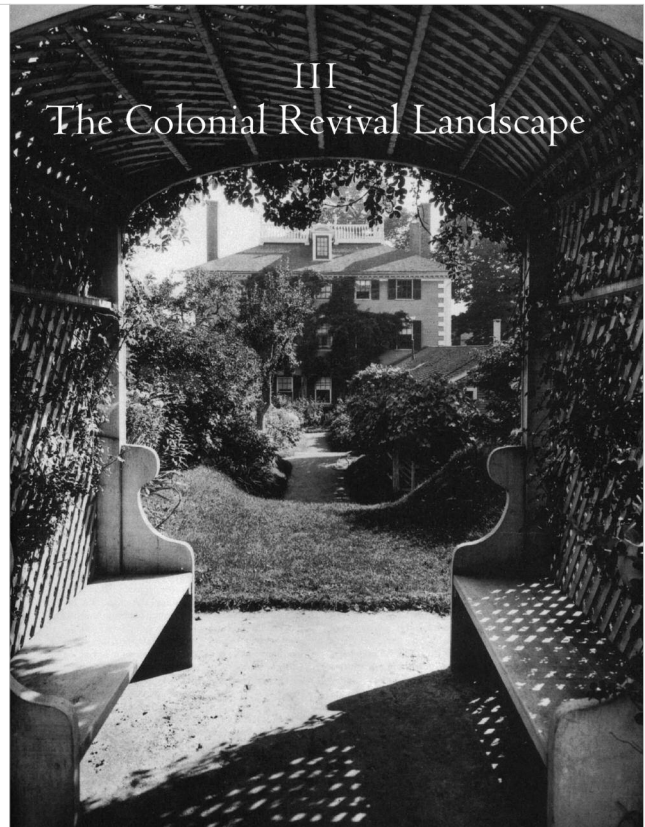
Fernald was quick to see the possibilities in this format for his mural. Taking advantage of the lush foliage provided by the block-printed paper already in place, Fernald created trees at each corner of the room and framed the doorways with classical ruins and vines. On each expanse of wall he painted the device of connecting the foreground to the background by adding a series of bridges that span the blue ribbon of water. Marching along a Seine-like Piscataqua, the houses are connected by the very river whose tidal reaches flow just beyond the windows of the room. The Wentworth-Gardner house, the Wentworth-Coolidge mansion, the first brick factory building at the Cococo Falls in Dover, the William Pepprell house, St. John’s Chapel, the Governor John Langdon house, the Jewett house, Coventry Hall, and Fort McClary are all included (see cat. 16b). In the foreground are scenes inspired by other scenic papers. A large seventeenth-century ship appears to have just off-loaded treasures from distant ports, notably ceramics from China and an old English chair. Farther along four ladies looking very much like courtesans

of Louis XIV are seated drinking tea at an unmistakably Piscataqua gate-leg table of about 1730.¹³ All along the quay there is activity, and a gaudalou, lateen sail billowing, awaits its cargo (see pl. 4).

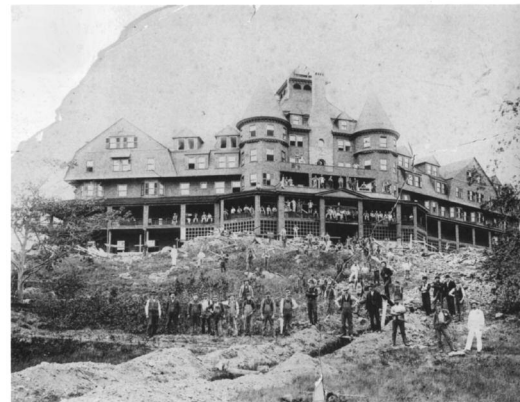
George Porter Fernald signed his name boldly and conspicuously on this mural and also added his own note of architectural whimsy. In a corner of the mural hidden by an open door, Fernald added a depiction of Thomas Jefferson’s “Monticello”—a sly tribute to the great American whose republican ideals were often manifested in the classical vocabulary of Palladian Georgian architecture. Fernald’s footnote immediately enlarges the concept of Piscataqua architecture and secures it in a national context.

