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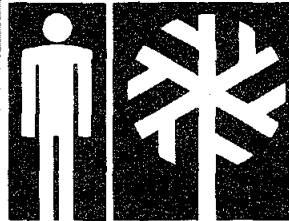
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MARTIN VAN BUREN

LINDENWALD

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE / NEW YORK



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HISTORIC RESOURCE STUDY  
LINDENWALD  
MARTIN VAN BUREN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE  
NEW YORK

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DENVER SERVICE CENTER  
BRANCH OF CULTURAL RESOURCES  
MID-ATLANTIC/NORTH ATLANTIC TEAM  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
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## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

In July 1977 Dr. John D. R. Platt prepared a draft manuscript of this report that was entitled "Historic Structure Report, Historical Data, Lindenwald, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, New York." The park and regional reviews of the document indicated that it was detailed and rich in informative material, of great value to the park in interpreting the site, and reflected accurately the extant data available to the researcher. However, it was noted that the draft contained less architectural history data than was generally desirable for a report of its kind and that it contained considerably more information than that related to the structure, i.e., biographical information on owners, grounds, and gardens, as well as political background material. Hence the North Atlantic Regional Office recommended, in its review memorandum dated January 4, 1979, that the draft document be retitled a Historic Resource Study.

The Denver Service Center agreed to the title change, and in February 1979, William W. Howell, Historical Architect, Branch of Cultural Resources, Mid-Atlantic/North Atlantic Team, revised the draft in light of the park and regional reviews and comments. In January 1982, I was assigned the task of editing the manuscript and preparing it for printing. My thanks go to William W. Howell for sharing with me his knowledge of the project and for helping me to locate the illustrations for the study. My thanks also go to Evelyn Steinman for retyping the revised manuscript and handling the administrative details associated with the printing and distribution of the report.

Harlan D. Unrau

February 1, 1982

### Introductory: The Sage of Lindenwald Enters on the Scene

On March 3, 1841, Martin Van Buren ended a four year term of "toilsome and anxious probation" in the presidential office, following bitter defeat in the log cabin, "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too," campaign of 1840. Although this loss must have shaken the "consistent faith in the people" that had bulwarked him for so long, the responsive crowds who greeted him everywhere as he wended his way home, must have acted as a restorative. Reaching Kinderhook, on May 8th, a Saturday afternoon, he experienced the most appreciated acclaim of all, from those people he loved best:

Ex-President VAN BUREN returned to the place of his nativity on Saturday last. . . after the lapse of a long series of years, spent in the service of his country, he has returned to the home of his youth, probably to spend the evening of his days among those who have long appreciated the splendor of his genius and admired his virtues.

Early in the afternoon, a numerous and respectable portion of the citizens of Kinderhook, Stuyvesant and the adjoining towns assembled on the steam-boat wharf, to await the arrival of the Ex-President. When the Albany, in which boat he had taken passage, came in sight, she was saluted by a heavy piece of artillery, which continued firing until the boat reached the wharf. Several popular airs were also played by the Spencertown Brass Band, the members of which, without distinction of party, volunteered for the occasion.

Mr. Van Buren was accompanied by the Hon. B. F. Butler, and as these two distinguished sons of Columbia pressed the soil of their native county, they were loudly cheered. After exchanging salutations with his friends and fellow-citizens,. . . Mr. Van Buren entered his private carriage, seated by the side of Mr. Butler, and the procession commenced its line of march for Kinderhook. The procession was composed

of a long line of citizens in carriages and on horse back, and its approach to our village was announced by the firing of cannon and the ringing of bells. Thus did MARTIN VAN BUREN, late the Chief Magistrate of this glorious Confederacy, enter his native village, surrounded, not by the trappings of power, or the pomp of royalty, but welcomed in a plain Republican style by honest hearts and sincere friends.

The procession having arrived in front of Stranahan's hotel, Mr. Van Buren was conducted . . . to the piazza. . . . Here in full view and in distinct hearing of a large assemblage of citizens who occupied the public square, Maj. M. MYERS, on behalf of his townsmen, addressed Mr. Van Buren. . . .:

Sir, - You see around you your friends and fellow-citizens, assembled to welcome your return to your native village. . . .

We know not, sir, whether to consider your return to private life as a triumph or a defeat: but certain it is that no Chief Magistrate has ever retired from his arduous trust, with greater demonstrations of popular respect.

It is a source of great satisfaction to your fellow citizens of the County of Columbia to find that the pleasures and allurements of a city life and associations with the most refined society, have failed to alienate you from the society of old and tried friends, on whose affections you have a strong hold - from the scenes of youth or the tombs of your ancestors - but that you retire to spend your latter days in your Native Town. - Here, surrounded by friends and connections, may you, under the Protection of Divine Providence, pass many and happy years under the shade of "your own vine and fig tree", unless again called by the voice of the people into public life, a mandate which you ever have and doubtless ever will obey.

Permit me sir, on behalf of your fellow citizens here assembled, to bid you thrice welcome home!

(Quoted from the Kinderhook Sentinel in the Albany Argus).

In the face of such eloquence as well as the questioning tone about the direction of Van Buren's political future, the former President framed a response in two parts. In passing reference to principles and policies undergoing partisan redress by the new administration, he assumed a defensive posture, determined that his failure at the polls should not be regarded as popular repudiation of his management of foreign affairs and his financial policies. The element of uncertainty over 1844's possibilities as adverted to by Major Myers could not be ignored in Van Buren's response. Already party loyalists had started the wheels turning for renomination in that year. In fact, the Missouri legislature had already nominated him for that distant day, and he had replied that he could not "profess to be indifferent to" the office, but a fair share had been his: "I have enjoyed that privilege long enough to satisfy my utmost ambitions." He gave this reply sober thought, and there is no good reason not to take it at face value. He would not fail to heed the call of duty while issues he held dear remained unresolved or reopened. But, by the time he arrived at Kinderhook, the political outlook had been altered and the Whigs were in trouble. Harrison died not long after taking office, and the ambitions of opposition leaders could be expected to divide their councils and weaken their assault on Van Buren's program of the years past.

It was thus in full knowledge of the general situation, and a conviction that the situation called for honesty and candor that Van Buren's response turned on:

. . . The demonstrations of respect and affection with which I have been everywhere greeted, by the honest yeomanry of the country, since my retirement from office, have afforded me more real satisfaction, than its continued possession could possibly confer; and I come to take up my final residence with

you, not, I assure you, in the character of a repining, but in that of a satisfied and contented man. . . .

Turning then to Myers, he put the seal of approval on his utterances in this regard:

You have, sir, done but justice to the motives which have induced me to return to my native county and town, and I promise myself much of enjoyment and advantage from renewing the ancient ties by which I am connected with them.

In closing the ceremony, Butler reviewed his career, playing on the crowd's feelings with his depiction of the former President's purity of motives, steadfastness of purpose, serenity at the hour of trial, and equanimity in defeat. He finished up with praise for the country's institutions of government, as exemplified by the process so recently completed. He was on sound ground, his conclusions according with those expressed by his chief in answering the Missourians: "No one can expect, or should desire, to be always in office under a government and institutions like ours. . . ." Few of his or any other generation held office so long and so often as Van Buren. He spoke with unquestionable authority.

Yet for all the sincerity shown, it can be argued that a potent political scenario was being sketched in. Given the stresses to which the Whigs would fall prey, it was more than likely in 1841 that political destiny would beckon yet again. Certainly, adept in the game of politics for which Van Buren and Butler had written the rules, these seasoned warriors were mindful that successful campaigns for office had been mounted from poorer vehicles than the one taking shape in Kinderhook. To add to Van Buren's already full reputation yet another laurel as the earnest and preoccupied agriculturalist of Kinderhook, could make him well-nigh irresistible four years hence. It could provide a stepping stone to the White House. He was still head of the Democratic Party; a platform in the countryside could become him during the interval ahead. There aloof from the day-to-day of party management, he could take the

part of Democratic conscience. In the guise as "Sage of Lindenwald," counseling, cautioning, approving, disapproving, and pointing with pride through an extensive correspondence, he would remain before the public as effectively as though engaged in the partisan strife that is forbidden ex-Presidents. However, much of Van Buren's retirement took an aspect other than of active participation, no matter how convincing a vision of the gentleman farmer was cultivated, his influence with the rank and file remained strong and he would be heard on issues again and again. Martin Van Buren's retirement to his country retreat was to become yet another phase in his long political life. With a score of years remaining to him there was still time for the "red fox of Kinderhook" to become the "Sage of Lindenwald."

Although Van Buren's arrival was set off by much spontaneous acclaim by neighbors old and new, it had been pleasurably anticipated for some time. He had owned the old Van Ness mansion and grounds for two years now, though visible at the estate infrequently. Only of late had measures been taken to prepare the place for occupancy. But once begun they were most obvious. The site, not two miles from the village, became a hive of activity. It was clear to everyone in upper Columbia County that he was refitting it as a county seat. For nearly two years, the grounds had been undergoing a revival from the neglect of nearly three decades. This was not simply the restoring of bygone splendors, but a wholesale redevelopment of the property. But not as a baronial land-holding, fit for a princeling; his estate was to be a productive farm, in the midst of which he would set an example of vigorous rural living. A sense of this is caught by John Robert Ireland's, The Republic; or a History of the United States of America in the Administrations. . . (VIII, 593-4):

. . . He was, indeed greatly attached to this new employment, and, as a farmer, was fully up to the necessities. . . of the times. He had, however, little inclination towards ornamental or landscape gardening and improvements. "Lindenwald," therefore, while being naturally beautiful, exhibits little trace of a master-hand or refined taste, being almost destitute of

ornamental plants. With the exception of that of Millard Fillmore, in Buffalo, perhaps, no home of an Ex-President of the United States was so little beautified as Martin Van Buren's, by the taste and hand of its owner. The vast lawn around his house he kept smooth, clean, and well-set in grass; and through this a graveled carriage-road, opening by two gates a hundred and fifty yards apart into the public highway, led to the old dwelling. . . .

He succeeded in making Lindenwald productive to an extent never before known.

