



***Romanticism and Ruralism:  
Changing Nineteenth Century American  
Perceptions of the Natural World***

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In 1833, Swedish tourist Carl David Arfwedson meandered through the delicately landscaped carriage paths of Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Constructed just two years earlier, the cemetery was the first of its kind in America – a picturesque, rural park designed for the enjoyment of the living and the nostalgic sanctification of the dead. The location differed from any previous place of internment. It was outside of the city, filled with exquisite funerary monuments and carefully landscaped vistas. Upon experiencing Mt. Auburn, Arfwedson wrote:

“Here stands man alone in the presence of his creator and his conscience. ...Look at these weeping willows, these cypresses – what do they not announce? And this flower, but lately planted, spreading its fragrance through the air, this rattling and crystal-like stream, this plaintive tone of a solitary bird – is not all this a language that speaks to the heart? Death inspires here no dread: on the contrary, a glance at this beautiful cemetery almost excites a wish to die.”<sup>1</sup>

What was so remarkable about the rural cemetery that it inspired so strong a sentimentalization of death and idealization of nature? Today such locations appear a mess of intertwining serpentine paths, leaf-cluttered reflecting pools and decomposing monuments. However, deeper analysis reveals them to be locations of deep historical and cultural significance. The rolling hills, winding paths, crumbling Greek temples and dark pools remind the viewer of an ancient work of art and evoke the creation of a set of culturally constructed emotional responses. Visitors like Mr. Arfwedson experienced in these locations sensations evoking a newfound learned connectivity between the individual and the natural landscape.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl David Arfwedson *The United States and Canada in 1832, 1833 and 1834*, New York: Johnson Reprint, (1969), 211 – 212.

The emersion of the cemetery into the natural world, and the treatment of the landscape as a work of art reflected changing sentiment towards nature in the American psyche. Visitors to this rural institution experienced a sense of natural harmony, historical continuity and cultural resonance. This change can be directly associated with a transmission of European Romantic thought into nineteenth century American culture. The ideology of the Scottish School of Moral Sense, with its emphasis on emotion as knowledge and the elevation of the heart over the brain, came to be utilized by European Romantic writers and artists. This work will argue that through various artistic media (including literature and landscape painting), this naturalistic ideology seeped into American culture and fostered a growth of sentimentality, which imprinted itself on the natural landscape. Nineteenth century American material culture preserves this ideological change and chronicles it through the rise in popularity of the landscape paintings of Thomas Cole, the growth of the landscape design industry as influenced by the works of Andrew Jackson Downing, the creation of American rural cemeteries, and the birth of the rural sanitarium (most notably, the Trudeau Sanitarium in Saranac Lake, NY). American culture absorbed Romantic ideology from Europe, internalized it, and expressed their newfound sentiment in the natural landscape.



Romantic literature, art, and ideology crept into the American mindscape and inspired a change in the conceptualization and representation of nature. Emotionally charged depictions of the natural landscape in art and literature and increased leisurely travel across the uncharted lands of the Americas, reveals a growing sense that the natural world possessed physical and mental healing powers. Romantic thought grew out of a shift in European mentality, fostered directly by the Scottish School of Moral Sense, Romantic thinkers who emphasized emotional or

internal experience over objective knowledge, and propagated the concept of a “cult of sensibility.”<sup>2</sup> To these intellectuals, man; as God’s creation, could find in himself a similarity to the natural world, which was in essence, a pure manifest of God’s work. The beauty of the natural world was seen as comparable to this subjective emotional knowledge, as both were considered pure constructs of the Creator.

This ‘inward turn’ in the words of historian and philosopher Charles Taylor, influenced the flowering of landscape art and landscape appreciation in nineteenth century America. This inward turn is preserved in nineteenth century American material culture. The artwork of the [Hudson River School](#), the landscapes of rural cemeteries and the still-standing examples of Romantic architecture, all point to this change in mentality. The transformation in American perceptions of nature as a result of Romantic ideology and aesthetic tradition remain a pervasive influence over not only the way that contemporary Americans perceive the natural world and their relationship with it, but how they are instructed to view it.

One major communicator of the emotional turn was the Scottish School of Moral Sense, a group of European intellectuals who emphasized the “innate ‘moral sense,’ [which] emphasized subjective of at least emotional reaction... and a combination of the doctrine of moral sentiment”<sup>3</sup> and opposed the ideology of the Common Sense School, which preached the accumulation of objective knowledge through empiricism. Scottish academic [David Hume](#) (1711 – 1776) shared these conceptions of sensory knowledge. He stated “a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right; because no sentiment represents what is really in the object... beauty is no quality in things themselves: it exists merely in the mind

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Jackson Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England*, University Of Michigan: Harvard University Press, (1946), 51.

<sup>3</sup> Bate, *From Classic to Romantic*, 101.

which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty.”<sup>4</sup> These ideas were centered on the belief that the human experience could be best understood through an innate moral sensitivity. Within this concept was the idea that emotions could communicate truth. Hume’s contemporary [Francis Hutcheson](#) (1694 – 1746) argued along similar regarding this innate moral sense, and extended this ideology to encompass the human relationship with the natural world. Hutcheson asserted that God’s creation of the world was intended to be something perfect and harmonious, and therefore in order to be the best possible individual, one should strive for harmony within their natural environment.<sup>5</sup> Hutcheson stated, “Does not even the flourishing State of the inanimate Parts of Nature, fill us with joy? Is not thus our nature admonished, exhorted, and commanded to cultivate universal goodness and love, by a voice heard thro’ all the earth.”<sup>6</sup> The innate nature of the human being is, as Hutcheson implies, akin to the innate goodness found within the natural world. These two harmoniously feed off of each other, and the human can only be his best when in recognition of the innate splendor and majesty of the natural world. Landscape architects such as Frederick Law Olmstead and Andrew Jackson Downing later adopt this concept of the beneficial and harmonious relationship between the human and nature. These individual created landscapes and domestic residences in which individuals can feel continuity between their existence and the natural world.

This emphasis on sentiment was an integral culture step towards the appreciation of nature in relation to human psychological and emotional wellbeing. “By the end of the century, idealization of nature, particularly of plants and of wild mountain scenery, had come to provide a

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<sup>4</sup> Bate, *From Classic to Romantic*, 102.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge University Press, (1992), 262 – 263.

<sup>6</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 263.

new, secular form of therapy, formerly provided by religious means for emotional disturbance.”<sup>7</sup> These ideas regarding the emotional (and physiological) benefits of experiencing the natural world would come to characterize the nineteenth century association between nature and the human being. The conception that “the provincial design of nature takes the place of hierarchical order of reason as the constitutive good,”<sup>8</sup> paired with the literature of nineteenth century Europe, (and the literature that it inspired in nineteenth century America) epitomized this associationism with the natural world, and further propagated the idea of nature as something beautiful, therapeutic, and sanctimonious. In opposition to the earlier Romantics who treated the natural world as a depository of material and information, these moral-sense philosophers argued for a harmonic resonance between the human and the natural environment. It is in this way that individuals were taught to understand their innermost self as being connected with the greater works natural environment (or, God’s purest creation), and draw from it spiritual, emotional and even physical rejuvenation.



Much of nineteenth century Americans’ perception of the Romantic Movement was transmitted through European Romantic literature, most notably in the poetry of [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#) who emphasized natural themes and sentimental experience. Coleridge (born in 1772) contributed greatly to this growing Romantic turn within European poetry and literature. His poem “To Nature” sentimentalizes nature as something godly and holistic, and laments the divergence between the condition and nature. He wrote,

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<sup>7</sup> Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*, Cambridge University Press, (1995), 108.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 361.