The author of Fernald’s obituary may have had the Hamilton house murals in mind when he wrote that “the work of Mr. Fernald is found on the dining rooms, drawing rooms, music rooms and other apartments in many places where owners have desired specially executed decoration in keeping with the architectural work or in harmony with period finish or furnishings.”¹⁴ The Tysons must have considered Fernald’s depictions of both classical and “colonial” monuments to be appropriately “in keeping” with the architecture of Hamilton house. Together, the powerful imagery of these interior landscapes makes visible the associations between Hamilton house and its gardens, its architectural significance, and surrounding arcadian landscape that had been described by Sarah Orne Jewett as early as 1881:

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1. Sarah Orne Jewett, “River Driftwood,” in *Country By-ways* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 188), 27.
 2. Charles A. Platt, *Italian Gardens* (New York, 1941), quoted in Keith Morgan, *Charles A. Platt* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 44.
 3. For a listing of particular papers and their locations, see Nancy McClelland, *Historic Wallpapers* (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott Company, 1944).
 4. Kate Sanborn, *Old Time Wall Papers: An Account of Pictorial Papers on Our Forefather’s Walls* (New York: Literary Collector Press, 1905), 49.
 5. Catherine Lynn, *Wallpaper in America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), 200, pl. 9-12.
 6. Sanborn, *Old Time Wall Papers*, 109.
 7. Sanborn, *Old Time Wall Papers*, 109.
 8. An example of the later less costly paper which was often printed with a tapestry-like texture survives in the hallway of Chesterwood, the home of sculptor Daniel Chester French near Stockbridge, Mass.
 9. George Porter Fernald, obituary, *Boston Transcript*, July 27, 1910.
 10. “Sicily,” its Architecture as seen by Mr. George Porter Fernald” (photograph), *The Year Book of the Boston Architectural Club* (1913).
 11. Jewett, “River Driftwood,” 9–10.
 12. *Microliths*, Appertons clipping file (before 1910), SARVA. Other mural commissions by Fernald include house at Bar Harbor, Me., ca. 1911; house at Sherborn, Mass.; Little and Brown, ca. 1916; Essex Country Club, Little and Brown, Hamilton, Mass., date unknown. Other possible commissions include the Old Bull house, Little and Brown, Cambridge, Mass., and the late Anderson house, Brookline, Mass.
 13. Sanborn, *Old Time Wall Papers*, pl. LVI, LVII.
 14. A large gate-leg table known to have descended through the Pepprell and Gerrish families of Kittery is now in the collection of Owens.
 15. *Obituary*, *The Boston Transcript*.



CHAPTER OPENER



Cat. 6. Passaconaway Inn, Cape Neddick, Maine, built 1893. Photograph, 1892. Old York Historical Society.

6
PASSACONAWAY INN
Cape Neddick, Maine, 1893; demolished, 1937
E.B. Blaisdell (1849–1924), architect

York Harbor and York Beach were thriving resort communities by the last decade of the nineteenth century, and more cottages and hotels appeared with every season. Yet there remained a large tract of undeveloped shoreline on the north side of the Cape Neddick River, about a mile from York Beach; the land was part of the holdings of the Wear family who had owned it since before 1652.¹

In 1890 two brothers from New Jersey decided to create a new summer resort on this property. Cornelius Vermeule was an accomplished civil engineer. His brother John was a banker and president of the Goodyear India Rubber Company. Cornelius Vermeule negotiated purchases of

land with several members of the Wear family, amounting to approximately 150 acres.² Later purchases increased the total holdings to about 300 acres and included a scenic pond which was dubbed “Lake Carolyn.” The use of the land as a resort was made possible by Cornelius Vermeule’s design of a municipal water system, a bridge over the Cape Neddick River that linked York Cliffs with the railway at York Beach, and a pier that provided access to deep water. In the first of a series of publicity brochures for the development, known as “York Cliffs,” its promoters claimed that the resort offered more amenities “than Bar Harbor or any other locality upon the coast of Maine, yet it is conveniently located as is famed Newport.” York Cliffs boasted, among other qualities, proximity to wooded forest, rocky coastline, and sandy beaches; the 1893 brochure styled the surrounding landscape “as rich in rural loveliness, historical associations, traditions and romance as any in New England.”³

The centerpiece of the development was the expansive Passaconaway Inn (cat. 6), said by local historian Ralph

Winn to have catered to a “very swanky clientele.”⁴ The newly completed inn was described in 1893 as having been “built substantially, equipped with the best modern appliances, steam laundry, cold storage, model cooking, lighting and heating apparatus, a passenger elevator,” and every room had an open fireplace and marble-topped lavatory.⁵

The first brochure went to press before construction of the inn was completed. It contains the only known views of the interior of the Passaconaway Inn which was both rustic and colonial in feeling. The lobby or “office” was dominated by a large stone fireplace, the lintel bearing the inscription “WAPANACHEEN,” apparently a native American word whose meaning has been lost. Around the walls was a seascape frieze painted by New York artist Frank DeHaven. Before the fireplace was spread an oriental carpet, and a tall-case clock and a number of pressed-back rocking chairs accounted for most of the visible furniture.