Once in residence, Van Buren made the most of the opportunity to refashion his image. Energetic and alert beyond most men of his age, in the saddle of his personal mount, a gift from John Randolph of Roanoke, before breakfast, he was out superintending work parties after that repast. When tired physically, he withdrew to his study to read and correspond. His intake of foods, sweets, and beverages was regulated, though he pleased a well-conditioned palate from well-stocked stores. When he found the place lonely, he toured extensively, or lived for a while in the city, or, in one case, went abroad and wrote about the history of American political parties while also starting his memoirs. His door was forever opening or closing on the great and near-great political figures of that era: Henry Clay, Thomas Hart Benton, Gideon Welles, and Samuel J. Tilden. Although not a member, he attended the Kinderhook Dutch Reformed Church regularly and contributed to its support.

These last years at Lindenwald were marked by the political disappointments that finally put an end to his career, for once and for all. Having already made his peace with those processes that at last do just that, and finding solace and contentment in farming as a profession, he passed his later life, as one friend of those years recalled them, "in tranquil beauty."

# 1. The House of Peter Van Ness

High in the councils of New York's "Lords of the Hudson" was the family Van Ness. Its ancient lineage as satirized by "Diedrick Knickerbocker" in A History of New York entitled its members to be numbered among the "legion of sturdy bush-beaters" summoned by "Peter the Headstrong" (Stuyvesant) for the conquest of New Sweden and described as "the Van Nests of Kinderhoeck, valiant robbers of bird's-nests, as their name denotes."

Peter Van Ness, of this line, was born on or about November 30, 1734, and spent a lifetime in what is now Columbia County, New York, among the Livingstons, Van Schaacks, Vanderpoels, and other families who left their mark on state and nation. Information about his life is fragmentary, no substantial body of his papers having survived. The old monument over his grave, on the grounds of the rear of Lindenwald, describe him as a "high minded, honourable, sensible man - fearing none but his God." It is also written there that he was a "distinguished and influential patriot in the most trying times, having served his country with great credit in numerous public stations, both civil and military, . . ."<sup>1</sup>

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1. This monument is in effect a manuscript in marble, and takes up some of the slack in posterity's knowledge about Peter Van Ness. Through the authorship of John Peter Van Ness, data is furnished that would otherwise be lost. He undertook the task "on behalf of himself, and years later the circumstances were as follows: ". . . in the epitaph on his tombstone, erected at Lindenwald, forty years after his death, and after the place had been mine, he is described by his eldest son, General John P. Van Ness, . . . Having, at an early day, obtained my permission to erect a monument over his father's grave, he came up for that purpose, not a great while before his death . . . I . . . directed my people to give him all the assistance he needed. . . . We visited the tomb together on the last day of his stay and he read aloud the inscription on the monument, and when he came to the words commemorating his father's bravery . . . he turned to me and said emphatically 'You, Sir, know that this is true;' to which I very heartily and sincerely assented. The General died shortly afterward." Van Ness died March 7, 1847. Van Buren's recollection of the inscription faltered here and there: "an honest brave man, who feared nothing but his God." In its entirety, the inscription reads: "HERE/lie the remains of/the honourable/PETER VAN

These words, though penned by his eldest son forty years after his death, were not mere windy rhetoric, vague and empty of meaning, but rather expressions of value, chosen thoughtfully and with care. The record bears them out, and they are further attested to by Martin Van Buren himself, who knew Peter Van Ness well, as a man "of no common mark." At the start he had little more going for him than the good family name:

. . . Judge Van Ness commenced life in the humble but respectable trade of a wheelwright, with very little education, and yet by force of a strong intellect and an indomitable spirit, he raised himself to high positions as well in the government as in the society in which he lived.<sup>2</sup>

Until more than forty years of age, he held no position of real importance outside the military, none that involved profession or training. Although captain of a militia company when but nineteen years old and later in the force that conquered French Canada, he first held office as a road commissioner of the Claverack District in 1772-3 and 1775.<sup>3</sup> An ardent Whig all his later life, he was prominent in the county committee of public safety throughout the period of the American Revolution and entered

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1. (Cont.) NESS./who died Dec. 21, 1804./aged 70 years and 21 days/he was/a high minded, honourable,/sensible man - fearing none but his God - and/a distinguished and influential patriot in the most trying times, having/served his country with great credit/in numerous public stations, both civil/and military, among which were the/command of a company at the age of/19 years by the unanimous choice of/his men in the invasion and conquest/ of Canada by the Brittish [sic], the command/of a regt. at the capture of Burgoyne/ in 1777; that of a member of the state/convention which adopted the federal/constitution; and a long service as a/state senator, member of the council/of appointment, and chief judge of/this county." John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren (Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1918, Vol. II) (Washington, 1920), pp. 16, 18.

2. Ibid., p. 16.

3. Typescript manuscript entitled "Van Ness Genealogy," p. 8, Van Ness Papers, Columbia County Historical Society.

military service on October 20, 1775, as a militia colonel. He commanded a regiment at Saratoga two years later. A glimpse is caught of him during these years also collecting rents from tenant farmers on the Livingston manor lands.<sup>4</sup>

Military achievement coupled with revolutionary leadership led inevitably to post-war political preferment. Chosen a state senator in 1784, he held that post for years. And his Whiggish caste of mind hardened with the years. An Anti-Federalist delegate to the 1788 New York ratifying convention, he sat and listened, apparently not entering debate, and then voted against adopting the Constitution of the United States.<sup>5</sup> From 1786 until 1792 he served as Justice of the Peace. In 1788 he became Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, rising to Chief Judge in 1802. He also served a term on the New York Council of Appointment, a body that dispensed all the state's patronage.<sup>6</sup> He died in the house later to be known as Lindenwald on December 21, 1804.

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4. George Dangerfield, Chancellor Robert R. Livingston of New York: 1746-1813 (New York, 1960), p. 116.

5. Ibid., p. 251, and Jonathan Elliot, The Debates in the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution . . . (Philadelphia, 1836), II, 413. Though not complete, the debates give no evidence of his having spoken.

6. "Van Ness Genealogy," p. 8. As described by State Historian Hugh Hastings, the Council of Appointment was a "sinister expedient" that "controlled all the political patronage of the State," and became a "powerful and offensive political machine." Created by the first constitution of New York, in an excess of zeal to control the executive, the council was prescribed by the following: "That all officers other than those who by this constitution are directed to be otherwise appointed, shall be appointed in the manner following, to wit, The Assembly shall, once in every year, openly nominate and appoint one of the senators from each great district, which senators shall form a council for the appointment of said officers, of which the Governor for the time being, or the Lieutenant-Governor, or the President of the Senate, when they shall respectively administer the government, shall be President, and have a casting vote, but no other vote, and with the advice and consent of the said council be a quorum. And further, the said senators shall not be eligible to the said council for two years successively." Hastings goes on to explain: "The state at this time consisted of four great districts, and the manner of selecting the Council clearly indicates the powerful lever

Respected for his abilities and politically active, Judge Peter Van Ness was a vital force, not to be engaged in controversy without due regard, as the young Martin Van Buren discovered when on the other side of election issues:

He was intolerant in his political opinion and arbitrary in his disposition. The traditions of the neighborhood in which he lived and died, abound with anecdotes of his fiery temper and personal courage. . . . My opposition to his views, which he regarded as a species of treason in a strippling and a member of a family with whom he had been connected at marriage and had always been intimate, produced . . . unpleasant collisions between us that made it difficult to treat him with the respect due to his years and position, . . . <sup>7</sup>

One anecdote will suffice to put a finishing touch to this sketch about the character of a stern and unremitting man, for beneath a forbidding exterior resided a sense of humor. Van Buren many years later recalled an incident during this period of political discord that serves to illuminate this side of the old patriot's personality:

In that interval I had but one meeting with him, and that under circumstances that I had reason to believe did not aggravate his prejudice . . . [summoned by his son, William] I started at

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6. (Cont.) placed within the hands of its members to abase and prostitute the civil service of the state, each succeeding year, by removing from office every individual whose politics differed from theirs or a majority of them." The Council of Appointment was discontinued by the constitutional convention of 1821. Peter Van Ness was appointed to that body from the Western District on January 2, 1789, and was succeeded by Philip Schuyler on January 15, 1790. Thus during that interval, he and Samuel Townsend of the Southern District, John Hathorn of the Middle District, and John Williams of the Eastern District were among New York's most politically powerful men. Hugh Hastings, ed. and comp., Military Minutes of the Council of Appointment of the State of New York, 1783-1821 (Albany, 1901), I, 54-57, 62.

7. Fitzpatrick, Autobiography of Martin Van Buren, p. 16. And this over a factional difference only.

once for his . . . residence without a thought of the existing relations between the old gentleman and myself. As I approached the . . . house . . . I perceived . . . the judge was seated close to and his back against the lower door, for the benefit of light, reading a newspaper. Hearing my steps he looked around and perceiving me, instantly resumed his reading in a manner that precluded me from addressing him. The door for explanation, as well as that for entrance, thus being closed upon me, and not feeling disposed to retreat, I seized the knocker which was hanging near his head, and gave it a somewhat emphasized rap, and as I did so I saw a smile upon his countenance of which my position afforded me a profile view. His son answered . . . and [I] then described the old gentleman's irrepressible amusement at the free use I had made of the knocker. He laughed and said that he had no doubt his father was pleased with the way, so much in character with his own decisive temper, in which I had extricated myself from the embarrassment in which he had placed me.<sup>8</sup>

Peter Van Ness took title to the property on which Lindenwald is located by deed of William Van Alstyne, Lambert Van Alstyne, and Lucas Hoes executed on May 3, 1787.<sup>9</sup> In fact, actual possession may have antedated the 1787 indenture, for, as Van Buren described the background: "The estate . . . was originally settled by a family who were relations of my father. It was sold at the close of the Revolutionary War to pay the debts of the then head of the family, and purchased by the Judge."<sup>10</sup> The Van Ness family had lived in nearby Ghent, New

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8. Ibid., pp. 16-17.

9. Collection of deeds and memoranda relating to "Lindenwald", the home of President Martin Van Buren, Columbia County Historical Society.

10. Fitzpatrick, Autobiography of Martin Van Buren, p. 17. "Jan's granddaughter, Derkje, in 1729 married Martin Van Buren and they were the grandparents of President Van Buren. Roy Appleman, "Notes on Martin Van Buren Property by Mrs. Van Alstyne."