“It may indeed be fantasy when I  
 Essay to draw from all created things  
 Deep, heartfelt, inward joy that closely clings;  
 And trace in leaves and flowers that round me lie  
 Lessons of love and earnest piety.  
 So let it be; and if the wide world rings  
 In mock of this belief, it brings  
 Nor fear, nor grief, nor vain perplexity.  
 So will I build my altar in the fields,  
 And the blue sky my fretted dome shall be,  
 And the sweet fragrance that the wild flower yields  
 Shall be the incense I will yield to Thee,  
 Thee only God! and thou shalt not despise  
 Even me, the priest of this poor sacrifice.”<sup>9</sup>

In this short literary passage, Coleridge expresses a deep appreciation for the natural world that is emblematic of this natural turn. Particularly in his passage “so I will build my altar in the fields,” evokes an emotional association between nature and religion, almost blending the distinctions between the two. Literary works such as this circulated sentimentalization of nature, asserting that cultural perceptions of the natural world were undergoing a transformative process. Ideas like those of Coleridge came to influence American literature and thereby inspire a growing body of landscape art that recognized and recreated these same naturalistic values. The

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<sup>9</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Including Poems and Versions of Poems Now Published for the First Time, Volume 2*, The University of Michigan: Clarendon Press, (1912), 144.

sentimentalization of nature, paired with the Scottish thinker's assertions of the validity of emotional experience, presented to America a perspective of the natural world that was both positive and reassuring. The association between nature and the individual thereby became a conduit of expression through literature, art, and design. His works likened the natural world to the religious one, creating an emotional association between the two, which would be further explored by American romantics.

American authors, poets and intellectuals found inspiration in the connection between the individual and the natural world, and reflected this newfound sentimentality in their own works.

In his piece "Prelude: Book III: Residence at Cambridge," [William Wordsworth](#) wrote:

"To every natural form, rock, fruit, or flower  
 Even the loose stones that cover the high-way  
 I gave a moral life, I saw them feel  
 Or linked them to some feeling: the great mass  
 Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all  
 That I beheld respired with inward meaning."<sup>10</sup>

In this passage, Wordsworth imbues the natural world with an almost animistic power, appreciating the value of every aspect of nature and drawing a sense of self-rejuvenation from it. He recognizes a connection between the individual and the natural world and expresses this attachment through heavily sentimental, Romantic language. In this brief passage, Wordsworth conveys an important idea to America at large – the inherent value in the natural world. His words "I gave moral life, I saw them feel" assign spiritual value to the various elements of

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<sup>10</sup> William Wordsworth, "Prelude: Book III: Residence at Cambridge," *William Wordsworth, the Major Works, Preface to Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems*, Oxford University Press, (1802), 407.



nature.<sup>11</sup> The works of authors such as Coleridge and Wordsworth instilled in American culture an understanding of the natural world as something deserving of appreciation, value, and even affection. They helped to spark a sentimentalization of nature that grew throughout the nineteenth century, promoted through various channels of aesthetic experience such as landscape painting and landscape design.



The great American landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing believed that “it is unquestionably true, that we learn to appreciate the beauty of nature in proportion as we become familiar with the beauty of art.”<sup>12</sup> It is in this way that the picturesque style in American landscape painting served as a pedagogical tool, providing the consumers of art with a toolkit for understanding and appreciating the natural landscape. American landscape painting of the nineteenth century underwent changes as a result of the influence of Romantic art and literature from Europe. “The movement we call Romantic [Downing concluded] is often said to mean a return to nature; a turn, that is, in literature and other arts, from representations of social action to ecstasies over a desolate pond, or a lugubrious nightingale, or a lonely cloud, with no human figure in sight.”<sup>13</sup> These depictions, along with countless others, imbue the viewer with a sense of historical continuity and morose sensitivity. Romantic painters utilized these images in landscape art, and communicated their meaning aesthetically to nineteenth century American landscape painters. They reveal the diffusion of Romantic ideology aesthetically through the picturesque: a blasted tree, or a broken column, or a ravaged pastoral landscape. “The ‘picturesque’ in painting is essentially distinguished by roughness and irregularity – the qualities

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<sup>11</sup> Wordsworth, “Prelude: Book III: Residence at Cambridge,” 407.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, *Victorian Cottage Residences*. (Courier Dover Publications, 1873), 80.

<sup>13</sup> Carl Woodring, “Nature and Art in the Nineteenth Century.” (*PMLA*, Vol. 92, No. 2, 1977): 193.

which are originally discerned by the sense of touch.”<sup>14</sup> The consumers of nineteenth century landscape art did not look at these images and merely seen a field or a wood, instead, they saw a culturally rich depiction of the personified human psyche and the connectivity between the individual and the natural world that surrounded them.

Instead of seeing nature as merely an external condition that they toiled against, romantic landscape painters came to see nature as a moralizing, curative and humanistic entity. Much of the American landscape tradition can be attributed to influence from great European landscape painters whose works demonstrate the picturesque incorporation of ruins into the natural landscape, and invoke sensations of the magnitude and sublimity of nature. The European landscape tradition served to integrate the natural world within classical subjects and tales, demonstrating the predominance of nature in human activity and presenting to the viewer and image of the world that places man within an everlasting and eternal nature. While the human figures may be the subject of the classical retellings taking place within these paintings, the natural world always holds the higher place: the humans are small, innocuous guests in relation to nature’s magnitude. This conception of the human as a miniscule element of the natural world is Romantic in essence, exemplifying the power and magnitude of the sublime and the picturesque.

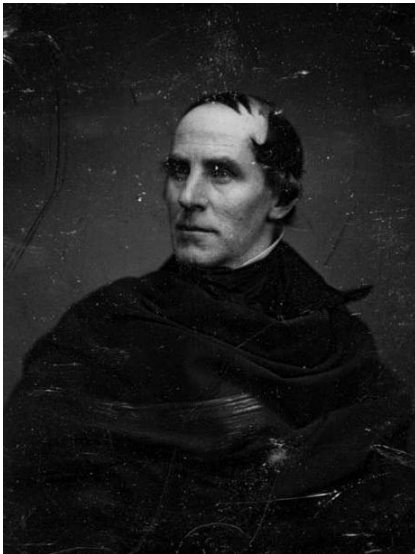
Later works of American landscape art would feature the picturesque as a key aesthetic characteristic, with beautiful landscapes evoking sensations of nostalgia, emotional connectivity between the individual and nature, and most notably, the neo-classicist sentiment present in images of ancient monuments and crumbling ruins, being slowly resorbed by nature. Inspiration for this newfound American interest in artistic representation of the natural landscape came

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<sup>14</sup> Bate, *From Classic to Romantic*, 150.

primarily from European landscape painters who themselves were influenced by the ideology of Romanticism, and specifically the concept of the picturesque. Nineteenth century American landscape painting stood in stark contrast to Enlightenment era artistic tradition which represented the natural world as “inevitably what he [the artist] empirically judges as reality, in which any human idealization discovered is not inherent or actual but either something simply displayed as a psychological reaction of human beings under given circumstances, or at best something useful or desirable for the social, scientific and humanitarian betterment of mankind.”<sup>15</sup>

The gradual transmission of Romantic ideas into nineteenth century American society provided everyday individuals with the ideological tool-kit necessary to interpret the natural landscape as a work of art, and therefore their perception of said landscape began to evolve. A newfound interest in the natural world resulted in a change in perception of the natural



1: Thomas Cole, Matthew Brady Studio  
Daguerreotype (1846)

landscape. [Thomas Cole](#)'s naturalistic paintings are filled with awe-inspiring landscapes, often dramatic and seemingly dangerous, with iconography indicative of the terrible might of the natural world and the respect it demands from human society. Cole, (born in England in 1801) emigrated to America at the age of 17, bringing with him the European landscape art tradition and ideology. Relevant examples of

Cole's works include *A View of Mt. Holyoke, Northampton,*

*Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm (the Oxbow), Kaaterskill*

*Falls, and Sunrise in the Kattskills.* “For Cole, like other romantics, the sublime and the beautiful

<sup>15</sup> Bate, *From Classic to Romantic*, 10.

formed not only part of an imaginary geography of nature but also part of the self. Cole's psychomachy, played out on the stage of nature, gave way in the work of later artists to social encounters drained of the psychic conflict that so charged his early landscapes."<sup>16</sup>

