Worthy but Obscure

May 16 is the 160th birthday of Josse Vrydagh. In celebrating Vrydagh, we commemorate the worthy but totally obscure Smithsonian personalities which have come to our attention during our varied research projects. We have dedicated this issue of the Smithsonian Preservation Quarterly to little-known figures in the history of the Smithsonian buildings. Of them all, Vrydagh's contribution to Smithsonian architectural history is the least familiar.

Born in Louvain, Belgium in 1833, Vrydagh emigrated to the United States to live in Dallas, Texas as a member of one of the celebrated communal experiments of the nineteenth century, the Phalanstery. After the collapse of the commune, Vrydagh traveled in the antebellum south and throughout Europe, returning again to America and settling in Terre Haute, Indiana in 1866.

Vrydagh was not obscure in his chosen home town, where he won considerable professional recognition, becoming a member of the American Institute of Architects in 1870. Local histories relate that he was one of only a handful of architects awarded a prize for a design submitted for the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, although he was not awarded a commission. Two years later Vrydagh won the competition for the rebuilding of the Patent Office Building after the fire of 1877. His success, however, was on paper only. After he submitted his plans along with an estimate, political or professional machinations intervened to deny him the commission he had won. Congress eventually awarded the job to Cluss & Schulze, the architects responsible for the reconstruction of the Smithsonian Building after its fire in 1865.

Vrydagh worked in Washington in the early 1880s, supporting himself as a draftsman for the architectural office of the Supervisory Architect of the Treasury. He never executed his winning design for the reconstruction of the building which now houses the National Museum of American Art and the National Portrait Gallery.

Returning eventually to Terre Haute, Josse Vrydagh died in 1895 a successful and respected member of his community. Several of his sons carried on his tradition as professional architects. As the curator of the Patent Office Building, the Smithsonian recognizes the contribution Vrydagh tried, but was unable, to make.

OAHP is grateful to Rafael Cre'spo, Dean of the Architecture School, University of Puerto Rico, and former architectural historian at OAHP, for his research which uncovered Vrydagh's role in the Competition of 1878.

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A NICHE FOR MOSES EZEKIEL

The fenestration of the Renwick Gallery's upper story is actually a window onto a tale of obscured artistry. Only the Palladian window over the main entrance is original; the others were statuary niches in James Renwick, Jr.'s design. Windows were installed after the Corcoran Gallery moved out in 1897, but the Smithsonian has restored two of the niches, adding copies of statues created for them. The copies were executed by an Italian sculptor, Renato Lucchetti, working in Washington, but the eleven originals were carved by a Virginian named Moses Ezekiel, working in Rome late in the last century.

William Corcoran and his Board chose "the world's greatest painters and sculptors" as subjects for Ezekiel's seven-foot marble figures, whose installation was complete in 1884. The four figures overlooking Pennsylvania Avenue were Phideas (sculptor of the Parthenon), Raphael, Michelangelo and Durer. Above 17th Street stood Titian, Leonardo da Vinci, Rubens, Rembrandt, Murillo (a Spanish painter), Antonio Canova, and Thomas Crawford, the only American included, a sculptor. The statues were all sold off the building in 1901 to Mrs. Evalyn Walsh McLean (who owned the Hope Diamond), who placed them around her garden and swimming pool. Three of them are now in Richmond (Ezekiel's birthplace); the remaining eight stand in the Norfolk, Virginia, Botanical Gardens. These include the Murillo and Rubens figures, copied and set above 17th Street in 1974.

Ezekiel produced other decorative sculpture which remains on the front facade of Corcoran's gallery. Carved stone wreathed medallions, flanking the Palladian window, and two pairs of bronze putti, kneeling on the entablature, respectively represent Painting, Sculpture, Music and Architecture. Also cast in bronze is a wreathed medallion profile portrait of Corcoran, surrounded by foliate garlands, set in the pediment.

Moses Ezekiel (1844-1917) is remembered for his Religious Freedom statue (a Philadelphia Centennial commission remaining in Fairmount Park), a bust of Jefferson in the Capitol, and the Confederate Monument in Arlington National Cemetery, at the foot of which he is buried. A graduate of the Virginia Military Institute, he served in the Confederate Army briefly, and after anatomy classes inspired him to study sculpture, he established a studio in the Roman Baths of Diocletian in 1869. In Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, D.C., James Goode also stated that Ezekiel's "Neoclassical works made him a very popular and respected sculptor...[but] since he was the perpetrator of an obsolete style at the end of its popularity, he is among the many forgotten artists of the last century."