York, as late as 1778 but by 1782 were residing in Kinderhook.<sup>11</sup> The property as conveyed in 1787 was larger than that acquired by Van Buren years later and included some three farms and a section to the east across the Kinderhook-Claverack Road (Old Post Road). Originally, it had been part of the 3,000 acre parcel bought by Jan Martense Van Alstyne and Derkje, his wife, from the Thomas Powell Patent in 1667, the decade that Dutch settlers from Albany moved into the Kinderhook area.<sup>12</sup> Three further generations of Van Alstynes - Lambert, Thomas, and a second Lambert brought the property forward to 1787, shrinking it through divisions generation by generation. Thus in 1682, the first Lambert had his own house on 698 acres across the creek from his father's.<sup>13</sup> It was probably this place that Peter Van Ness first occupied after moving to Kinderhook, the one he later referred to as "the old stone house in which I formerly resided."<sup>14</sup>

Having prospered and accumulated a fortune in the years just past, Van Ness in 1797, though by that time over sixty years of age, built a large brick house on what was then a lane leading into the property from the Post Road. In the absence of Van Ness' housekeeping records, accounts, descriptive correspondence, diaries, and the like, practically nothing is known about the process of constructing the mansion. The date itself has persevered to the present on a silver plate of the old door knocker, by grace in the first instance of Van Buren, who made provision for it out of a reminiscent impulse: "In the many alterations and improvements I have made in the house I have preserved the old

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11. James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, eds., Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography (New York, 1889), VI, 248-49.

12. Payment consisted for the most part of "beaver skins and grain." Appleman, "Notes."

13. Ibid.

14. Copy of the Will of Peter Van Ness, Columbia County Historical Society. The original was donated by Bartow Van Ness, Jr., of Baltimore in 1965, to the New York Genealogical Society.

double door, and its knocker, as interesting memorials of my last interview with its original owner."<sup>15</sup>

Relying on the resources of the neighborhood both for materials and trademen's skills, Van Ness built a two-story and attic of a post-Georgian style known generally throughout the country at that time. Its plan was that of a center hallway house with exterior doorways opening into the hallway and a staircase to the rear of this feature. Four rooms to a floor, at the corners, communicated by interior doorways into the hallway with public rooms on the first floor and bedrooms on the second. In houses of the type, the kitchen was located in the basement along with offices for laundry, wood storage, cold storage, and other household support functions. The attic provided quarters for servants. Shuttered windows, four to a room, gave the main floors abundant illumination by day. The end walls were gabled with fireplaces and chimneys set into them. The exterior's most obvious distinguishing feature was the Palladian window on the second floor hallway. Its arched and Gothicized center sash set off by the columns and entablatures of flanking windows provided a dignified focal point, supported by the main doorway's frontispiece below. These design elements show clearly though simply in the house sketched on the early plan of the property.<sup>16</sup> A graceful window, to light the stairway, would have completed the functioning plan.

The Van Ness house achieved whatever additional effect it possessed through its scale and a few decorative touches conferred by the remaining architectural amenities, a brick band course between stories, brick flat

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15. Fitzpatrick, Autobiography of Martin Van Buren, p. 17. Described also by Van Buren as an "old-fashioned front door which was divided through the middle (a style greatly favored by our Dutch ancestors)."

16. The plan shows no dormers, a straight roof line along the facade (in place of the pediment of today), and a sketchy representation of the house's gable end. As to the first floor hallway's doorway arrangement, Van Buren's recollection of his visit in 1804 to the Van Ness house took him literally in the one door and out the other: "We passed thro' the Hall, and . . . left the house by the back door, . . ." Ibid.

arches above the windows, and the water table. By 1797, this combination of architectural characteristics was the popular style (now known as Federal), and had much solid experience and public acceptance behind it. It certainly gratified Peter Van Ness.

Inside, the house was finished in the best post-Classical building tradition. Fireplaces with chimney pieces, entablatured doorways with highly embellished gouge-work and reeding in the then newest mode, baseboards with like detailing, chair rails, plaster cornicing, and six-panel moulded doors expressed the owner's late-found importance in the dying century. An early architectural evaluation judged these qualities to be "representative of the best period of Georgian work of that time with cornices containing finely detailed and carved members and pilasters in good proportion and craftsmanship."<sup>17</sup> The general architectural form given the house, inside and out, remain there in spite of the passage of time and three capital alterations of the premises. The intent as well as the spirit of Peter Van Ness and his Kinderhook tradesmen are clearly evident today and contribute materially to the mansion's intrinsic strength of character.

With the house finished, Judge Van Ness assumed full manorial status. The large and imposing mansion house, set 300 feet west of the Albany Post Road and probably provided with a complete range of outbuildings for the support of the household as well as agricultural pursuits and animal husbandry, three tenant farms with their complexes of dependency structures, and willing hands to give assistance in season and out comprised the Van Ness establishment at century's end. Here was a figure of some consequence in the upper Hudson Valley, who enjoyed comfort and luxury, shared with those put up under his roof.

Peter Van Ness many years before had married Elbertje Hogeboom, described by her affectionate son, John, as "a pattern of a virtuous,

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17. C. Stephen Pierpoint to Melvin J. Weig, "Subject: Inspection of Van Buren Homestead," October 8, 1936, quoted in a report by Melvin J. Weig, entitled "Lindenwald," The President Martin Van Buren Homestead, Near Kinderhook, New York (November 3, 1936), Appendix III, p. 46.

affectionate, amiable, and sensible wife and mother."<sup>18</sup> The immediate family consisted of three sons and two daughters: John, William, Cornelius, Catherine, and Gertrude.<sup>19</sup> The 1790 census lists ten servants, including a number of slaves, a figure almost certainly increased before 1804.<sup>20</sup>

At the time of his death, Peter Van Ness was a wealthy man.<sup>21</sup> By the provisions of his will, he left the Kinderhook property to his sons. To John, the eldest, he gave nearly half the land and the older house:

. . . I give and devise to my oldest son John his heirs and assigns forever in fee simple the stone house in which I formerly resided, and the outhouses and appurtenances thereunto belonging, together with one equal half part of the land of the farm on which I now live, situate and being in the town of Kinderhook and County aforesaid, on the west side of the main road leading from Kinderhook to Claverack which said half part of the farm hereby devised to my said son John, is intended to be, one equal half part of the land, comprising the said farm of land, to be divided as nearly as can be into two equal parts, having due regard to the quality and quantity of

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18. Inscription on monument by John P. Van Ness, as in Footnote 1 above.

19. Van Ness' daughters married locally and are not further involved in this narrative.

20. Van Ness' will provided for emancipation of slaves identified as "The small black Girl named Hannah," "The black woman named Hannah or Nann," "The black woman named Bet," and "The black woman named Sattin." Van Ness Papers, Columbia County Historical Society.

21. According to the Van Ness genealogy at the Columbia County Historical Society, he left each son \$40,000. Van Buren wrote: "The Judge died . . . possessed of considerable wealth." Fitzpatrick, Autobiography of Martin Van Buren, p. 17.

the land, without taking into consideration the value of the brick house in which I now live.<sup>22</sup>

To Cornelius, the youngest, he gave the property across the road from the main body of land:

. . . I give and devise unto my son Cornelius, his heirs and assigns forever in fee simple, all that farm piece or parcel of land, with the buildings thereupon and the appurtenances thereunto belonging situate, lying, and being in the town of Kinderhook and County of Columbia aforesaid, on the east side of the main road leading from Kinderhook to Claverack, opposite to the house and farm I now occupy which said farm hereby intended to be devised is now in the tenure and occupation of Andrew Lovejoy.<sup>23</sup>

To William, he gave nearly half the land and the mansion:

. . . I give and Devize [sic] unto my son William and his heirs and assigns for ever in fee simple, the new brick house in which I now live, with the outhouses, buildings, and appurtenances thereunto belonging, situate and being in the town of Kinderhook and County of Columbia aforesaid, together with the remaining equal half part of the land of the farm on which I now reside, lying on the west side of the main road leading from Kinderhook to Claverack, the one equal half part of the land whereof, I have already devised to my son John - And it is my will and I hereby order and direct that the lot of Ground lying to the north of the new brick house as far as the division fence between me and Casparus Dingman, and also the

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22. Copy of the Will of Peter Van Ness, Columbia County Historical Society.

23. Ibid.

lot of Ground including the Orchard to the south of the said house as far as the first fence as it runs at the foot of the hill, shall be part of that one half of the above named farm, which I have devised to my sons John and William . . . .<sup>24</sup>

In explanation and clarification of this division of the property between the elder brothers, Van Ness' will stated:

. . . . my intention expressly is to divide the land of the farm on which I now live, including the small place occupied by John Pin [Pier?] lying in the fork of the roads leading from Kinderhook to Claverack, and from Kinderhook to Van Alstyne's Mills, equally between them, as well in point of quality as quantity, Giving to my son John, the old stone house in which I formerly resided, and to my son William the brick house in which I now live, thus rendering his portion the most valuable, because the advances I have made to my son John since he has been of age, far exceed those made to my son William, to which I ought in justice to have regard in the distribution of my property.<sup>25</sup>

The generation of Van Nesses into whose hands the property was now to descend and thus reside for twenty years to come, attained distinction in American public life as well as places in their country's annals. All educated to the law, they became involved in politics at an early stage. Given their father's political temperament, it would not be too much to assume, in fact, that they were bred to politics. They held elective and appointive office. But their interest in various other forms of enterprise, often covert or masked, was not unduly restrained by their public roles. Caught up in the optimism of early nineteenth century American entrepreneurship, they became involved in capitalization of

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24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

banks, land speculation, and internal improvement companies. Just what their father would have said about the former activity can be accurately gauged. That his partisan dislike of all banks was not shared by his sons is merely a commentary on the times. Although provided for handsomely by their father's estate, the brothers lost little time getting into debt. Family correspondence for the first decade and more of the century alludes constantly to one scrape or embarrassment or another. Creditors pressing notes on them, the need for further capital, and arrangements for selling certain of their land holdings are interspersed among injunctions of secrecy and warnings against the machinations of others.<sup>26</sup> In time, success in the public field brought about a moderating of these earlier acquisitive inclinations and greater regularity into their general conduct.

John Peter Van Ness was born in Ghent, New York, on November 4, 1769, and died in Washington, D. C., on March 7, 1846. He studied at Columbia College and prepared for the bar. He entered practice briefly at nearby Claverack. Elected to the House of Representatives in 1800, he served until disqualified in 1803, for accepting a commission in the district militia. He appears to have been inclined more by nature to cultivate the social graces than to pursue a career. Retreating to the Van Ness estate between sessions of Congress, he spent his time on diversions, entertaining his associates, sisters "Caty" and "Gitty," and himself by larks in the vicinity of Kinderhook and trips to resorts.<sup>27</sup> Secured in

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26. Cornelius P. Van Ness to William P. Van Ness, May 17, 1809, February 13, 18, 1813, and many other letters between these dates. Van Ness Papers, New-York Historical Society.