Cole also frequently places human figures within his natural landscapes, but they are miniscule, and not at the center of the work, demonstrating the power of nature over humans. Cole utilized a specific hierarchy of scale to demonstrate the awesome power of nature (the subject of the image) over the human (merely a spec on the canvas). However in opposition to the flowing, beautiful landscapes created by some of Europe's most famous landscape painters, Cole focuses specifically on the more grotesque aspects of the concept of the picturesque. "What emerges here, then, is that roughness, ugliness, deviation, decay, deformity, and ruin, in addition to things foreign and strange, are at the centre of ideas of the picturesque at the end of the eighteenth century."<sup>17</sup>

One of Cole's most famous pieces, [\*A View of Mt. Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm \(the Oxbow\)\*](#) epitomizes his sentimental treatment of the American landscape as well as his heavily



2: "A View of Mt. Holyoke..." Thomas Cole, 1836

picturesque aesthetic. The viewpoint of looking down upon the oxbow is beautiful and serene,

<sup>16</sup> Angela L. Miller, "Nature's Transformations: The Meaning of the Picnic Theme in Nineteenth-Century American Art," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 24, No. 2/3, (1989), 116.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Rawlings, "Grotesque Encounters in the Travel Writings of Henry James," *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 34, Nineteenth-Century Travel Writing, (2004), 176.

yet at the same time presents a certain foreboding sensation, indicated by the receding storm clouds and Cole's infamous 'blasted tree' on the left side of the canvas. The tree is marred and freshly broken, (perhaps struck by lightning?) and serves as a reminder of the terrible power of the natural world. This element could be considered a characteristic of the grotesque, as well as the picturesque. Cole chooses to include human figures within his natural landscape, but they are so insignificant that they are nearly indistinguishable at first glance. Just past the blasted tree, sitting on the edge of the overhang is a portrait of the artist himself, with canvas and paintbrush in hand, capturing the image of the oxbow. There are also some ships on the river, and several places where smoke is rising from small houses. However all of these human elements are so small that, when looking at the work as a whole, they are almost entirely encompassed by the surrounding natural landscape – so much so that they require a very close examination to even detect them.

The works of Cole and the Hudson River School all depict a relationship between human and nature that is indicative of a great love for the landscape, as well as fear and admiration of the natural world. This change occurring in American sentimentality towards nature is visually apparent primarily through artistic works. The ideas and artistic characteristics associated with European Romantic landscape painters found themselves transplanted into American artistic schools, and functioned as pedagogical tools providing individuals with a means of viewing the natural landscape as a piece of art – and even manipulating it as such.



The work of American landscape architect [Andrew Jackson Downing](#) (1815 – 1852) illustrates the growing culture of sentimentality in nineteenth century America. Downing's ideas concerning the beautification of the natural landscape reflect a widespread desire for Victorian

and Gothic styles of domestic architecture and, more generally, a growing appreciation for the picturesque.



3: Photograph of Andrew Jackson Downing (1851)

As a proponent of the nineteenth century American Victorian cottage design, Downing sold his clients not only the design for a picturesque homestead, but also the possibility of improving oneself from within through the improvement of one surroundings without. Downing desired the dissemination of “livelier perceptions of the beautiful, in everything that relates to our houses and grounds.”<sup>18</sup> Drawing from the notion that the external directly reflected the internal, Downing proposed to his clients,

“If we become sincere lovers of the grace, the harmony, and the loveliness with which rural homes and rural life are capable of being invested, that we are silently opening our hearts to an influence which is higher and deeper than the mere *symbol*; and that if we thus worship in the true spirit, we shall attain a nearer view of the Great master, whose words, in all his material universe, are written in lines of Beauty.”<sup>19</sup>

For Downing, the creation and consumption of picturesque architecture and landscape has the capability of bringing those who consume it closer to God himself. Downing could only have crafted such views of the power of beauty and the natural landscape through a complex interplay of influence from European Romantic ideology and the American picturesque ideal. The

<sup>18</sup> Downing, *Victorian Cottage Residences*, viii.

<sup>19</sup> Downing, *Victorian Cottage Residences*, ix.

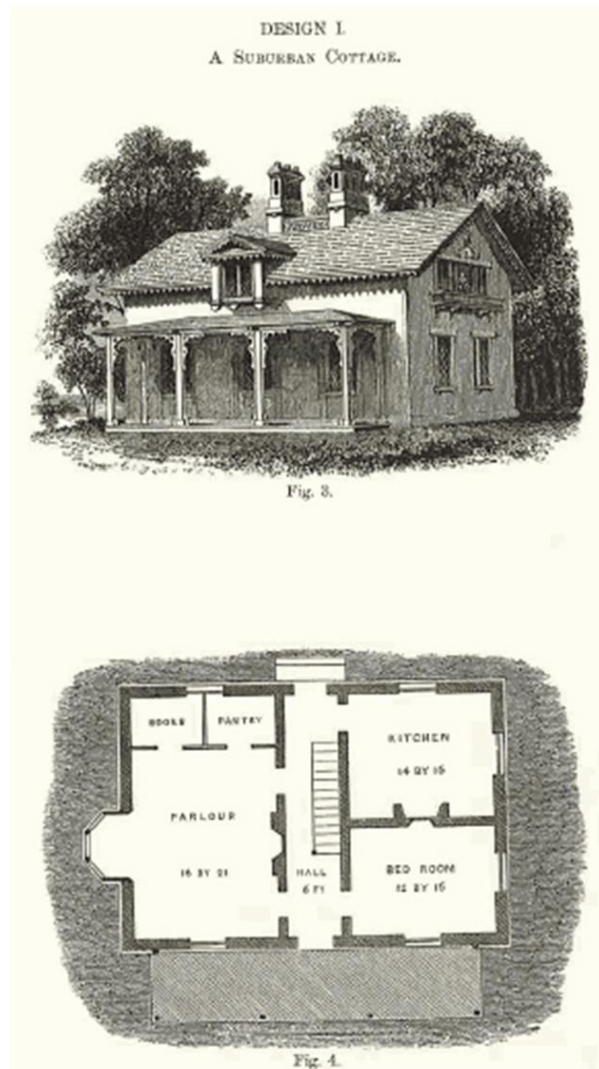
purifying abilities of the natural world are emphasized here, paired with the importance of surrounding oneself with the most perfected form of nature – that which the human has created.

Instead of placing a home into a pre-existing natural landscape, Downing believed that the man-made structure should be an entity that could meld with the natural landscape, not just be added to it. “Those who desired the Picturesque in their homes and grounds should take care to choose a natural site which suggested that mode before its artistic improvement. The landscape gardener should seek only to eliminate those elements in the natural scene which he judged to be out of character with its essential spirit, while at the same time he exercised his art to heighten its fundamental character to a degree never found in nature.”<sup>20</sup>

This harmony between man and nature was a focal point of Downing’s work, reflecting Romantic conceptions of the preponderance of sentimental value in the natural world.

“By their insistence that a house should express in its style, location, and plan the persons who were to occupy it, they [Downing and his contemporaries]

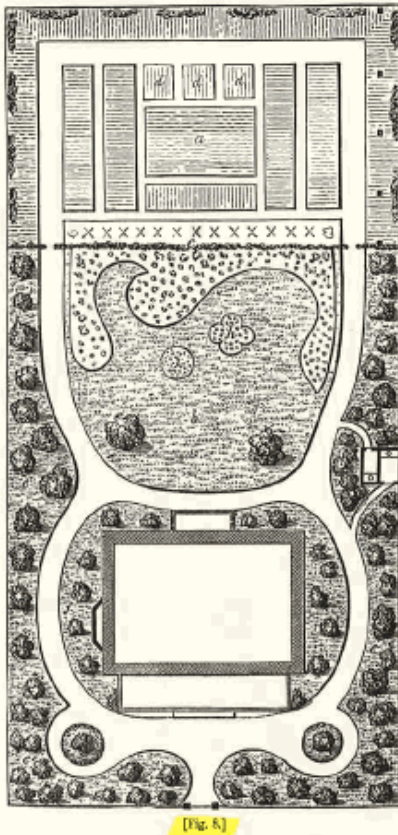
helped to foster a new interpretation of the relationship of man to art. This



4: Downing's Design for a 'Suburban Cottage for a Small Family' From his "Victorian Cottage Residences"

<sup>20</sup> George B. Tatum, “The Beautiful and the Picturesque,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (1951), 43 – 44.

concept of the complete life was one of the motivating principles that gave vitality to that aspect of the Romantic Movement in America of which Downing was the principal exponent. As applied to architecture it meant that, in theory at least, the house was suited to its natural setting, the furnishings and interior decoration were a unit with the house, and all were expressive of, and in harmony with, the unique personality of its owner.”<sup>21</sup>



5: Downing's "Landscape and Gardens for a Small Cottage Design"

This concept of harmony between the individual and the natural world was a pivotal characteristic of the new moral sense initiative, as well as the Romantic Movement at large. If an individual could situate himself or herself within a domestic space that was in harmony with the natural world, those dwelling within the home could reap emotional peace, spiritual connectivity and bodily rejuvenation.

