



**ARCHITECTURAL ASSESSMENT
OF
CEDARMERE MILL**

for the

Nassau County Parks Recreation and Museums
Cedarmere
225 Bryant Avenue
Roslyn Harbor, New York 11576

by

Page Ayres Cowley Architects, LLC
636 Broadway, Suite 720
New York, New York 10012

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Architectural History and Changes over Time

Background

The presence of a mill at Cedarmere dates back to Richard Kirk, who built the house at Cedarmere in 1787 and also the first mill, a water-powered fulling mill,¹ near the current site. The property with house and outbuildings, including the first mill, were owned in succession by Obadiah Jackson, William Hicks, and Joseph Moulton. The mill subsequently functioned as a paper mill, planing mill, and as a glass-cutting business. William Cullen Bryant bought the property and buildings from Moulton in 1843. On Friday, 29 June 1849, the mill building then in use by George Wilson for a glass-cutting business was destroyed by fire.²

In 1862 Bryant had the Gothic Revival Mill and summer cottage constructed. Although some historians have suggested that Calvert Vaux designed the Mill, it now seems most probable that Frederick S. Copley was the architect. There are several reasons to support this attribution. Bryant confirms in his correspondence that at the time of its construction Copley was involved in a few projects at Cedarmere. In a letter of reference, he wrote on 27 December 1862 that "Frederick S. Copley Esqre. Of Roslyn on Long Island has made several architectural designs for me which I have caused to be executed at my place near that village and which in my opinion do great credit to his taste and his invention In his designs he has shown much skill in combining beauty and variety of proportion with

¹ Fulling is a two-part process (scouring and milling) in cloth making for cleaning and thickening of cloth, especially wool.

² Handwritten copy of article in *North Hempstead Gazette*. June 30, 1849, Cedarmere archives.

convenience of arrangement.”³ One of these designs by Copley was the Dewey Cottage on the Bryant property. It is also likely that Copley is responsible for some alterations and additions to the main house in 1860-1861, including the remarkable pear tower for storing and ripening Bryant’s favorite fruit. At this time Copley was exhibiting several renderings of cottages with various art organizations. The titles or subjects of these pictures add confirmation that he was then active in designing picturesque dwellings. We have Bryant’s documentation that Copley was working for him in Roslyn in 1862, and there are notable similarities in the trim of the Pear Tower, Mill, and Dewey Cottage, and in the paneling of the Dewey Cottage and Mill. Working professionally as a sanitary engineer as well as an architect, Copley would no doubt have been interested in many types of water projects including water-powered mills.

Description and Changes over Time

The Mill at Cedarmere is a remarkable, if not unique, surviving example of a mill in the Gothic Revival style. It abounds in characteristic features of this style and its harmony with the landscape and role in creating a pleasing scene is especially evident in old photos and prints that show it comfortably nestled in its surroundings and embellished and visually softened by vines. The board and batten siding, arched and divided windows, tracery, decorative bargeboards and railings, chimney pots (as originally built), and roof finials all work together to exemplify the picturesque Gothic cottage. Built in 1862, the two-story Mill housed the mill works in the lower story and a summer-cottage space in the second or main story. The Mill was originally powered by a water wheel and

³ Letter 1316, *The Letters of William Cullen Bryant*, William Cullen Bryant II and Thomas G. Voss, eds. Vol. IV, 1858-1864, New York: Fordham University Press, 1984.

supplied power for operating machinery such as lathes, saws, grindstones, and other tools and equipment needed to maintain the estate. It also supplied water for the estate by pumping water from the spring fed-pond to a reservoir on the hill on the other side of Bryant Avenue. In 1885 Bryant's daughter Julia replaced the waterwheel with a turbine drive. The Mill's lower story and south wall are brick with brick quoins and segmental arch window openings and a pointed arch doorway on the north wall. The second story on the north, east, and west sides are board-and-batten siding. The wood windows on the east and west sides have divided lights and drip molding. The large Gothic window on the north side has carved tracery. Originally the wood siding on the Mill and other outbuildings was painted a light ochre color, described by Bryant as "the color of new wood."⁴ The north and west gables have openwork bargeboards, the east gable pierced bargeboard. The medium-pitch gabled roof was covered with slate. Bryant mentioned that the slaters were nearly finished with the roof in a letter to his wife Frances written on 30 September 1862.⁵ A gabled porch extends from the bank of the pond to the entry door of the summer cottage on the second or main floor. The summer cottage storey was appointed with features for pleasing effect and comfort such as the large Gothic window on the north side with Bryant's initials in Old English-style lettering⁶ etched on the three top panes and a fireplace with a slate mantel. This space was converted ca. 1930 for use as an art studio by Bryant's great-granddaughter, Howard Godwin's daughter Frances, a sculptor. The chimney was rebuilt, the interior was subdivided and refinished, and a

⁴ *Roslyn Landmark Society Annual House Tour Guide: 43rd Annual Tour, 7 June 20-03*, p. 110. Pages 3-5 of this architectural history are drawn largely from this source written by Harrison Hunt.