27. A Biographical Directory of Congress . . . 1774-1911 (Washington, 1911, 1913), p. 1074. "The time is yesterday expired at which Mr. Clarke was to have my Carriage finished - I want it extremely . . . as . . . we propose a Jaunt to Lebanon Springs. . . ." John P. Van Ness to William P. Van Ness, August 21, 1802, Van Ness Papers, New-York Historical Society. "My father is out of horses & we can not think of going to the Springs with his heavy carriage unless we had four horses. . . . If you would conveniently send up me a few Bottles of French or light Wines (Claret, Champaign [sic], or Burgundy) I would be glad as it is scarce here." John P. Van Ness to William P. Van Ness, September 1, 1802, ibid.

his dilettantish ways by marriage to heiress Marcia Burns during 1802, he in time came into her large fortune. But, before that, he ran up bills, drew liberally on his father, and even became indebted to his younger brother, Cornelius, for considerable sums.<sup>28</sup> With the Burns family money in hand, he settled in Washington, building a fine mansion where he entertained lavishly. One of the district's leading citizens, he served as trustee of many institutions, became president of the Bank of the Metropolis, and rose to mayor of the City of Washington.<sup>29</sup> Marcia Burns Van Ness in addition to occupying a high place in Washington society, also became famous for her many benevolences.<sup>30</sup>

John Van Ness makes one other appearance on the pages of history. Commander of the district militia brigade, he ordered his regiments to the colors at the approach of the British in 1814, only to resign his commission when they were entrusted to the control of an officer junior in rank to himself. With a characteristic gesture, he later supplied a barrel of whiskey, having it set out on the avenue, for refreshment of the defeated troops retreating from Bladensburg.<sup>31</sup> There is no reason to

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28. Not only did he owe Cornelius \$6,500 by 1817, but laughed at requests for repayment, the latter confided to William. Ibid.

29. Wilson and Fiske, Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography, VI, 248.

30. Ibid. "Mrs. Van Ness was the only woman in Washington that ever received a public funeral, which was awarded her on account of her extensive charities." Mrs. Van Ness predeceased her husband by almost fifteen years. Their tomb at one time enjoyed the reputation of one of the capital's "sights": "Mr. and Mrs. Van Ness were buried in a mausoleum that was erected after the pattern of the Temple of Vesta at Rome. It stood in the grounds of the Protestant orphan asylum, and for many years was one of the curious and interesting relics of old Washington. It has since been removed to a cemetery." Ibid.

31. Willis Thornton, "The Day They Burned the Capitol," American Heritage, VI (December, 1954), 49, 51. The author made note that Van Ness did not have to stand the expense of his handsome show of solicitude: "It is pleasant to record that a grateful Government later reimbursed him."

dispute Martin Van Buren's final evaluation of the general as "a gentleman . . . who was in every sense a remarkable man."<sup>32</sup>

Cornelius Peter Van Ness was born in Kinderhook on February 1, 1782, and died in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on December 15, 1852. He reached his majority without benefit of higher education and no training for a profession. While staying with William in New York City, he chafed at his dependent status, quarreled violently with his brother, and for a time seriously considered a career in the theater.<sup>33</sup> Journeying to Philadelphia, then the nation's cultural center, he found himself stranded with neither money nor friends. John Van Ness had written ahead, asking influential citizen, Alexander James Dallas, to intercede with the theater managers to deny him any opportunity of appearing on the stage.<sup>34</sup> In time, Cornelius went on to Washington, where he stayed with John, applied himself to study of the law, and was licensed on May 3,

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32. A respect born in the Hudson River community never flagged when Van Buren's importance came to exceed that of the General's and even survived later political differences: "During my long official residence in Washington, very courteous relations were maintained with my old friend Gen. John P. Van Ness, but he by no means liked my political principles. My course in regard to the currency and particularly in respect to the Banks of the District of Columbia, in one of which he was deeply interested, displeased him so much, as to induce him to come to our county in 1840, to speak and electioneer against my re-election . . . [now, seven years later he reappeared for the purpose of erecting the monument over his father's grave] with an evident resolution that our intercourse should be of the most reserved character. Altho' the business he had in hand would detain him some days, he declined my invitation to stay with me, and, at first, every other advance on my part to facilitate his operations . . . [Van Buren, however, directed that he be assisted] and on the second day he consented to dine with me. He did the same on each succeeding day, and left me when the work was finished with feelings as kind as those which existed at the commencement of our acquaintance. . . . I have thought this brief notice due to a gentleman with whom I was at the commencement of my career so closely connected. . . ." Fitzpatrick, Autobiography of Martin Van Buren, p. 18.

33. John P. Van Ness to William P. Van Ness, January 8, 1803, Van Ness Papers, New-York Historical Society.

34. Ibid., January 14, 1803.

1803.<sup>35</sup> Returning to New York, he occupied one of the Kinderhook houses, was admitted to the bar in 1804, and entered the practice of law in nearby Spencertown with a Charles Thompson. When that failed to meet expectations, he moved in January 1806, to St. Albans, Vermont, with wife, first child, and six tablespoons "of my mothers," he wrote at the time. For three years he found the going harder than he had expected, the Embargo and Federalists leaving his practice "much injured," as he complained to correspondents. Eventually, in 1809, he sought his valuation in public office, being appointed first postmaster of Burlington and the same year United States attorney for the district.<sup>36</sup> After that year Cornelius virtually never was out of office, although he became involved in much profitable enterprise on the side. In combination with brother William, he speculated in "Northern land," and on his own in Lake Champlain steamboat companies and chartering of Vermont banks.<sup>37</sup> He gained appointment as collector of customs at the port of Burlington in 1813, and commissioner in settling the boundary under provisions of the Treaty of Ghent in 1816.<sup>38</sup> He served as a member of the state assembly between 1818 and 1821, leaving to accept appointment as Chief Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court the latter year. In 1823, he vacated that office to become Democratic governor, in turn accepting appointment as Minister to Spain in 1829.<sup>39</sup> While at that post, he married a Spanish lady and returned to this country in 1837. By 1844, he was back in public office, this time as collector of the Port of New York.<sup>40</sup> That Van Ness' unsavory past had not passed unnoticed is

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35. Ibid., May 1, 1803. According to reports, he ingested the usual hard fare of Coke on Littleton and Blackstone until proficient enough to bear examination.

36. Cornelius P. Van Ness to William P. Van Ness, February 18, 1812, ibid.

37. Ibid., February 18, 1812.

38. Ibid., February 9, 1813. The commission met at the Hague.

39. Wilson and Fiske, Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography, VI, 249.

40. Ibid.

evident in the observation of William L. Marcy when Polk, upon assuming office in 1845, determined to maintain status quo for the time being in the New York Customs despite flagrant use of the collector's office for political purpose:

The keeping in V. N. in whose hands is the almost entire am[oun]t of patronage rendered it expedient that there should be an exceedingly honest & vigilant N. officer [naval officer - an important official] & one who would divide the responsibility in case of trouble. Hoffman is a real watch dog - that I had to admit. So far as the money is concerned he will look well to it.<sup>41</sup>

Not long after Cornelius returned to private life, writing on political subjects and looking to his honors.<sup>42</sup>

William Peter Van Ness was born at Ghent in 1778, when that place was still a part of Claverack, and died in New York City, September 6, 1826. He attended Kinderhook Academy, and upon graduation enrolled at Columbia College. There, until his graduation in 1797, he pursued his studies in an acceptable manner. Letters home between 1795 and 1797 were concerned almost entirely with rooming arrangements, provisioning for a youthful appetite, and student attachments.<sup>43</sup> Yet, even before his course of study ended, he demonstrated an interest in politics that

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41. William L. Marcy to Gen. Prosper M. Wetmore, May 3, 1845, quoted in Leonard D. White, The Jacksonians: A Study in Administrative History, 1829-1861 (New York, 1954), p. 176. "In 1845 Collector Van Ness received between \$1,000 and \$1,500 from customs employees for the city election and spent the money under his own direction." Ibid., p. 335.

42. "The University of Vermont conferred on him the degree of LL. D. in 1823. He published a 'Letter to the Public on Political Parties, Caucuses, and Conventions' (Washington, D.C. 1848)." Wilson and Fiske, Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography, VI, 248-49.

43. William P. Van Ness to Peter Van Ness, March 10, November 9, 1795, and July 14, September 1, 9, November 23, 1796, Van Ness Papers, New-York Historical Society.

presaged his main preoccupation in the years ahead.<sup>44</sup> By 1797, he was hard at the study of law in the New York offices of Edward Livingston.<sup>45</sup> What influence Livingston had on the yet fledgling Van Ness' politics can only be conjectured. A member of the House of Representatives representing Republican New York City, Livingston had already strongly supported partisan measures in that body. But he was rapidly losing interest in the political processes of the time and in elective office as well. So it was to his preceptor's friend, Aaron Burr, instead that young Van Ness turned in his search for a leader and a cause. To a young man craving excitement, one figure on the New York scene in particular could offer both; indeed, in his person combined both. His way of life, his circle of followers, and his beautiful and charming daughter galvanized New York's young Republicans as no other force of that day:

Richmond Hill, by the autumn of 1799, had become the mecca of New York's young intelligentsia. With his passion for collecting, filling his home with imported books, choice portraits, furniture, bric-a-brac and innumerable curios, the Colonel combined a predilection for young company and keen minds. To his board and library came the host of youthful talent - writers, painters, lawyers, embryo statesmen - with whom the city was rapidly filling. Washington and Peter Irving were his guests. So were John Vanderlyn, the artist; Martin Van Buren, . . . Daniel Tompkins, twice Vice President and three times Governor of New York; . . . Billy Van Ness, sometimes Federal judge; Marinus Willett, later mayor of the city; . . . and others of lesser fame. Various their destinies, but they united to worship the ground of Aaron Burr's treading. Theodosia dubbed them his "Tenth Legion," and

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44. Ibid., December 16, 1796.