Along with the importance of the home as reflecting picturesque ideals, Downing also emphasized the need for a well-planned personal garden. In his "Design I: A Suburban Cottage for a Small Family," Downing insisted, "the exercise involved in the pursuit [of tending gardens] thus soon becomes,

also, a source of pleasure and mental satisfaction.”<sup>22</sup> Downing was a great fan of botanical

<sup>21</sup> Tatum, "The Beautiful and the Picturesque," 51.

<sup>22</sup> Downing, *Victorian Cottage Residences*, 39.



experimentation, often creating unusual combinations of plant life and tree species in his proposals of gardens for the patrons of his domestic designs. This interest translated directly into his work with the inclusion of extensive arboretums in rural cemetery designs.

Downing's landscape designs served as inspiration for other realms of nineteenth century American landscaping, most notably in the Rural Cemetery Movement, which grew out of the landscape architecture movement and the development of a national parks system. American landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead was a proponent of Downing-style design, and utilized similar ideas in his park proposals. "America's nineteenth-century cemeteries emerged from both the need for larger and healthier burying grounds and a nostalgia for the pastoral view of death culled from classical authors."<sup>23</sup> Rochester serves as a prime example of some of these ideological changes happening in the nineteenth century landscape, particularly Mt. Hope Cemetery and its correlation with the visualization of Romantic thought and sentimentality. Olmstead's designs were highly influenced by the creation of rural cemeteries, as well as the work of Downing. Olmstead served as the landscape architect of Central Park in New York City, (1857) the function and aesthetics of this being quite comparable to Mount Hope. In regards to his designs, and the ever pervasive contrast between urban and rural, Olmstead stated that "...no broad question of country life in comparison with city life is involved; it is confessedly a question of delicate adjustment between the natural and the artificial."<sup>24</sup> This desire to have the best of both worlds appears to have been evident both in Olmstead's designs, as well as the desires of the American public, who craved both a busy city life and the pleasures of country experiences. One can clearly differentiate the creations of the landscaper's picturesque designs,

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<sup>23</sup> Margareta J. Darnall, "The American Cemetery as Picturesque Landscape: Bellefontaine Cemetery, St. Louis," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 18, No. 4, (1983), 266.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley French, "The Cemetery as Cultural Institution: The Establishment of Mount Auburn as the 'Rural Cemetery' Movement," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (1974), 205.

in contrast to more modern sections of the cemetery, which are merely concerned with organization and spatial conservation. The transmission of Romantic ideology from Europe to America in the nineteenth century was a phenomenon that is visibly recorded in the American landscape. Works of landscape art such as those by Cole instructed his clients and contemporaries how to view the landscape as a piece of art. This concept of nature as art took hold in American culture, and resulted in the physical transplantation of art into the natural world by means of landscape design.



The works of American landscape architects Andrew Jackson Downing and [Frederick Law Olmstead](#), (notably rural architecture and rural cemeteries), function as culturally imbued institutions, emphasizing Romantic ideals as a means of creating the picturesque. Rural,

picturesque cemeteries functioned not only as culturally imbued institutions which provided a sentimentalized version of death for the American populace, but also as physical environments that reflected the inner-most workings of the human spirit – an external



6: Old Granary Burial Ground, Boston MA (Photo by Paige Doerner)

theater for the internal sentimentality that was fostered throughout the nineteenth century in America as a result of the transmission of Romantic ideology.

The predominate form which cemeteries took in seventeenth and eighteenth century America was the graveyard adjacent to a church. Characterized by the crowds of headstones, these graveyards often lacked basic maintenance. They were more of an eyesore than a place of mourning and were often neglected or avoided altogether. Historian Stanley French stated, “It was simply an unenclosed, unkempt section of the town common where the graves and fallen markers were daily trampled upon by people and cattle.”<sup>25</sup> These locations seldom visited. Pre-Romantic (and generally negative) conceptions of death during the early stages of the American republic were observable in these graveyards, where the remains of the dead were treated with little reverence. The terminology associated with these graveyards was morbid and literal. Phrases like ‘bone yard’ and ‘grave yard’ were used to describe these places, contrasted with the later usage of ‘cemetery’ or ‘funerary acre’ or even the pleasant ‘memorial park.’ Public parks were referred to as ‘pleasure grounds,’ and cemeteries of the nineteenth century began to take on strikingly similar characteristics.

The proximity of these graveyards to cities posed a number of problems. Sporadic bouts of disease combined with unkempt premises presented a potential danger to visitors. Crowding of headstones made landscaping of the graveyard difficult to maintain – weeds, foliage and refuse often overran these locations. Graveyards also posed a problem to the development of early American towns and cities – their efforts at expansion and maximum usage of space were often thwarted by the presence of these graveyards. In his discussion on the Rural Cemetery Movement, Thomas Bender wrote “even the bones of the dead, man’s sacred link with his communal past, were not safe from the next wave of residential and industrial expansion or

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<sup>25</sup> French, “The Cemetery as Cultural Institution,” 39.

financial promotion.”<sup>26</sup> Although there were multiple reasons for the removal of cemeteries from cities, their ruralization did not occur until there was an accepted ideology associating sentimentalization of death with the natural world. This ideology came about as the result of the transmission of Romantic ideology from Europe through natural literature, landscape painting, and the growing interest in landscape gardening.

It was in the late nineteenth century that graveyards relocated to the outskirts of towns and cities and were placed into semi-natural landscapes (such as forests, hills, fields, etc.), often reconfigured with man-made alterations – hence the name ‘rural cemeteries.’ As French concludes,

“[they]... were certainly some improvement over the standard sappy churchyard, where the mourners sink ankle deep in a rank of offensive mould, mixed with broken bones and fragments of coffins... people would not have to worry about the remote graves of their loved ones and friends being subject to the depredations of suppliers to the medical profession or other forms of desecration because the new cemetery was to be effectively fenced and subject to constant supervision of a salaried staff consisting of supervisor, his secretary, a gatekeeper and a gardener.”<sup>27</sup>

The newly enforced safety precautions allowed families to take solace in the fact that the remains of their loved ones (and the expensive monuments they erected) were protected. The looting of corpses from urban cemeteries and used illegally as cadavers in medical facilities, as the legal sanctioning of cadavers was not yet in effect. The separation of cemeteries from highly

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Bender, “The Rural Cemetery Movement: Urban Travail and the Appeal of Nature”, (*The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 1974), 201-202.

<sup>27</sup> French, *The Cemetery as Cultural Institution*, 44.

populated urban areas was in itself a deterrent to robbers, much to the appreciation of the families of individuals at risk of dissection and desecration. The cemetery was now in the right cultural position to become an institution of great social and cultural value, presenting the living with tangible natural worlds in which their commemoration for the dead could take place in a sanitary, natural, and cathartic way.