⁵ Letter 1291, *The Letters of William Cullen Bryant*.

⁶ Frederick Copley was also very interested in lettering and published a book on alphabets in 1870: *A Set of Alphabets: of All of the Various Hands of Modern Use, with Examples in Each Style; Also, the Mechanical & Analytical Construction of Letters, Figures & Titles, with Designs for Titles, Ciphers, Monograms, Borders, compasses, Flourishes, etc. . . Drawn and Arranged by Fred'k S. Copley*, New York: G. E. Woodward [1870].

skylight was installed on the western side of the roof. The attic stairs were relocated from the center of the building to the south wall and the basement stairs were covered over.⁷ Elizabeth Love Godwin, sister of Frances the sculptor and Bryant's last surviving great-granddaughter, willed the estate, which had been her permanent home, to the County of Nassau as a memorial to Bryant at her death in 1975.

Architect Frederick S. Copley

Frederick S. Copley was the son of Charles Copley [fl. 1843-69], a map and globe publisher and engraver active on Staten Island and in Brooklyn in the mid-nineteenth century.⁸ Charles Copley and Sons were particularly noted for sea charts. Frederick Copley was an artist as well as an architect. Nineteenth century exhibition records reveal that he was showing work with various arts organizations: In the 1860s he exhibited several times at the National Academy of Design: *Cottage at Montrose, (near Roslyn), Long Island* in 1864; design for a proposed Soldier's Monument on Harbor Hill, Roslyn, L. I., *Our Flag in Granite*, in 1866; and two views, the entrance front and a garden front, of *Model Suburban Cottage, in the old English style*, in 1867.⁹ Copley's paintings *Model Cottage near Roslyn, Long Island*, and his *Gardener's Lodge* were included in the Artists' Fund Society's exhibitions in 1864 and 1866, respectively. These titles, in particular, closely match the titles of his designs for houses published by George Woodward in 1865. A number of Copley's paintings were also shown with the American

⁷ *Roslyn Landmark Society Annual House Tour Guide: 43rd Annual Tour, 7 June 20-03*, p. 110 (written by H. Hunt).

⁸ The 1882-1883 Richmond County Directory lists "Copley, Charles and Sons (Charles and Frederick S. Copley) Chart Publishers, Richmond Rd., corner of Metcalf, Stapleton" and "Copley, Frederick S., Architect, and Charles Copley and Sons, Richmond Rd. corner Metcalf, Stap."

⁹ In 1864 and 1867 his address was listed as Thompkinsville, Staten Island [Maria Naylor, ed., *The National Academy of Design Exhibition Record, 1861-1900*, Kennedy Galleries, Inc., New York, 1973, 188-189.]

Society of Painters in Water Color in the 1860s and 70s: two paintings, *Night and Morning*, in 1867-68; *Residence of Judge O. M. Dorman, Norfolk, Va.*, in 1870-71; and *Picturesque French Roof Villa* in 1874. Other known works are an oil painting of a harbor scene, dated 1858, private collection, and an idealized head of a child, 1861, collection of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences.¹⁰

Copley was active as an architect in New York City and Long Island at least from the 1860s to 1903, with addresses from the 1870s onward in Manhattan and on Staten Island, sometimes concurrent.¹¹ A few known commissions demonstrate Copley's interest in picturesque style for the design of country estates and in the latest developments in plumbing and ventilation for comfortable living.

In 1862 Copley was commissioned by Bryant's neighbor Anna Eliza Cairns to design a country house, which she named "Clifton." A floor plan, architectural rendering, and description of this picturesque "Model Suburban Cottage" of two and one half stories with distinctive Flemish gable ends and dormers and Gothic detailing, were published in 1865 in *Woodward's Country Homes* and in *The Horticulturist* and described by *Woodward's* as a dwelling "in the Old English or Rural Gothic Style." The house was well furnished with modern conveniences including a bathroom with enclosed water

¹⁰ Art Inventories Catalog, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Smithsonian Institution Information Systems (SIRIS).

¹¹ From 1873 to 1877 his address is 335 Broadway in New York. In 1882-1889 he is listed at Richmond Road, corner of Metcalf, Stapleton, S. I.; in 1899-1900 at 339 Richmond Road. For some of these years he also has a Manhattan address: from 1889-1896, 1899, and 1901-1903 at 510 Pearl Street. [Francis Dennis Steadman (for the Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records), *Architects in Practice, New York City, 1840-1900*, New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, ca. 1980; and James Ward (for the Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records), *Architects in Practice, New York City, 1900-1940*, Union, NJ: J & D Associates, 1989.]

closet and vertical pipes, all rooms equipped with fireplaces, ample closet space, Dixon's patent grates, Arnott's ventilating valves, ventilating transoms over the doors of each room, a dumb waiter accessible at every floor, and a dust shoot with registers at each floor to receive sweepings from rooms and send them to a bin in the cellar. Also, the house was said to be fire resistant by virtue of its high-quality construction of solid floors, wall, partitions, and stairs. The exterior was painted with a sand coat of light brown ochre for "substantial effect" and to avoid "harsh and disagreeable glare and glisten of paint."¹²