45. The younger brother of Chancellor Robert R. Livingston, educated at Princeton, married to the daughter of one of New York's leading merchants, Livingston spent the years 1795-1801 in the House of Representatives busy with statutory reform legislation. Van Ness thus found himself in daily contact with someone of a critical nature during these impressionable years.

when she graced the head of his banquet table, the Colonel knew his cup of joy was running over. . . . She had inherited the fine eyes of the Burrs, and at sixteen presented a comely picture with her auburn hair, banged over the forehead and falling in wispy lines along the temples. In talents and accomplishments she yielded little to the most cultivated of her father's guests. She read and quoted in French, Latin, Greek; she skated, she rode, she danced, she sang, she played, she sketched. She was a marksman with her father's pistols, his hostess to ambassadors, philosophers and scientists, to French emigres and British travelers.<sup>46</sup>

Against this setting Burr played a role that captivated the hearts and minds of his young followers. At his charismatic best amidst political intrigue, he studied the strategies of history's great leaders, told no more than he had to, corresponded in cyphers, and timed his moves carefully. In nourishing the cult of personality he had given rise to, he appealed to their spirit and sense of adventure, to their innate youthful desires to associate with a hero. Himself daring when provoked or challenged, cool and full of resolution in the breach, Burr demanded and received the loyalties of his followers. Whether debating, scheming, or duelling, and he engaged repeatedly in all three, he added to the mystique that surrounded him - in the eyes of his dazzled followers if not among better informed and more experienced contemporaries.<sup>47</sup>

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46. Holmes Alexander, Aaron Burr: The Proud Pretender (New York, 1937), pp. 129-30.

47. Code Duello, as then observed, was a murderous expedient for settling differences involving honor, as that word was at the time construed. At a mere ten paces, an experienced marksman not only could not miss, but could reasonably expect to place his shot in a vital location. Burr faced his opponents on the field of honor with a confidence born of experience under fire and much practice. But even his devil-may-care attitude was put to the test on occasion. Facing John Barker Church on a September morning, Burr found that one of his two pistols had been improperly loaded. He agreed to accept the first exchange, from whence he took a bullet through the coat, with the airy observation that "if he missed him, then he would hit him the next shot." Ibid., pp. 128-29.

None of Burr's followers was more convinced of his idol's greatness or of his role as a man of destiny than young Van Ness. Nor was the youngster's adulation more heartily reciprocated in any other instance. From these early days at Richmond Hill, Van Ness embarked on a relationship that was to influence the entire course of his life and career. The ambitions and vanity, lack of scruples and opportunism, and others of Burr's weaknesses, he failed to recognize or utterly misjudged. In the tumultuous events that followed his enlistment in the cause, it was as though the young lawyer were mesmerized; and he threw away his larger future as though he were a weapon that discharged prematurely.

Van Ness' first campaign under Burr's banner turned out to be the Assembly canvass of 1799. It ended disastrously as Burr lost his Assembly seat in the wake of his sly manipulation that had led to chartering of the Manhattan Company, ostensibly as a water supplier, in actuality to compete in banking with Hamilton's Bank of New York. The Burrrites now set out to recoup their losses through tight factional organization and full use of their strong electioneering talents. A number of the "Little Band," Van Ness among them, as Burr's most intimate associates became known to their railing opponents, also belonged to that fraternal and benevolent organization, the Tammany Society, and their influence at the Wigwam proved to be critical to their chief's fortunes. As one of the Tammany initiates who frequented the long room of Brom Martling's tavern, Van Ness provided Burr with a tie to the mechanics and tradesmen. After organizing them effectively, the "Martling Men" aligned them with the Clinton-Livingston-Gates coalition to sweep the city, capture the Assembly, narrowly, and through adroit maneuvering obtain the electoral votes that brought Burr a tie with Jefferson in the election of 1800. By 1801, Van Ness had become Burr's protege, whose inclinations, influence, and qualities suited his master perfectly. As Burr confided to party chieftain and sachem, Albert Gallatin, in a letter of introduction:

He is a born Whig & will never dishonor his parentage - already he is considered important to our cause and the respectability of his connections & family - No man can better explain to you

the underworks of party among Us and his honor and integrity may be perfectly [adapted]. . . . He is bred a lawyer & promises to attain the first degree of eminence.<sup>48</sup>

Now an established principal in Manhattan's political life, Van Ness settled in the city, where he was to remain, occasional interludes excepted, for the rest of his life. He and wife Nancy set up housekeeping there, he entered the practice of law there in 1800, taking as one of his clerks young Martin Van Buren the next year, and on August 26, 1801, was commissioned a notary public.<sup>49</sup> Even the yellow fever epidemic of 1803 could not budge him from his chosen theater of operations.<sup>50</sup>

The best efforts of the "Little Band" in the end gave the Republicans the White House and their man, after completion of an agonizing electoral process, the vice presidency. But two of them became patronage recipients, bright prospects notwithstanding. Hopes in the future remained high during 1801 as Burr's prominence in reelecting George Clinton governor and presiding over the convention to amend the state constitution mounted. But other occasions showed him in a less favorable light, as his casting vote on the Judiciary Act and his even-handedness with Federalists over issues antagonized one side or the other. Presiding over the Senate proved hazardous to his designs. Then, all turned to dust.

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48. Aaron Burr to Albert Gallatin, May 21, 1801, Van Ness Papers, New-York Historical Society.

49. Commission of Notary Public dated August 26, 1801, ibid.

50. ". . . You may bring your family here to my house. I have plenty of convenient house room and Every Conveniency which will make You and Your family happy and agreeable on such an occasion. I should spare neither trouble nor Expence [sic] to make it perfectly agreeable." Peter Van Ness to William Van Ness, August 13, 1803, ibid.

For years Burr had endured Hamilton's malign and inveterate opposition. Now starting in 1802, he was confronted by an even more powerful opposing force within his own party. Alleging that Burr had conspired with the Federalists to deprive Jefferson of the presidency, a combination of Livingstons and Clintonians declared war on Burr in 1802. There followed two years of the most acrimonious exchanges known to that time, and worse. At first as abuse rained down, Burr held his peace, not responding in kind. The Republican editors, particularly Cheetham of the New York Citizen, exceeded all their previous best efforts, while the Burrites had no rag of their own to make reply. Then the columns of the Morning Chronicle became available to them, and Van Ness, exhibiting for the first time a marked talent for invective, turned political polemicist. In championing his idol, he plunged ever more deeply yet into the complex factional disputation of New York Republicanism.<sup>51</sup>

Yet his most notorious such sally appeared not in the press, but under the pen name Aristides in reply to James Cheetham's, A View of the Political Conduct of Aaron Burr. Van Ness' pamphlet proved to be memorable to all concerned, for it marked the taking off of gloves at last, in the contest between the Burrites and the Livingston-Clinton faction. Entitled, An Examination of the Various Charges Exhibited Against Aaron Burr, the tract threw caution to the winds in castigating every tormentor equally and in turn:

The title does not give any real inkling of the dynamite contained in these few black-letter pages. It was far more than a defense of Burr; it was a bitter, relentless, excoriating

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51. Van Ness' totality of commitment to Burr must not be through the result entirely of an impressionable young man's deference for an absorbing if dangerous companion. He was ambitious and selective of principles, and doubtless had been denied office following Jefferson's election. He was fully prepared to strike hard whenever a suitable opening appeared. In fact, the Burrites had been out-maneuvered and isolated by the sagacious quarterbacking of De Witt Clinton, whose brilliance in his role compares most advantageously with Van Ness' raging lunges as Burr's lieutenant. Dennis Tilden Lynch, An Epoch and a Man: Martin Van Buren and His Times (New York, 1929), p. 48.

attack on all of his enemies within the Republican party. . . . Nowhere in all polemic literature, with the exception of the famous "Junius" letters, is there anything comparable to this performance. Burr's back was now to the wall and his anonymous defender lashed out with barbed language and accusations that sank deep into the most insensitive hide. No one was spared, all were flayed alike; . . . The Clintons had long hated Burr, it was declared, and sought his downfall. George Clinton, old and doddering, had "signed for" the Vice-Presidential nomination, and had spoken in very unflattering terms of Jefferson. As for De Witt Clinton and his colleague, Ambrose Spencer, they were "destitute of all honor, probity, or talents, of all attachments to the general welfare." Clinton himself was "the acknowledged leader of a band of hired calumniators," his mind "matured by the practice of iniquity, and unalloyed with any virtuous principle, pointed him out as fit for any vice." He had filled every office with relatives, hirelings and the pliant . . .

Then he turned his unflattering attention to the Livingstons. The old Chancellor himself was "destitute of solid and useful knowledge . . . a capricious, visionary theorist;" Tillotson, Secretary of State, "had travelled the country round, like a hungry spaniel, begging an office as he went"; Richard Riker, District Attorney, as "a vain and contemptible little pest"; while as for the ineffable James Cheetham, he was "an open blasphemer of his God, a reviler of his Saviour and a conspirator against the religious establishment of his country." Brockholst Livingston was "a man who has been extricated from debts, to an incalculable amount, by means which have never been explained, but is now rioting in luxury and wealth." Jefferson himself had rewarded those who voted for him with lucrative appointments, had in fact bid for the Presidency."<sup>52</sup>

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52. Quoted from Nathan Schachner, Aaron Burr: A Biography (New York, 1937), pp. 232-33.

Appearing in December 1803, the pamphlet was the opening shot in a series of sensational developments over the course of six months. Three extra editions followed the first.<sup>53</sup> After the initial tooth-gnashing, suits were instituted, intended to flush out the author. For the moment they failed as the publishers stood firm.<sup>54</sup>

In the meantime terrible things were taking place on the field of honor as Burr's embattled cohorts resorted to the only means still left to them in their predicament. Duelling came as naturally to the "Little Band" as to their leader. Earlier in the contest, one of the Burr loyalists, George Eaker, fatally wounded Hamilton's son, Philip. Now the air was filled with challenges:

William Coleman . . . editor [of the Morning Chronicle] attempted to defend Burr and, being given the lie by Cheetham called him out for it. Cheetham took refuge behind the law, but Coleman dueled and killed a braver man, Captain Thompson. The Swartout brothers, John and Robert, certain that the Clinton-Livingston combine was behind Cheetham, sent their compliments to De Witt Clinton and Richard Riker, his lieutenant. Honors were even. Robert winged Riker, but John was carried into Richmond Hill one morning with two flesh wounds in his leg.<sup>55</sup>

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53. Wright Howes, comp., U.S. IANA (1650-1950): A Selective Bibliography . . . (New York, 1954, 1963), p. 601. Lengthy sections were also widely quoted in the press.

54. After failing through threats to force publishers Ward and Gould to divulge the author's identity, the victims of Van Ness' attacks brought suit. When time and event proved the fallacy of relying on Burr for protection, the publishers made "abject apology." By then everybody knew who Aristides was. Schachner, Aaron Burr, p. 233.