**F7: Death's Head Gravestone Iconography, Old Granary Burying Ground, Boston MA (Photo by Paige Doerner)**

The gravestone iconography accompanying with these early cemeteries also reflects the ideologies of the early American mindscape and the growing appreciation of the natural world. In their work on mortuary iconography, Frederick Gorman and Michael DiBlasi hypothesize that

“expectations about the patterning of gravestone iconography are assumed to be the material correlate of mortuary ideas.”<sup>28</sup> The designs placed on headstones reflect the mentalities of the societies creating them. Of the various iconographic motifs that appear within early American cemeteries, some of the most popular are the “bird-like death’s head, angel, anchor, skeleton, wreath, torch, hourglass, cross, father time, shroud, masonic emblem, cherub, plain inscription, urn and willow, portrait, sunflower rosette, skull and crossbones.”<sup>29</sup> Several of these motifs were images that originated in European graveyard inscriptions, and transferred into the American

<sup>28</sup> Frederick J. Gorman, Michael, E., DiBlasi “Gravestone Iconography and Mortuary Ideology,” (*American Society for Ethnohistory*, Vol. 28. No. 1. Duke University Press (1981), 79

<sup>29</sup> Gorman, DiBlasi, “Gravestone Iconography and Mortuary Ideology,” 84.

cemetery iconography as a result of migrations of Europeans to America in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

In the New York area, the image of the willow tree, often accompanied with one or more neoclassical urns, is ubiquitous. These changes to funerary iconography mirror the greater social changes occurring during the early to mid-nineteenth century. “Certain researchers have hypothesized that shifts in the popularity of these widespread motifs reflected concomitant changes in theology. To them, the death’s head signifies the mortality of the deceased, while the cherub represents immortality; the urn and willow symbolize the impersonal aspect of death.”<sup>31</sup> Whereas the seventeenth and early eighteenth century had seen dark and morbid headstone imagery, (for example, the skull and cross bones motif or the death’s head), compared to the stoic, rather unfeeling coldness of the willow tree and urn, a change was then noticeable with the onset of more sentimental imagery (for example the cherub), which represented a much more hopeful and optimistic view of death. This change correlates with the movement of graveyards out of urban churchyards and into rural landscapes, and the associated turn away from negative views of death to a more positive outlook and a more natural aesthetic.



8: Willow Tree Gravestone, Mt. Hope Cemetery, Rochester NY  
(Photo by Paige Doerner)

<sup>30</sup> Gorman, DiBlasi, “Gravestone Iconography and Mortuary Ideology,” 86.

<sup>31</sup> Gorman, DiBlasi, “Gravestone Iconography and Mortuary Ideology,” 89.

While these new cemeteries were literally the final resting places for remains, they served a function different from any American graveyards to date: these were locations where family and friends of the deceased could go for a leisurely walk, a picnic or a lovely carriage ride, all amidst beautifully crafted semi-natural vistas. In these spaces, visitors were not simply visiting the dead, however. They were visiting for their own benefit – the opportunity to step out of the bounds of the city and into nature, and experience the resulting serenity and rejuvenation. This



9: From James Smillie's 'Mt Auburn Illustrated in Finely Drawn Line Engravings,' Courtesy of Mt. Auburn Cemetery

entirely new behavior marked a change in American sentimentality, as the old-style graveyards were generally avoided and the remains of the deceased often neglected or ignored. In the new rural cemetery, families created elaborate works of sculpture and masonry for their loved ones, often creating whole-family plots surrounded by wrought iron fences or raised on concrete and earthen terraces. Families often spent the afternoon at the cemetery for a picnic, a practice still in vogue with contemporary Americans. Cemeteries became places that individuals desired to go, and even attracted the attention of travelers, a kind of necro-tourism.

These changes in the perception of the role of nature in bereavement practices reflected a shift in the mentalities of nineteenth century Americans, specifically in terms of their appreciation of picturesque landscapes and desire to escape from the pollution and disorder of increasingly industrialized cities. “As the nation becomes increasingly urban, Americans who had moved from the country to the city tended to romanticize nature. Only an urban society can

afford such romanticizing; in a frontier society trees are not scenic; they are potential houses.”<sup>32</sup>

The combination of Romantic imagery (coming from European art and literature) and the increasing distinction made between the city and the country served as the perfect moment in history for the rural cemetery to take hold as a cultural institution. There was even the hope that these cemeteries would have a moralizing effect on their visitors and society in general. “The new rural cemetery would give people more of a sense of historical community, a feeling of social roots, a sense of perpetual home, and remind them that the standard of living and the blessings of a republic they owed to those who have gone before.”<sup>33</sup> This hope paralleled the appreciation of landscape painting or great romantic literature; that the consumption of the art form (in this case, the cemetery) would educate the viewer aesthetically and morally, giving them a new way to understand and appreciate their surroundings and make them better

individuals. The growing ‘culture of

sentiment’ in eighteenth century

America directly reflected the process of

internalizing the natural world as

something physically and emotionally

beneficial to the individual. Naturalistic

literature and beautification of the

natural landscape through architectural

design presented the growing harmony

between the individual and their natural surroundings.



10: From James Smillie's 'Mt. Auburn Illustrated in Finely Drawn Line Engravings,' Courtesy of Mt. Auburn Cemetery

<sup>32</sup> French, *The Cemetery as Cultural Institution*,” 203.

<sup>33</sup> French, *The Cemetery as Cultural Institution*,” 48-49



A visual representation of this new culture of sentiment and increased emotional harmoniousness with nature is [Mt. Auburn cemetery](#) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Founded in 1831 (marking the start of the Rural Cemetery Movement), Mt. Auburn boasts all the elements of picturesque funerary landscaping, and served as an appropriated model for almost all future rural cemeteries in nineteenth century America. Author Mary Louise Keet describes the ideology behind the creation of Mt. Auburn as “the dream where the living and the dead could better maintain their relationships in a carefully sculptured environment of nature and beauty.”<sup>34</sup> The previously mentioned Swedish visitor to Mt. Auburn certainly understood the significance of this



11: Map of Mt. Auburn, from James Smillie's 'Mt. Auburn Illustrated in Finely Drawn Line Engravings,' Courtesy of Mt. Auburn Cemetery

institution. His declaration “And this flower, but lately planted, spreading its fragrance through the air, this rattling and crystal-like stream, this plaintive tone of a solitary bird – is not all this a language that speaks to the heart?” indicates just how affected visitors were by the absolute beauty of the rural cemetery in contrast to their normally urbanized surroundings.<sup>35</sup> Visitors enter

Mt. Auburn through a powerful Egyptian-style entranceway. It twisted, snake-like paths wind through natural forest and manmade lakes and ponds, allowing visitors to walk through the multitudes of sculptures and mausoleums, all situated within the perfect

<sup>34</sup> Mary Louise Keet, *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth-Century America*, Duke University Press, (2000), 167

<sup>35</sup> Arfwedson, *The United States and Canada in 1832, 1833 and 1834*, 211 – 212.

picturesque vistas. The headstones and sculptures are decidedly neoclassical in their design. The influence is evident in the numerous sphinxes, obelisks, columns, mortuary temples, urns, etc. “The creation of Mt. Auburn marked a change in prevailing attitudes about death and burial. It was a new type of burial place designed not only to be a decent place of internment, but to serve as a cultural institution as well.”<sup>36</sup>

This cemetery was intended to be a shared space, equally used by those interred and those who wished to visit and make use of its aesthetic pleasures. The 1850’s and 1860’s marked a period of renovation of American cemeteries, with the hopes of re-envisioning the landscape to meet the aesthetic tastes of the visitors, and therefore “this period marked the height of Mount Auburn’s popularity.”<sup>37</sup> In his consecration address for the opening of the cemetery, Joseph Story addressed the crowd as follows: “There is, therefore, within our reach, every variety of natural and artificial scenery... We stand, as it were, upon the borders of two worlds; and as the mood of our minds may be, we may gather lessons of profound wisdom by contrasting the one with the other.”<sup>38</sup> In this short passage, Story makes mention of several pervasive ideas that pertain directly to the rural cemetery movement and Romanticism in America. He addresses the desire for a reconnection between the individual and the natural world, and the belief in the moralizing quality of both nature and the institution of a rural cemetery. He speaks of the concept of the cemetery as a microchasm, or the presence of two distinct worlds, working concentrically together as one. “These cities of the dead represented an idealized order in the cities for the living [necropoli].”<sup>39</sup> Mt. Auburn served up just the right amount of untamed

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<sup>36</sup> French, *The Cemetery as Cultural Institution*,” 38.