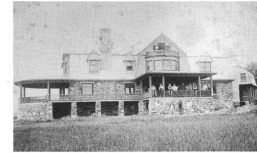
The 1893 brochure also illustrates three of the cottages built as part of the York Cliffs development. “Rockhaven,” which was the summer home of Frank DeHaven, stands on the northern edge of the tract. Built in 1892, its exterior combined locally available rubblestone with wood shingles in a treatment characteristic of summer cottages of the period. Nearby, the former Wear homestead was transformed into “Pinehurst Cottage” (cat. 2). The third York Cliffs building shown in the brochure was the cottage of Joseph N. Kinney of New York, vice president of the York Cliffs Improvement Company. Kinney had quickly chosen as the site for his own cottage a desirable seven-acre tract at the mouth of the harbor called “Wear Point.” The *York Transcript* described the property thus:

Now we emerge on a wide spreading lawn that slopes down to the very water’s edge where the white foam washes up among the pebbles and rocks. On this spot stands a beautiful cottage, “Greystone.” It is without exception the finest summer residence anywhere along this section of the coast. Its quaint style is most pleasing and its magnificent location unsurpassed.⁶

Greystone has the settled, rambling quality of an English country house (cat. 6a). English-inspired elements include the low Gothic porch, the patterned brickwork, and, originally, the half-timbering in the gable over the entry. Otherwise, the house has a typical shingle-style gambrel roof broken by dormers.

Both Greystone and the Passaconaway Inn were designed by architect Joseph H. Taft of New York City, but only the design for Greystone was executed. The York Cliffs Improvement Company had set a limit of \$100,000 for construction of the inn, and Taft’s design was rejected as too costly. The company instead accepted a design by the local architect and builder E.B. Blaisdell.⁷ Blaisdell completed the construction of the inn in ninety days.

Built in the same year as Greystone, but not included in the first York Cliffs brochure, was a small shingle-style cottage perched on the rocks at the ocean’s edge north



Cat. 6a. Greystone, Cape Neddick, Maine. Photograph, 1892. Old York Historical Society.

of the larger cottage. Its original owner, Elizabeth Blackwell, has been called “the first American woman doctor,” but it is more likely that she was the first woman to receive a medical degree from an American university. Born February 3, 1821, she was awarded an M.D. by Syracuse University in 1849.⁸

Eleven more cottages were built at York Cliffs between 1894 and 1902, of which all but three survive. Most of these summer houses were commissioned by officers of the York Cliffs Improvement Company for their own use, or served the company as rentals; only four were for people without connections to the development, like Elizabeth Blackwell. The company eventually built a golf club, bathhouses, and a large carriage house and stable. Several cottage owners built private stables at a remove from their residences on the western side of Shore Road. Despite the grandiose projections of its promotional brochures, this was the extent of the development at York Cliffs.

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1. In 1873 Theodore and Elsie Jane Wear, descendants of Peter Wear, the earliest known member of the family to settle in Cape Neddick, built the famous Cliff House summer hotel overlooking Bald Head Cliff, between York and Ogunquit. It continues to be run under Wear ownership, much altered and expanded.
 2. NRDC, 035282, 442-424, 446-262.
 3. *York Cliffs, Coast of Maine* (New York: York Cliffs Improvement Society, 1893).
 4. Ralph Winn, *Legends of Cape Neddick* (Freeport, Me.: Bond Wheelwright Co., 1984), 65.
 5. *York Cliffs*, 107-11.
 6. *York Transcript*, June 22, 1894.
 7. Taft is credited with the design of the Passaconaway Inn in an article that appeared in the *Industrial Journal* (Bangor, Me.), Jan. 21, 1893. Taft showed his design for Greystone in the 1893 annual exhibition of the Architectural League of New York; see *Catalogue of the Eighth Annual Exhibition of the Architectural League of New York* (New York: Architectural League of New York, 1893). Earle G. Shortlough, Jr., kindly brought these references to my attention.
 8. *York County Case Files*, Feb. 3, 1961. I am grateful to Dr. Barbara S. Barr of Portland, Me., for further information on Dr. Blackwell.

TYPICAL SPREAD