55. Alexander, Aaron Burr, p. 188. John Swartout lost his appointive post for his part in the scandal. Cheetham evaded the consequences of his brush with Coleman when Brockholst Livingston arrested both of them, escaping, as it were, on a technicality furnished handily by these friends of his faction. Burr's attempts to show Jefferson's bargaining for

Had the identity of Aristides become known at this time, there is little reason to doubt but that William Van Ness would one morning have found himself standing, pistol in hand, at the required ten paces.

None of this had the desired effect. If anything the pressure on Burr intensified. Cheetham returned to the attack with his somewhat pallid entry, A Reply to Aristides. Van Ness' tract provided a pretext to dump Burr in Clinton's favor, and the latter became the Republican nominee for Vice President in 1804.<sup>56</sup> A final blow to Burr's candidacy for renomination may have been struck a few short weeks before the party's caucus when Van Ness appeared in tandem with Alexander Hamilton to plead Federalist editor Harry Crosswell's innocence of a charge of slandering the President.<sup>57</sup> Received in Republican quarters as

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55. (Cont.) the presidency by forcing sworn statements from James A. Bayard and Samuel Smith of Maryland during the course of a libel suit against Cheetham bogged down in procedure and were discontinued as Burr became involved in his western expedition. Schachner, Aaron Burr, pp. 233-34. It remained for Van Buren to act the part of the thoroughgoing politician during this imbroglio. Requested by Van Ness to stand up and be counted, when the going became rough in 1804, he demurred. Van Ness wrote: "You know that Mr. Burr is the intended victim of villainy and persecution against which it is the duty of every friend to freedom to sustain him . . . I wish you to reflect maturely before you take a side - and when you do never change." Opening with expressions of attachment: "Feeling Possessed of Strong personal prejudices for Mr. Burr and feeling pure and disinterested affection for some of his most intimate friends amongst whom it is with pleasure that I name you as first in my esteem," he closed with the finality of disengagement: "Upon the most mature [and] passionate reflection however I am truly Impressed . . . that the support of Col. Burr would not under existing Circumstances be proper, . . . and in giving this opinion I wish to be understood, as not at all embracing the truth or falsity of the Charges." Quoted from Ibid., pp. 234-35.

56. The nominating caucus was held on February 25, 1804.

57. The verdict: guilty as charged. Harry Crosswell published a sheet in Hudson, New York, bearing a masthead emblazoned, The Wasp. Like so many of the day's newspapers, it specialized in scurrility, albeit to a small country audience. In the issue of September 9, 1802, appeared the following: "Jefferson paid Callender for calling Washington a traitor, a robber, a perjurer; for calling Adams a hoary-headed incendiary; and for most grossly slandering the private characters of men whom he well knew

further evidence of Burr's flirtation with Federalists, this audacious move could hardly have been expected to win converts among the party faithful. But such is the blindness of overzealousness.

Turning to the governorship, Burr then openly embraced Manhattan's Federalists, only to lose out to the regular Republican nominee statewide, as the Clinton and Livingston combination, supported by the vindictive Hamilton, proved to be more than the Burrites could handle.

In the wake of the election, the final blow fell. While still smarting from the sting of defeat and confusion over the invidiousness of its authors, Burr happened upon one slur too many in a heretofore overlooked Albany newspaper item. Cheetham's oft-repeated charges that the Vice President had conspired to take the 1800 election had long been treated with contempt. In the American Citizen editor's pamphlet, Nine Letters on the Subject of Aaron Burr's Political Defection, he charged that "General Hamilton declared openly that Mr. Burr had intrigued with the federal gentlemen to effect his election to the Presidency." On the head of this Burr, although declining to take on so unworthy a figure as Cheetham, warned that he would "call out the next man of respectability concerned in the infamous publications." Now, he took up an account

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57. (Cont.) were virtuous." State officials, unleashed by Governor George Clinton, conducted proceedings against Croswell in what has been called a "spirit of thoroughgoing partisanship." The first trial in 1803 considered only whether the charged allegations had been made and not the truth of the libel, ignoring the Zenger case precedent. Appealed to the Court of Errors at Albany, in 1804, it attracted an impressive array of legal talent. And again the finding went against Croswell, as the court divided evenly, thus upholding the conviction. When the law was changed in 1805, Croswell was granted a new trial. Quotation and opinion from Dumas Malone, Jefferson the President: First Term, 1801-1805 (Boston, 1970), pp. 232-33. Also see Nathan Schachner, Alexander Hamilton (New York, 1946), pp. 413-18. For Van Ness' argument see The Speeches at Full Length of Mr. Van Ness, Mr. Caines, THE Attorney-General, Mr. Harrison and GENERAL HAMILTON in the Great Cause of the People, Against Harry Croswell on an Indictment for Libel on THOMAS JEFFERSON, President of the United States (New York, 1804), pp. 1-17.

printed in an Albany newspaper during April of a dinner party contained in a letter signed by one Charles D. Cooper. That worthy averred that during its course, he had overheard Hamilton state not only that Burr was a "dangerous man, and one who ought not to be trusted with the reins of government," but that he could specify other instances when the same party had expressed "a still more despicable opinion of Burr." This last portentous clause with the damning word "despicable" proved to be more than could be borne. The seeds sown in factional council were to be harvested before a candid public.<sup>58</sup>

Burr decided the moment to demand satisfaction had arrived. His letter of June 18 was peremptory: "You must perceive, sir, the necessity of a prompt and unqualified acknowledgement or denial of any expressions which would warrant the assertions of Mr. Cooper." At the center of the negotiations was Van Ness; the rash counseling the exasperated: "Mr. Van Ness, who does me the favour to deliver this, will point out to you that clause of the letter to which I particularly request your attention." Throughout their course, Van Ness pursued with single-minded determination the lengthy exchange's niceties, until they reached the verge and little remained but the order to "present" under the heights at

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58. Burr and Hamilton had remained cordial in social situations despite the latter's perseverance in countering the former's every move in politics. The peculiar circumstances that released Burr's pent up resentments owed their origins to the political opportunism of the son-in-law of Hamilton's host. His dissemination of Hamilton's opinions on the occasion had no purpose other than to see them put to use as political capital. That they would reach the Albany Register and beyond its columns to other newspapers and pamphlets was not foreseen. In its essence, Burr's reaction was best summed up in the finality of his expression during the exchange of letters that followed: "These things must have an end." He referred to Hamilton's habit of uttering expressions of disapproval in private, from whence they were passed along by word of mouth to the desired quarters. On the one previous occasion when Hamilton was quoted in print by Cheetham (the Nine Letters accusation that Burr "had intrigued") offered an opportunity for a challenge: "a fair occasion for calling on him." As Burr prepared to open communications, Hamilton anticipated him, "coming forward voluntarily and making apologies and concessions." The Evening Post carried Hamilton's authorized statement that he had no knowledge of such intrigue. Schachner, Alexander Hamilton, p. 422; Alexander, Aaron Burr, pp. 188-89; and John C. Miller, Alexander Hamilton: Portrait in Paradox (New York, 1959), pp. 569-70.

Weehawken on the morning of July 11, 1804. Hamilton did everything in his power to avoid the final issue - everything that is short of acknowledging or denying. Finding the man he accused of "irregular and insatiable ambition," to be driven at last by "premeditated hostility," as represented by young Van Ness, Hamilton at length accepted, and prepared for a contest he had no hope of surviving. Van Ness' final contribution to the sorry episode centered on the post-duel controversy over who fired first and Hamilton's intent that ill-fated morning.<sup>59</sup> A relentless adversary to the end.

With Hamilton's death, all came crashing down for William P. Van Ness. Ruin stared him in the face. Burr, still in the vice presidential office, recovered sufficiently from the opprobrium of his deed to preside impressively over the impeachment trial of Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Samuel Chase and deliver an effective valedictory address to the Senate on the occasion of leaving office on March 2, 1805. In dogging Hamilton to his grave, Van Ness never wavered in his conviction that sanguinary resorts were perfectly efficacious for the uprooting of political opponents. That Hamilton's decease would arouse a hue and cry heard everywhere, and that he, as Burr's second, would soon be indicted by a coroner's jury seems not to have been foreseen. Van Ness became a fugitive, and went into hiding in the vastness of Judge Peter Van Ness' great house at Kinderhook.

At this point, the tangle of Burr's and Van Ness' lives and affairs assumed status quo as they parted for what turned out to be the last time. The effect of these five years of partisan activity was to be felt

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59. Schachner, Alexander Hamilton, pp. 423-25, and Miller, Alexander Hamilton, pp. 570-74. There has been confusion on this point owing to Hamilton's apologia, penned before the duel, in which he announced his intention to withhold fire. His pistol discharged, whether in reflex after suffering the fatal wound, or in falling, or as Van Ness maintained as the opening shot cannot be ascertained on the basis of contemporary accounts. Solicitous of his chief's reputation even in the aftermath of rage and criticism, Van Ness saw his assertion disclaimed and treated with contempt. Other rankling accusations had him and Burr refusing to help the wounded Hamilton. Richard B. Morris, ed., Alexander Hamilton and the Founding of the Nation (New York, 1957), pp. 602-08.

for a long time to come. That Van Ness remained under a cloud for years cannot be doubted. Its blight on a promising career may also be assumed. He was to hold important posts and enjoy patronage and preferment in the years ahead. If it would not be precise to portray him a victim of misfortune, he was to experience political disappointment. This talented young man, who possessed the qualities required to become one of his generation's leaders, paid heavily for his loyalties. His years with Burr effectively killed his larger political aspirations.

Yet, for five years he was in the thick of things, a participant in the age's most dramatic and best-remembered events. If he ever entertained regrets, he failed to confide them to his associates of later years. For he was one of a special breed, molded by Burr, of whom it has been written:

He had a rare faculty of inspiring young men with his own ambition, and with his own contempt of danger, luxury, and ease. Many young men loved him almost with the love of woman, and made him their model, and succeeded in copying his virtues and his faults. He, on his part, was really attached to them, would take infinite pains to form and advance them; and succeed in so imprinting his own character on theirs, that their career in life was like his - glorious at the beginning, disastrous, if not disgraceful, at the close.<sup>60</sup>

Many years later, a biographer questioned one of his ardent followers of decades before:

"You were intimately associated with Colonel Burr during the years when your character was forming, and he must have influenced you powerfully. Looking back a quarter century, do you think he influenced you beneficially?"