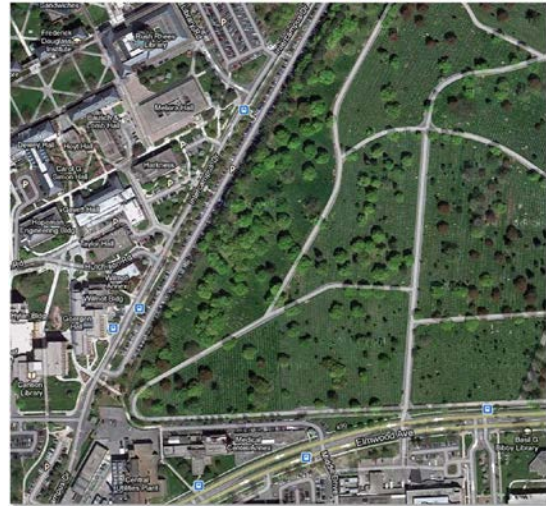
<sup>37</sup> Shary Page Berg, “Approaches to Landscape Preservation Treatment at Mount Auburn Cemetery,” *APT Bulletin*, (1992), 53.

<sup>38</sup> French, “*The Cemetery as Cultural Institution*,” 198.

<sup>39</sup> Margaretta J. Darnall, “The American Cemetery as Picturesque Landscape: Bellefontaine Cemetery, St. Louis,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 18, No. 4, (1983), 249.

wilderness to excite and awe the tourist, combined with just enough beautified landscape to create the feeling of harmony with the natural world, much akin to the function of Downing's domestic landscapes.

[Mt. Hope Cemetery](#) in Rochester NY presents a slightly later version of picturesque rural cemetery. It is also full of carriage paths that wind through a landscape of hills (both natural and man made), various species of trees, neoclassical temples, and Gothic chapels. The paths lead the



12: Google Earth Image of Mt. Hope Cemetery (vs. Surrounding City)



13: Mt. Hope Cemetery, Rochester NY (Photo by Paige Doerner)

visitor past the historical citizens of Rochester, all the while creating beautifully crafted vistas emblematic of the picturesque. Mt. Hope, designed in 1838 constitutes “the first municipal Victorian cemetery in America and is listed in the State and National Registers of Historic Places.”<sup>40</sup> Mt. Hope is also understandable in terms of the transition from city to country (or in more Romantic terms, industry to nature) and the creation of a natural microchasm. The differentiation between the surrounding city and the cemetery's naturalism is visibly evident in aerial views of the location. The mood of the cemetery is immediately different from that of the bustling city around it, as if it was created with the intention of being a different world in itself. The architecture of Mt. Hope is characteristic of a rural cemetery, and is quite

<sup>40</sup> Richard O. Reisem, “Federal Grant Will Restore Mount Hope Cemetery Entrance,” *Epitaph: The Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery*, Vol. 30, No. 2, (2010), 1.

picturesque in nature. The Victorian gatehouse (built in 1874) is aesthetically reminiscent of Downing's rural Victorian church designs. The image of the gothic temple (which occurs frequently in rural cemeteries) represents "virtuous primitivism"<sup>41</sup> and a hearkening to established forms of medieval European architecture. "This was the original entrance to Mount Hope, and in the early days, it was not only a cemetery but a popular city park. Rochesterians frequented the area for picnics and carriage rides, particularly on Sundays."<sup>42</sup> The cemetery also boasts an impressive mausoleum in



14: Gothic Revival Chapel, Mt. Hope Cemetery (1862)

the Egyptian revival style, (indicative of the growing 19<sup>th</sup> century interest in the neoclassical), as well as the 1862 Gothic Revival Chapel, faced with a circular carriage path and Florentine fountain complex.

The visual experience of a rural cemetery such as Mt. Auburn would have served almost as a physical allegory for the sentimental attitudes towards the natural world present within American landscape paintings. Olmstead and other landscape architects utilized the same ideas that Thomas Cole expressed in his recreations of famous landscape images. They employed the

<sup>41</sup> Darnall, "The American Cemetery as Picturesque Landscape," 257.

<sup>42</sup> Reisem, "Federal Grant Will Restore Mount Hope Cemetery Entrance," 1.

same artistic tropes and canons as a means of drawing in the American populace and exposing them to the Romantic conception of nature as a powerful, ever-present, moralizing, restorative



15: Hand-Colored Engraving of Rochester's Mt. Hope Cemetery from "Picturesque America" (1873)

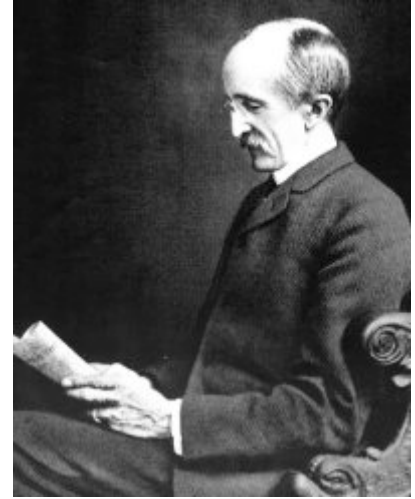
force. The advent of rural cemeteries in America also marked a change in the individual's perception of the self, and the ways in which the individual was perceived as being connected to their natural surroundings.

Drawing from the ideology of Romantic thinkers such as the Scottish School of Moral Sense, the creators of cemeteries allowed for the American public to experience these cultural institutions in a way that exposed the inner self to the external environment, and created a sentimental relationship between the two constructs.



A visual and ideological culmination of the transmission of Romantic ideology into nineteenth century American culture through literature and art is the creation of nature-oriented sanitariums, drawing from the influence of landscape art and beliefs in the healing powers of the natural world. This movement resembles the Rural Cemetery movement, as these institutions relocated from cities and into a natural setting as a means of employing nature as a healing agent for the patients within. A key example of such a sanitarium is the Trudeau Sanitarium in [Saranac Lake, NY](#).

Within this institution (founded in 1884), founder Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau utilized conceptions of the natural world as a means by which patients could recover from pulmonary tuberculosis. Situated in the uppermost portion of the Adirondack region, the location of this sanitarium is essential to understanding its function. Not only was the open-air treatment suggested for the curing of respiratory ailments, but also hunting, hiking, swimming in the Adirondack lakes, and painting the natural scenery. All activities were intended to cure the physical ailments of the patients, while at the same time bringing them closer to the natural world. “In the sanitarium one drifts into a kind of timelessness, where all measures are lost and time loses its shape. Just as it was with the unitary self, this kind of slippage is the



15: Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau, Saranac Laboratory Archives



16: Blumenthal Nurse's Cottage at the Trudeau Sanitarium, Saranac Lake, NY (Photo by Paige Doerner)

essential condition for a deeper experience which opens another dimension of life.”<sup>43</sup>

The property on which the sanitarium sits was chosen and designed specifically to create awe-inspiring natural views that would in themselves

be a source of healing for the patients. Upon carefully choosing the particular location to build, Trudeau wrote,

<sup>43</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 464

“Here the mountains, covered with an unbroken forest, rose so abruptly from the river, and the sweep of the valley at their base was so extended and picturesque, that the view had always made a deep impression upon me. Many a beautiful afternoon, for the first four winters after I came to Saranac Lake, I had sat for hours alone while hunting, facing the ever-changing phases of light and shade on the imposing mountain panorama at my feet, and dreamed of the dreams of youth; dreamed of life and death and God, and yearned for a closer contact with the Great Spirit who planned it all, and for light on the hidden meaning of our troublous existence. The grandeur and peace of it had ever brought refreshment to my perplexed spirit.”<sup>44</sup>

Again, the way Trudeau describes the natural scenery of the Sanitarium as akin to the description of a painting. He writes passionately about nature and his surroundings, expressing an emotional connection with the natural world that hearkens to the concept of moral sense and the inward turn for knowledge and self-healing. The assertion that nineteenth century American landscape portraiture provided American citizens with a tool-kit for reading and interpreting the natural landscape as a work of art is demonstrated in Trudeau’s nostalgic and cathartic experience with the vistas of Saranac Lake. The medicinal benefit of exposure to the cold mountain climate was a topic that Trudeau wrote about extensively in his autobiography.