Also in 1862 Bryant had Copley design a Gothic Revival gardener's lodge on his estate for Jerusha Dewey and her brother, the Reverend Dr. Orville Dewey, who was Bryant's close friend. The original board-and-batten cottage was 1 ½ stories as drawn by Copley and described in *Woodward's Country Homes*. The board used was 1 ½-inch tongue-and-groove pine plank, and the battens have chamfered edges. The wood was stained with a "mixture of oil, &c., that heightens the grain of the wood, and gives a brightness of color, and that cheerfulness of effect, so desirable in rural dwellings." The description in *Woodward's* closes with this assessment, one that invites application to the Cedarmere Mill as well, "As a specimen of cottage architecture, (on the smallest scale, lodge class,) it will rank as one of the best. For simplicity, variety of form, symmetry of proportion with convenience of arrangement and economy of space and construction, it forms a model cottage, that anyone might live in and many covet, besides being an addition to the landscape and an ornament to the grounds."¹³ This modest dwelling for Miss Dewey is

¹² Woodward, George, *Woodward's Country Homes*, New York: Woodward, 1865, 149.

¹³ Woodward, 41-44

most likely also the one depicted in his painting titled *Gardener's Lodge*, exhibited in 1866. The subject of another of Copley's exhibited paintings, *Residence of Judge O. M. Dorman, Norfolk, Va.* was probably also a home of his design. To date, no image of this residence has been located, but Dorman's obituary stated that "in 1865 the judge reared and adorned a lovely home."¹⁴ That is the year Copley's designs for Clifton or Model Suburban Cottage in the Old English or Rural Gothic Style and the Gardener's Lodge (Jerusha Dewey House) would have been widely known through *Woodward's Country Homes*.

Copley's innovations for Clifton are not surprising considering he also practiced as a sanitary engineer whose expertise was respected and published. *The Staten Island Business Register and Railroad and Steamboat Guide for 1879-1880* lists Copley as an architect, artist, and sanitary engineer in Stapleton at the corner of Richmond Road and Roff Street.

In the early 1880s Copley was consulted by the journal *Sanitary Engineer* on automatic cistern filters. His design had been presented in the issue of 1 April 1881 and his disapproving reply to a query on using iron pipes instead of vitrified stoneware was published subsequently.¹⁵ Copley's innovations even included a chess set, "Improved

¹⁴ *Norfolk [Virginia] News*, June 17, 1879, clipping courtesy Norfolk Public Library. Copley evidently had been in Norfolk—in discussing automatic cistern filters for the *Sanitary Engineer*, Copley wrote that he witnessed the "most simple and inexpensive" means of filtering in Norfolk, Virginia.

¹⁵ *Plumbing Problems; or Questions, Answers, and Descriptions relating to House-Drainage and Plumbing from the Sanitary Engineer*, New York: The Engineering Record, 1892, 122-125.

Geometrical and Universal Chess-Men" (1864), which inspired the design of a number of folding wallet-sized sets.¹⁶

His book, *Copley's Plain and Ornamental Standard Alphabets*, representing "all the various hands of modern use," intended as a textbook for "draughtsmen, civil engineers, surveyors, architects, engravers, designers, sign painters, schools, etc.," was published by George Woodward in 1870. The book was favorably reviewed by *The Manufacturer and Builder* as "valuable, and much above the average of its class," with special praise for the section on numerals.¹⁷ At about this time Copley illustrated another book to aid the building professions, the *Gurley Manual of Surveying Instruments*.¹⁸

Later in his career, in 1886, Copley designed a handsome Queen Anne/Shingle Style multi-purpose railroad station. The *Manufacturer and Builder* reported that F. S. Copley was the architect for "a railroad depot, post office, and residence for keeper" to be built at a cost of \$4,000 for Douglaston, Long Island.¹⁹ According to the Flushing Journal of 29 May 1886, the site was donated by William P. Douglas, who also supplied \$2,000. The Long Island Railroad provided \$2,000, Mr. A. S. Robbins gave \$500, and remaining funds came from local subscribers.²⁰ The building was constructed by a contractor named Ryan, and the site was artistically landscaped by postmaster Albert Benz, a German immigrant and noted local horticulturist. The station was demolished in 1962.²¹

¹⁶ Mike Darlow, *Turned Chessmen*, Fox Chapel Publishing: East Petersburg, PA, 2004

¹⁷ *The Manufacturer and Builder*, 2 (November 1870), 339.

¹⁸ W. and L. E. Gurley, *Gurley Manual of Surveying Instruments: Drawn and Arranged by Frederick S. Copley*. Troy, New York, 1871

¹⁹ *The Manufacturer and Builder*, 18 (July, 1886) 161.

²⁰ Joseph B. Hellmann, History of the Douglaston Train Station, Douglaston/Little Neck Historical Society.

²¹ Joseph B. Hellmann.