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60. J[ames] Parton, The Life and Times of Aaron Burr . . . (New York, 1857), p. 163.

"I am sure he did," was the reply.

"What particular effect did his character produce upon yours?"  
I asked.

The emphatic reply was: "He made me iron!"<sup>61</sup>

Although Van Ness and Van Buren parted company during 1804's troubles, they came together late in the year, united in purpose one last time before going their separate ways. Enmity and rivalry amidst partisan strife was to be their future course. But in William's hour of need, Van Buren sought again to serve his erstwhile companion. Summoned to Peter Van Ness' home, Van Buren was questioned about the advisability of Van Ness' appearing in public while under indictment as an accessory in murder:

He informed me by a friendly note, of his desire to go to Albany, and to consult with me, before going, in regard to his right to be bailed if he should be arrested there, and for that purpose asked me to call on him at his father's house. Happy in the opportunity thus afforded to show him our differences in regard to the election had made none in my friendly feelings towards him [Van Buren set out for Peter Van Ness' house]. .  
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There followed the amusing aforementioned encounter between the two, from whence William Van Ness rescued his former associate by appearing promptly in response to Van Buren's hammering.<sup>63</sup>

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61. Ibid., pp. 622-23.

62. Fitzpatrick, Autobiography of Martin Van Buren, pp. 16-17.

63. After Van Ness "answered the summons immediately," he "spoke to his father, (who passed into the drawing room without looking behind him) and opened the door for me. He proposed a walk to the neighboring

What began as an interview over a single aspect of Van Ness' predicament led in time to a successful attempt on Van Buren's part to have Van Ness' civil rights restored to him. This took a while, and in fact, awaited the governorship of Daniel D. Tompkins before being fully consummated. Not too many years before Tompkins had been a member of the Burr faction, and at one time had joined with Van Ness and 29 other propertyless young lawyers, students, and mechanics to buy a house and qualify themselves technically as voters in a New York City municipal election. So effective was their ruse that they carried the ward in a close election and put a Republican into the common council.<sup>64</sup> As a near-classmate too of Van Ness' at Columbia College, he proved only too willing to help.<sup>65</sup> But, for several years Van Ness languished, his

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63. (Cont.) bank of the creek to prevent interruption from visitors . . . he apologized to me for having forgotten the relations between his father and myself which would have made it more proper for him to come to me. I told him he was not to blame, for the preoccupation of the moment, I had forgotten them myself, but thought the circumstances bid fair to improve our intercourse, . . ." *Ibid.*, p. 17.

64. Lynch, *Epoch and Man*, p. 46. Van Buren's gratitude for favors done him by the Van Ness family was then still in balance with slights received. Not only had he enjoyed the patronage and tutelage of William, but the friendship of elder brother, John. During Van Buren's days of struggle in New York City, John lent him small sums of money, and with the gift of prophecy had laid down a set of rules to be followed in achieving success in the world: "to move only in the best society; to be moderate in attending the theater lest he become addicted to it; to avoid vice and idleness; to improve his mind by constant study." In summarizing his views, he stated: "I have no doubt you will (reflecting and considering that your future prospects are principally founded upon your attention to the improvement of that mind and those talents, with which you are blessed) neglect no opportunity of accomplishing this desirable object to such degree as to render you an ornament and an honor to your friends and your country." *Ibid.*, p. 47.

65. Tompkins was of the Columbia College class of 1795, an upper-classman by the time Van Ness first enrolled. After three terms as governor, Tompkins, though recently elected to a fourth term, left office to become Vice President of the United States, in which capacity he served until 1825. To help the situation, Van Buren's law partner and half-brother, James I. Van Alen received appointment as County Surrogate soon after Morgan Lewis, whom they had supported in the election, took the oath of office on July 1, 1804. Tompkins succeeded

career at the bar suspended, out of politics, and confined for the most part to the estate at Kinderhook and its vicinity. Not until 1812 did he resume his career full tilt, returning once more to the political arena in a much reduced role, and taking an important court appointment.

During this interval, he busied himself with the Van Ness estate. Peter Van Ness having died in December 1804, he inherited, as has been seen under provision of the will, the house and half the main farm property. The other half he received from brother John by deed of October 25, 1805.<sup>66</sup> Stymied in other fields, he set about with a vengeance to turn these holdings to account. By 1806, he was involved with measures to beautify the grounds, ordering "seeds and shrubs" from former Burrite confederate, Samuel Swartout, in New York City.<sup>67</sup> In August of that year, Elisha Williams referred to him for consideration as a "Master" gardener one Richard Finck.<sup>68</sup> In 1808 he was searching for

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65. (Cont.) Lewis three years later, and it was during his term in office that Van Ness was fully restored to grace.

66. Collection of deeds and memoranda relating to "Lindenwald," the home of President Martin Van Buren, Columbia County Historical Society.

67. Samuel Swartout to William P. Van Ness, April 14-17, 1806, Van Ness Papers, New-York Historical Society.

68. Elisha Williams to William P. Van Ness, August 18, 1806, *ibid.* "The bearer Richard Finck has lived with me this Summer as a Gardner [sic] - not having imploy [sic] for him during the Year, he proposes to find a place where his home will remain the same through the year - and calls on you for that purpose - he is honest and faithfull [sic] - and Master of his profession. . . ." Williams lived in Hudson, New York. Virtually nothing is known about Van Ness' farm laboring force. Of interest in this vein is the following: "Know all men by these presents that I William P. Van Ness of the town of Kinderhook & County of Columbia for and in consideration of the sum of five hundred & fifty dollars, have granted, bargained & Sold & do hereby grant bargain & sell unto Barent S Goes Junr. a Negro boy named Guss of Augustus, aged about nineteen years - to have and to hold the said Negro boy as a slave to him the said Barent S Goes Junr his Executors, administrators and assigns for & during his natural life - In Witness Whereof I have hereunto set my hand & seal this ninth day of March 1815." Van Buren Papers, Columbia County Historical Society.

locust seed.<sup>69</sup> Thus, flower beds, ornamentals, and trees were planted, presumably under the watchful eye of Finck. In Van Ness' papers is the draft of a tract dated July 22, 1824, and entitled: "A Brief Sketch of the Rise and progress of the New York Horticultural Society with a Convent. account of those events which terminated in the separation of a disaffected individual who is endeavouring to establish an opposition Society &c."<sup>70</sup> Work horses were on their way upriver too by April 1806.<sup>71</sup> Management of the estate he put in the hands of an "overseer."

But it was as a livestock breeder that William Van Ness placed his most serious emphasis. Fine horses attracted gentlemanly interest universally in that day and age, and William had his share of them. Peter Van Ness before him owned a racer.<sup>72</sup> While William's stock was intended primarily for more prosaic employment (and he dealt for the finest that Richard Cock in New York City had to offer), one in particular bore the Van Ness silks on New York's racing turf. Described as "without exception the finest saddle horse in the State," by the proud owner himself, he was in addition extolled for his ability to justify a wager: "I confidently pronounce him the most magnificent animal I ever

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69. Whether common or honey is not specified. William Bard to William P. Van Ness, January 13, 1808, Van Ness Papers, New-York Historical Society.

70. This involved the controversy over Shaw's and Dr. Walker's grapes and resignation of the former. Ibid.

71. In Peter Van Ness' day the farmland appears to have been worked with oxen, as was the rule in all lesser establishments at this time. Peter Van Ness to William P. Van Ness, February 4, 1803, and Jacob Van Ness to William P. Van Ness, April 13, 1806, ibid.

72. This was the "great horse Madoc," ridden by the judge to the village, to the entertainment of Kinderhookers. Notes in Van Buren Papers, Columbia County Historical Society.

backed."<sup>73</sup> Outbuildings for accommodation of Van Ness' stable included a "carriage house" in which were sulkies, cutters for wintertime use, and brass-decorated harness.<sup>74</sup>

These pursuits were but passing diversions by comparison with Van Ness' involvement with sheep raising. At the time when prudence dictated a retreat to the country, the so-called "Merino Craze" was about to begin. Alert as always to late developments where entrepreneurship might find a toehold, William became involved in advance of the general vogue. Although the height of the speculation that brought 20,000 Merino sheep to these shores from Lisbon, Portugal, in one year was reached between 1810 and 1816, Van Ness was making inquiries by mid-1808 about their availability and profitability.<sup>75</sup> Few Merinos found their way to America before the Napoleonic invasion of Spain in 1809 broke that country's monopoly. Significantly, the 1808 embargo had already cut off the imported woolens. They remained scarce through the period of war that followed. As the country had been dependent on imported woolens for all but homespun, this scarcity impelled American merchants and farmers to take measures that would meet the new demand. As a fine wool breed, Merinos soon commanded a premium. At a time when common wool sold for forty cents a pound, Merino wool sold for as much as \$3.00. Breeding stock, the center of Van Ness' interest, went to prices unimaginable a few years before, though valued even then. Full-blooded

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73. "I have several horses that I wish to sell, & among the best one that I took of Davis. . . . He has uniformly been admitted to be the best in New York. . . . He is about the colour of Lehelluynes grey horse, and incomparably more elegant. . . ." William P. Van Ness to G. A. Worth, June 25, 1811, and Timothy Green to William P. Van Ness, May 28, July 1, 1807, Van Ness Papers, New-York Historical Society.

74. Cornelius P. Van Ness to William P. Van Ness, November 25, 1806, and May 28, 1815, ibid.

75. "I have to acknowledge thy kindness by the last mail and having the same day written [sic] on the subject of Marino [sic] sheep it will not be necessary for me to say anything further until I hear again from thee. . . ." Levi McKeen to William P. Van Ness, June 18, 1808, ibid.

Merinos sold for \$300 to \$500, while rams changed hands for a high of \$1,500. With the war over in 1816, the market collapsed; in January a pound of Merino wool brought \$7.06, in October 68 cents.<sup>76</sup>

When Van Ness entered the field, the magnates in this trade were David Humphreys, who as Minister to Spain had imported breeding stock, and Robert R. Livingston and Elkanah Watson, both of whom participated experimentally. Shares could be purchased for as little as \$50 while Livingston had gone as high as \$500 for a single sheep.<sup>77</sup> Before the year was out, Van Ness had his first ram.<sup>78</sup> The market was on the upgrade, and news from England indicated that the same thing was happening over there.<sup>79</sup> By early 1810, none of full blood could be had, and "half-blooded" ones were made to do.<sup>80</sup> Speculators had begun to

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76. Stephenson Whitcomb Fletcher, Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life: 1640-1840 (Harrisburg, 1950), pp. 192-95.