GEORGE W. GATES

Patently Obscure

Late nineteenth-century American furniture in the OAIHP "Castle" Collection exemplifies
The energetic and innovative spirit of the age. The 1870s was an expansive period for manufacturing for the industrial arts. The proliferation of numerous patented furniture designs reflected the abundance of American invention and achievement during this period.

One characteristic example from the collection is a folding, drafting table, patented on June 19, 1877, by George W. Gates of Worcester, Massachusetts. Gates was one of thousands of obscure designer-manufacturers of the period. This functional furniture design, in cherry wood, iron and brass, was produced in Philadelphia. Designed for ease of assembly and use it still betrays a late Victorian love of ornamentation which is integral to the aesthetic of factory-made furniture in the last quarter of the century.

The increasing obscurity of the furniture designer and manufacturer in the late nineteenth-century results from basic changes that took place in the manufacture, design and distribution of furniture. The factory system of production was made possible by the invention of specialized woodworking machinery, hastening the eclipse of the architect as designer of furniture. Industrialization of manufacture was achieved by the mechanization of the craft, accompanied by an attendant specialization of labor. The craftsman as well as the designer became increasingly separated from each other and isolated from the manufacturing process. Specialization encouraged the rise of merchants. The art of marketing introduced new roles and activities in the process of distribution, further distancing the designer-craftsman from the consumer of his craft. Despite the increasing obscurity of the designer, the inventiveness and expressiveness of late nineteenth-century furniture remains rich and undeniable.

The Gates table is highly expressive, betraying the fact that strict utilitarianism was not Gates's only design concern. This table was produced at a moment when patented furniture of the nineteenth century reflected important aspects of nineteenth-century American taste: exuberance, love of machinery, and a desire for self-sufficiency. The Neo-Grec style of this "Castle" Collection table is an eclectic variation of late neo-classicism that is highly energetic in form. The table pedestal with its winged lion's paw feet is an imaginative and dynamic synthesis of historical motifs. The mechanical complexity of the folding table reveals Gates's infatuation with machinery and a reconciliation between function and beauty. Because the table was marketed for home use, a sense of self-sufficiency was encouraged for the individual who was able to achieve a measure of aesthetic and functional control through its use. The Gates table exemplifies how the patented furniture of the late nineteenth-century brought functional beauty and "culture" within the reach of individual Americans.

ALBERT HARRIS

VISIONARY OF A MODERN ZOO

Albert Harris, born in 1869 in Wales, found work in Washington D.C. in 1900 with the firm of Hornblower and Marshall. Rising to the position of chief designer in 1908 after Hornblower’s death, and becoming partner in 1911, Harris contributed to design elements of the Natural History Building, on which the firm had been working since 1903. Harris later became the Municipal Architect of the District of Columbia, a post he held from 1921 until his death in 1933. During this time he also served as the architect for the National Zoo, because of a stipulation in the 1912 Sundry Bill which included the zoo under the Municipal Architect's jurisdiction.

Harris was the zoo's architect during the height of its prosperity. Throughout the 1930s, un-
nder Director William Mann, the zoo expanded greatly with a new emphasis on recreation and entertainment. The animal collection more than doubled during this time, and the building program to house this growing collection aimed to place the zoo alongside the greatest of the world’s traditional zoological gardens. Mann perceived the National Zoo as "a great public enterprise." With Albert Harris’ expertise, architecture became yet another form of entertainment for the people during these years.

The first major project Harris completed was the Bird House (1927). By far the largest building at that time, it was a massive, symmetrically arranged Italianate brick structure. The focal point of the design was a magnificent gabled porch. The door surround, which was executed in poured colored concrete, featured colorful birds and flowers among an abstract design (today the door is located in the building’s Indoor Flight Room).

In preparation for the next building, Mann and Harris visited most of the major European zoological gardens in 1929; the scale and bright color of the buildings, the public facilities (restaurants, bandstands, and refreshment gardens), and the landscaping impressed them immensely. The resulting Reptile House of 1929-30 represented the full blown development of Harris’ unique architectural style. A richly colored cathedral-like building in a Byzanto-Romanesque style, it was teeming with sculptural depictions of reptiles. The marble columns of the porch entrance were supported by stylized turtles. Cited the "Best Brick Building of the Year" by the American Institute of Architects, it was unlike anything in any European garden.