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<sup>44</sup> Edward Livingston Trudeau, *An Autobiography*, Doubleday Page & Co., (1916), 165 – 166.



17: View of the Adirondack Mountains from the Sanitarium and Saranac Lake (Photos by Paige Doerner)

Trudeau's experience with the contemporary treatments for tuberculosis, the most popular being a hot-room treatment, taught him to think differently about the ways in which the body responds to its natural surroundings. In terms of the actual curative value of natural environment, Trudeau, wrote,

“Bad surroundings of themselves could not produce tuberculosis, and when once the germs had gained access to the body the course of the disease was greatly influenced by a favorable or an unfavorable environment. The essence of sanatorium treatment was a favorable environment so far as climate, fresh air, food, and the regulation of the patient's habits were concerned, and I felt greatly encouraged as to the soundness of the method of treatment the Sanitarium represented, even though it did not aim directly at the destruction of the germ.”<sup>45</sup>



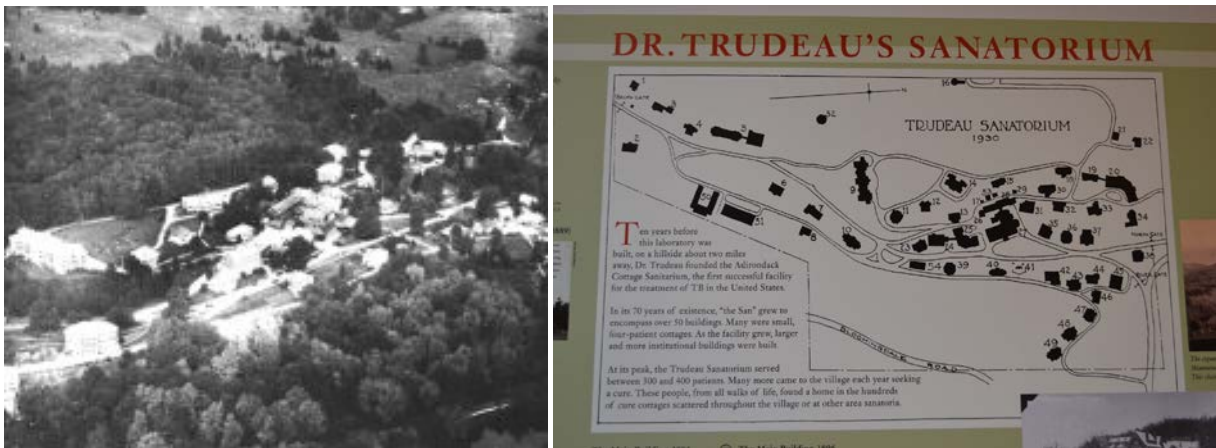
18: Patient's Cure Chair in Trudeau Laboratory, Saranac Lake, NY (Photo by Paige Doerner)

<sup>45</sup> Trudeau, *An Autobiography*, 206.



However the medicinal values of the open-air treatment constituted only part of Trudeau's all-inclusive treatment. The essence of his treatment was that it was 'whole-body,' this including spirit and mind. While Trudeau was the first to suggest this open-air cure, contemporary practitioners of medicine now recognize the physical benefits of exposure to a clean, natural (and generally cold) climate. In his piece, *Climate and Health, with Special Reference to the United States*, Robert Ward states:

“Climate, it is true, is but one element in the treatment, but it is an element of great, and in most cases of paramount, importance. As has already been pointed out, atmospheric conditions are critical in that they affect the micro-organisms which are the specific causes of disease; they strengthen or weaken the individual's power of resistance; they encourage or they discourage rest and recreation out of doors, and outdoors is the best treatment of all.”<sup>46</sup>



19: Aerial View of Trudeau Sanitarium Property, From Saranac Laboratory Archives and Map of Sanitarium (From Trudeau Laboratory in Saranac Lake)

<sup>46</sup> Ward, "Climate and Health, with Special Reference to the United States." 361.

In [his autobiography](#), Trudeau writes of his familiarity with the natural world and his belief in its healing powers (both spiritually and physically) for patients with respiratory disorders such as tuberculosis. He states,

“This same love of wild nature and hunting, which was a passion in my father, was reproduced in his son, for when stricken with tuberculosis in 1872 it drove me, in spite of all the urgent protests of my friends and physicians, to bury myself in the Adirondacks – then an unbroken wilderness, and considered a most dangerous climate for a chest invalid – in order to lead an open-air life in the great forest, alone with Nature.”<sup>47</sup>

Upon his decision to move to the wilderness of upstate New York, Trudeau expressed a sentimentalization of the natural world that led him to believe it was this climate, and only this, that could heal his fatal illness. Whereas the contemporary understanding of pulmonary illness regarded fresh air as an antagonist to the condition, Trudeau held the belief that it could actually function as part of the cure and therefore implemented his famous ‘open-air’ treatments. Trudeau writes of how being in the midst of the Adirondack forest inspired a rejuvenation of life within him. He states, “I was carried up onto my airy porch in the little cottage, with the stillness of the great forest all about me, the lake shimmering in the sunlight, and a host of recollections of many happy days... Again, imperceptibly the fever began to fall, and strength – and with it the desire to live – to return.”<sup>48</sup> What Trudeau describes here is no less than a picturesque scene, almost like what one might see in a landscape painting of shimmering water and tranquil forest. Trudeau

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<sup>47</sup> Trudeau, *An Autobiography*, 10 - 11

<sup>48</sup> Trudeau, *An Autobiography*, 98

describes the forest as if he is examining a work of art and draws from it both physical and emotional renewal.



20: Ladd Cottage and Minter Cottage, Trudeau Sanitarium (Photos by Paige Doerner)

Several of the ideas associated with this new type of sanitarium can be attributed to the health resorts visited by numerous nineteenth century American travelers. Trudeau’s patients sat/laid outdoors on cure porches as part of his ‘winter cure.’ “The air in pine forests has long been believed to have certain desirable soothing and healing properties, of benefit in affections of the nose, throat and lungs. It is upon such local characteristics as those here mentioned, and others like them, that many local weather prognostics and proverbs are based.”<sup>49</sup> Trudeau believed in an all-inclusive cure – not only did he intend to cure the patients of tuberculosis physically, but he also believed that part of the curing process had to encompass both mental and spiritual rejuvenation.

Much of the sanitarium’s architecture is Victorian-Cottage style, inspired by the work of Andrew Jackson Downing, especially the main building, otherwise known as the Administration Building. The hooded arches, heavy stone foundation and cottage-like composition all represent elements of Downing’s Victorian cottage architectural style. The small white cure cottage was

<sup>49</sup> Ward, “Climate and Health, with Special Reference to the United States,” 359.

originally Neoclassical Revival style-architecture, but in the nineteenth century was converted to a more cottage-like aesthetic as to visually match the other buildings going up around the



21: Administration Building, Trudeau Sanitarium (Photo by Paige Doerner)

premises – all with crafted picturesque vistas. Again, the location for this sanitarium (a precarious hill in Saranac where no other architects had any desire to build) was chosen specifically for the amazing view of the Adirondack Mountains, which Dr.

Trudeau believed would play an integral role in the patient’s healing process. He even

went so far as to state “the view from the Sanitarium has been one of its most valuable assets.”<sup>50</sup>

In regards to the earliest architectural accomplishments at the Sanitarium (particularly the cure cottages, which were simple, Victorian style-design), Trudeau reminisced:

“Memory and mental imagery’ are certainly a wonderful piece of human mechanism, for now, looking back over the long span of thirty years, I can distinctly see the Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium in all its incongruous details, in the midst of its beautiful natural environment of mountains and unbroken forest. The grounds were a rough hillside covered with scant grass, through which everywhere jutted boulders of varying sizes, a few rising four or five feet above the ground.”<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Trudeau, *An Autobiography*, 166.