In 1931 Harris executed a design for the next planned monumental animal house, which was not constructed. The Mammal House, like the Reptile House, featured a porch entrance enriched by sculptural depictions of the inhabitants. Carved monkeys topped the two pillars at the entrance. The classical massing of the Mammal House, however, was very different from the amorphous creature-like shape of the Reptile House. Perhaps Harris intended that monkeys, animals closely related to human beings, should be placed in classicizing architecture, long considered the highest tribute to man’s rationality. These buildings, the plans of which are located in the Smithsonian Archives, evinced Director Mann’s thorough intentions to create in the National Zoological Park a modern, unparalleled zoological garden. New homes were designated for all major groups of animals, and Albert Harris’ palatial buildings, replete with ornamental schemes based on animal imagery, embodied the zoo’s message of education through entertainment.

The Bradley & Hubbard Manufacturing Company

A brand name widely known in the late nineteenth century but recognized today only by curators, collectors and antique dealers is "B&H." The Bradley and Hubbard Manufacturing Company was one of the largest producers of kerosene lamps and other household items such as andirons, match-safes, desk sets and clocks during the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. The OAH "Castle" Collection is in possession of a number of B&H objects and has conducted research into the history of this major manufacturer.

The company began in 1852 as a partnership of Nathaniel and William Bradley and Orson and Chitten Hatch with Walter Hubbard as a minor partner in the industrial town of Meriden, Connecticut. Thus named Bradley, Hatch & Company, the partners began manufacturing clocks as their sole product. In 1854 the Hatch brothers sold their interests in the company and it became simply "Bradley and Hubbard," but clocks continued to be the firm’s main product throughout the 1850s and 60s.

The Civil War years brought immense prosperity to many northern manufacturers, especially those producing military supplies. Surprisingly though, non-war related production also increased during this period, due to an expanded market west of the Mississippi and increased exports to foreign countries. To meet this in-
creased demand, Bradley and Hubbard added many domestic items to their line, such as hoop skirts, spring measuring tapes and match safes, in addition to clocks for which the company was still primarily known.

After 1865 the focus of the company changed with Nathaniel Bradley's decision to produce kerosene burning lamps. The discovery of oil in Pennsylvania in 1859 and subsequent advances made during the 1860s in drilling and refinement processes had led the way to a new and lucrative industry. Between 1867 and 1871 employed over one thousand workers. Their products, then widely considered of the highest quality and artistic merit, were being sold in showrooms owned by Bradley and Hubbard in New York, Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia and by a force of salesmen travelling throughout the country.

After the deaths of Walter Hubbard in 1911 and Nathaniel Bradley in 1915 the company continued to prosper by relying on time-proven products. The immensely popular nickel-plated "Rayo" lamp made for the Standard Oil Company was one such

![Bradley & Hubbard Mfg. Co.](image)

Masthead from a Bradley & Hubbard invoice, ca.1880

and Hubbard factory buildings in 1973, this once well known company has been relegated to obscurity to all but a handful of antiquarians. RS

THE RISE OF WOMEN AT THE SMITHSONIAN

Since the founding of the Smithsonian Institution, its employees have comprised a diverse and eclectic mix of individuals. Each person has contributed to the Institution's mandate, the "increase and diffusion of knowledge among men." And, of course, women.

Pamela Henson will celebrate her twenty year anniversary with the Institution in October 1993. Most of those years have been spent in the Smithsonian Archives (now the Office of History, Archives and National Collections) as Historian of the Institution. Her duties include investigating the history of the Smithsonian and conducting oral history interviews with retired staff.

Ms. Henson's research has led her to discover a number of remarkable women who were employed by the Institution as early as 1870. While most women held clerical positions, several were encouraged by the Secretaries of the Institution to do field and academic research in their chosen field. "You don't hear much about the women because they didn't make it into the executive level," says Ms. Henson. "But I was surprised to find how strong a role they played."
Ms. Henson presented her findings on early women researchers at the Smithsonian for Women’s History Month in March 1993. Her paper, Against All Odds: Pioneering Women at the Smithsonian, 1880-1930, discusses such diverse women as Julia Ann Gardner, a paleontologist, Doris Holmes, an entomologist, and Doris Male Cochran, a scientist who received her Ph.D. from the University of Maryland in 1933. While the women in Ms. Henson’s paper had positions of responsibility, there was limited career advancement. Henson notes that there was a "glass ceiling" which prevented any woman from moving into a management position. Under Secretary Adams’ tenure many more women have been appointed to upper management positions than at any time in Smithsonian history. This is an irrevocable change which, in future years, will be studied by other Smithsonian historians as a landmark of change for the Institution in the late 20th century.

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