<sup>51</sup> Trudeau, *An Autobiography*, 170 – 171.



22: Baker Memorial Chapel, Trudeau Sanitarium (Photos by Paige Doerner)

The architectural design of the Administration Building is particularly emblematic of the rural picturesque and Victorian cottage design. Built in 1896 by architect J. Lawrence Aspinwall, the Administration Building (also referred to as the ‘Main Building’) was a center of activity for the patients of the sanitarium. It was in this location that they would take communal meals, bath/shower, and meet for events such as dances, card games and other such activities. The Elizabethan Revival architecture utilized in the design of the Administration Building is visually akin to the design of the chapel on the premise (referred to as the Baker Memorial Chapel, and also designed by Aspinawll). The design of the church is integrated into the natural landscape, its foundation accommodating the slope of the hillside, and its façade covered in local rough-hewn cobbles.



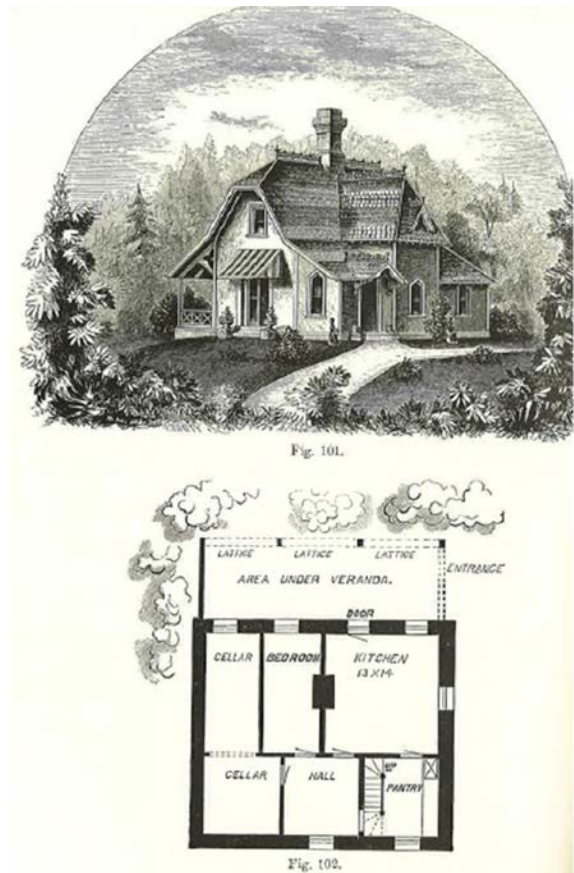
23: Saranac Cottage with Multiple Cure Porches (Photos by Paige Doerner)

One of the key architectural elements associated with the structures within the Trudeau Sanitarium (and the town of Saranac at large) was the cure porch. Inspired by the veranda designs of Andrew Jackson Downing, who propagated the concept of a space within

the domestic realm (the exterior porch) that could bridge the home and the natural realm, the implementation of cure porch was emblematic of this desire to connect the individual with the natural world for purposes of healing. Downing incorporated porches in his Victorian cottage designs as a means of “extolling the pleasurable virtues and functional benefits of the veranda and its contracted form, the porch.”<sup>52</sup> The element of Downing’s porches that made them attractive to the designers of cure cottages was the fact that “Downing had already convinced the public that porches were a joy to use and were good for the house, blocking summer sunlight but allowing the sun’s lower winter rays to reach the windows and enter the rooms... The porches provided the potential health benefits of sitting under shelter in the open air.”<sup>53</sup> This design was therefore incorporated into the cure cottages within the Trudeau Sanitarium as a means of employing natural healing.

The planting of trees outside of these porches was also an essential characteristic of the porch cure, as deciduous trees would provide the shade necessary for the patients sitting on the porches.

“The cottage keepers wasted little time taking that advice to heart, and soon the barren hills were thoroughly planted with maples, elms, poplars, and other species of shade trees.”<sup>54</sup> This semi-



24: Downing's Design for a "Small Side-Hill Cottage" with a Large Veranda

<sup>52</sup> Phillip L. Gallos, *Cure Cottages of Saranac Lake: Architecture and History of a Pioneer Health Resort*, University of Michigan, (1985), 7.

<sup>53</sup> Gallos, *Cure Cottages of Saranac Lake*, " 7.

<sup>54</sup> Gallos, *Cure Cottages of Saranac Lake*, " 7.

arborous experimentation can be likened to the arboretums created within domestic landscape designs as a means of controlling the appearance of the natural world and reaping the health benefits of gardening and tending to plantings, as prescribed by Downing. Downing utilized the porch design as a means of melding the natural landscape with the domestic realm, and thereby the emphasis of the porches in the curative process was one of harmony between the individual and the natural world – a concept that Trudeau heavily emphasized throughout his sanitarium. A contemporary examination of American architecture reveals the continued usage of the porch, (more commonly known throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century as the ‘sleeping porch’) throughout much of America. Examples of homes with sleeping porches much akin to the ones created in Saranac can even be found in Rochester.

Other sanitariums in the United States, including other health resorts as well as asylums for the mentally insane and the disabled, utilized the practices employed by Trudeau at the sanitarium in Saranac. These ideas came to be associated with a more general rural-asylum reform movement, imbuing locations of physical and mental healing with Romantic conceptions of the relationship between the individual and the natural world. “To Victorian asylum builders, the countryside was an unquestionable good: God's chosen people lived close to the land, and the insane would benefit from bucolic settings. Each asylum was surrounded by acres of picturesque gardens.”<sup>55</sup> The Trudeau Sanitarium had its own landscape gardener to ensure the constant beautification of the surroundings, especially important to an institution that put so much stock in the aesthetic pleasure associated with the natural landscape. Trudeau was a major proponent of the introduction of nature into the healing process. His proven success with the treatment of

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<sup>55</sup> Carl Yanni, “The Linear Plan for Insane Asylums in the United States before 1866.” (*Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 62, No. 1, 2003), 34.

pulmonary tuberculosis in the Adirondacks was inspirational to disease treatment in America, and served as a model for the creation of subsequent rural sanitariums and asylums.



The Swedish visitor to Mt. Auburn cemetery was so awe-inspired by the beautiful scenery that “almost excited a wish to die.”<sup>56</sup> His expression of sentimentality and appreciation of the natural world comes into much clearer focus when larger processes at work behind the changes occurring within nineteenth century American mentality are examined. European artists and writers who further spread the concept of the connectivity between the individual and their experience of the natural world into American culture, as imparted by Scottish Romantic intellectuals, adopted the transmission of the concept of moral sense.

Landscape painters such as Thomas Cole appreciated the value of this emotional representation of nature, and utilized it as a means of creating natural imagery that evoked strong sensations of the sublime and the picturesque. These same ideas were implemented by landscape designers such as Andrew Jackson Downing and Frederick Law Olmstead, who took the sentimentalization of the natural world a step further by creating locations in which humans could attain harmony with nature, and draw moralization and self-rejuvenation from it. Similarly, the growth of rural cemeteries reflected this desire for natural spaces in which the living could remember the dead, but more importantly finds emotional resonance within nature. A culmination of these changes within the nineteenth century American perception of the natural world is the rural sanitarium – complete in its combination of picturesque landscaping, Downing-esque architecture, and naturalistic healing. The Trudeau Sanitarium is exemplary of these beliefs in the harmony between human and nature, and stands as a landmark to the belief in the

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<sup>56</sup> Arfwedson, *The United States and Canada in 1832, 1833 and 1834*, 211 – 212.



healing power of the natural world. It was through these aesthetic changes to the American landscape that Romantic ideology forged a connection with the individual. Americans found new ways to connect with the natural landscape and view it as a force of physical and emotional healing. Much like Coleridge's proclamation that he would "build [his] altar in the fields,"<sup>57</sup> the nineteenth century American came to see their surroundings as the exalted designs of God, and thereby infused the natural world with the power to rejuvenate their very existence.

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<sup>57</sup> Coleridge, *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 144.

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