77. John R. Livingston to William P. Van Ness, October 23, 1809, Van Ness Papers, New-York Historical Society.

78. ". . . I have only time to write you a few lines to request Your answer on what terms you keep the Ram I forwarded by your Overseer, . . . ." John R. Livingston to William P. Van Ness, November 26, 1809, ibid.

79. "I have just recd. your favour and am happy to find the lamb I forwarded to you is approved of and that the wool is so exceedingly fine. . . I do believe that these sheep will be much higher as Duer is just returned from England - He went to see Sir J[oseph]. Banks to examine his Curiosities and particularly to View his Library he says that Sir Joseph could talk nor think of anything but his Merino Sheep - and that they are as mad in England after them as we are here. . . ." John R. Livingston to William P. Van Ness, December 18, 1809, ibid. George III's Merino flock at Kew Gardens became "the foundation stock of the present great Australian wool industry." New York Times, February 24, 1977.

80. Van Ness employed the notorious speculator, James Greenleaf, to search out likely purchases. From Philadelphia he reported: "I returned to this city last evening, and am sorry to inform you from the inquiries I have made at your desire, on the subject of Merino Sheep, I find that not a one, of the full blood can be obtained, at any pain. Mr. Buckley has still a few for Sale of the mingled race, the prices and qualities of which I shall note at foot. . . ." James Greenleaf to William P. Van Ness, March 31, 1810, Van Ness Papers, New-York Historical Society.

scour the countryside, with the current theater of interest in the South.<sup>81</sup> By mid-year Van Ness himself was selling "three fourths Blooded Merino Rams."<sup>82</sup> His venture had begun to pay off.

From all indications Van Ness built up his flocks, and continued in this field even after his return to the law.<sup>83</sup> If not one of the country's centers of sheep breeding and sales, the Van Ness estate apparently gained status as of some importance in these undertakings. How he fared in the crash of 1816 does not appear in the correspondence, but it is possible that his involvement terminated at this time. His interest in the

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81. "I shall proceed on to Washington City in a day or two, and shall return here again in a few weeks, when, if my services can in any way be made usefull [sic] to you, I beg you would, with freedom, command them. . . ." Ibid. In October, John P. Van Ness shipped a ram and a ewe to his brother from Alexandria, Virginia, claiming proudly that they were in "excellent order - having been kept at Night . . . in an Apartment once a Kitchen. . . ." They proceeded to New York as part of a cargo of Merino aboard a ship, the Eliza Ann of Georgetown, Captain James Spelman, master, that had been fitted with special pens for their safety and well being. John recommended to his brother that he give serious consideration to buying others of the cargo lot, and had talked the owner, one Fitch, into allowing them to be graded by order of relative quality, indicated by red numbers painted on their sides. John P. Van Ness to William P. Van Ness, n.d., ibid.

82. "When you were in New York in May last you mentioned that you had several three fourths Blooded Merino Rams for sale. . . . If you have not yet disposed of them, and can spare me one of that Blood, of good size, and finely wooled, I should be very desirous of having him, . . . ." Silvanus Miller to William P. Van Ness, June 23, 1810, ibid.

83. ". . . having some Drovers in ye Course of ye next week who will be in your Neighborhood, if you are still disposed to sell the Ewes you wrote me about, I wish you to send me a few Lines. . . ." he wrote from Duanesburg, New York. Charles Wilkes to William P. Van Ness, November 17, 1813, ibid. On the eve of these involvements Van Ness acquired a pedigree dog, perhaps for sheep-herding: "Your dog is now here [New York City]. J. V. N. not choosing to take him up - I am apprehensive he will be lost. . . ." John R. Livingston to William P. Van Ness, February 14, 1807, ibid.

estate did not diminish, however, and he restocked it at times through the years.<sup>84</sup>

That this period in Van Ness' life as a country gentleman was not spent in seclusion is clear enough. He lived well and entertained well. His wine cellar was kept well supplied.<sup>85</sup> The best known of his guests was Washington Irving. An old associate in the Burr campaigns, he wrote anonymously the Burrite sheet, The Corrector, even before making his debut as a satirist of the New York social scene as author of "The Letters of Jonathan Oldstyle, Gent.," in his brother's Morning Chronicle. Irving sojourned with Van Ness under tragic circumstances in May and June of 1809, following the sudden demise of his betrothed, Matilda Hoffman:

The two months succeeding the death of Matilda [April 26, 1809] were spent in the retirement of the country, at the house of his friend, Judge William P. Van Ness, at Kinderhook, afterwards the residence of President Van Buren.<sup>86</sup>

He had been engaged in writing A History of New York, and it is no measure of his bereavement that he was to continue it and make an addition or two amidst the soothing amenities of the estate and its

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84. As late as 1819 Van Ness was in the market for oxen, a fine breeding mare, cows, and young cattle, receiving advice on proceeding from breeder Jacob Van Ness of Poughkeepsie. Jacob Van Ness to William P. Van Ness, January 25, 1819, ibid.

85. "David says he put your name on the box of Claret. . . . You have never said anything in reply to my letter respecting Mr. Hoyt's whisky [sic]." William Van Ness to William P. Van Ness, June 18, 1813, ibid.

86. Pierre M. Irving, The Life and Letters of Washington Irving by His Nephew (New York, 1889, 1973), I, 170-74. One author states flatly that Irving was in Van Ness' employ: "Irving . . . was not a stranger to Kinderhook, having found the originals of Ichabod Crane and other characters there while tutoring the children of . . . the late William P. Van Ness, . . ." Lynch, Epoch and Man, p. 347.

environs. Writing to the month of the deceased Matilda, Irving admitted, "I feel so contented here, so quiet. Life seems to flow so smoothly in the country, without even a ripple to disturb the current, that I could almost float with the stream and glide in sensibly through existence."<sup>87</sup> He was later to recall the "good old Dominie Van Ness" who gave "wholesome castigation" in one Sunday sermon, "ending with the judge himself, in the stronghold of his own mansion."<sup>88</sup> And it was from the Kinderhook locale that he took the setting and characters for the best-known of his stories, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.

With the election of Tompkins Governor and his taking office on July 1, 1807, William P. Van Ness' political fortunes were reversed dramatically. The first steps in his restoration to positions of importance took place that very year. This was a measured process, having its origins in the legislative elections of 1806 and a shift in the political balance that brought the Burrites again into prominence. With their accession to positions in the Council of Appointment, Van Ness received appointment to the State Supreme Court bench.<sup>89</sup> This took him to Albany periodically to sit, but his principal residence remained the estate in Kinderhook.

As he picked up the pieces of his public career, other opportunities beckoned. By 1809 he was actively corresponding on the approaching gubernatorial election.<sup>90</sup> With Jefferson out of office in 1810, he came

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87. Quoted in William Watt, "Random Notes on Our Early Local History," The Bulletin (Columbia County Historical Society), April 1938, pp. 18-19.

88. Ibid.

89. Lynch, Epoch and Man, pp. 72-73. The previous year had seen the Council of Appointment dominated by the Clintonians, with none other than De Witt Clinton himself member for the southern district. On January 28, 1807, a council consisting of Thomas Thomas, James Burt, Edward Savage, and John Nicholas were named by the new legislature and made appointments that brought charges the Livingston family was monopolizing the state's principal offices.

90. Matthew L. Davis to William P. Van Ness, August 1, 1809, Van Ness Papers, New-York Historical Society.

under consideration for appointment as Postmaster General of the United States.<sup>91</sup> While this did not come to pass, his abilities found additional outlets in various promotional and business enterprises, most notably banks. He served with Van Buren as a Director of the Bank of Hudson, not far from home. Around 1810 he reappeared on the Manhattan scene, and was accused of disqualifying himself for those posts that required his residence to be in the state's middle district by moving his family to New York City.<sup>92</sup> Another tribute to his abilities and intellect took the form of a request by the legislature that he codify the laws of the state for public use. Assisted by John Woodworth, he finished the job for publication in 1813, as The Laws of New York, with notes.<sup>93</sup> It has been praised as "notably successful in method and arrangement."<sup>94</sup>

Meanwhile, a latent aspiration for elective office was stirred in Van Ness by the state senatorship of his district in the 1812 election. Here, he clashed with Van Buren, who received the nomination and eventually won election, and stood accused for his pains of sharp practices.<sup>95</sup> But the crowning touch in the rehabilitation of Van Ness' reputation was supplied by his appointment to the federal bench the same year by President Madison. As a judge of the court for the Southern District of New York, he resumed the chosen life he had enjoyed eight years before

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91. Ibid., January 2, 1810.

92. J. C. Hogeboom to William P. Van Ness, December 21, 1810, ibid.

93. W. P. Van Ness to Graham A. Worth, June 25, 1811, ibid.

94. William E. Smith's article on Van Ness in Dictionary of American Biography (New York, 1934), XIX, 203.

95. Lynch charges that Van Ness requested support of Van Buren and was turned down as the latter favored Sheriff John C. Hogeboom. At the state convention, the tide swung without solicitation to Van Buren, but his backers were opposed by a coalition ostensibly supporting another candidate, but prepared to swing behind Van Ness once Van Buren had been mastered. All this came to naught as Van Buren was nominated on the first ballot. Lynch, Epoch and Man, pp. 85-88.

in the city. There as an "able subtle and ingenious legal practitioner," he passed the remainder of his life.<sup>96</sup>

Although Van Ness never again became embroiled in anything as damaging to his career as the drama of 1804, he proved unable to elude entirely further troubles. At one time he became entangled in a particularly acrimonious dispute with Navy Secretary Benjamin Crowninshield over disposition of the prize ships Cyane and Essex Junior. In 1817 he rushed to Washington to defend himself against charges that he unjustifiably retained funds accrued from condemnations of vessels or cargoes amounting to \$200,000, although judgments had already been obtained. Believed to have originated with his associate of old, Burr, who had suffered embarrassments in Van Ness' court, these charges proved costly, as he was being considered at the time for appointment as either Secretary of the Navy or that of the Army.<sup>97</sup> Further tribulation followed the discovery that a clerk of his court had embezzled \$100,000, abetted by Van Ness' negligence. Somehow or other he managed to emerge from each such episode with his reputation unimpaired. He was still held in high esteem when he died "instantaneously . . . of apoplexy, when apparently in good health, on the sixth day of September, 1826."<sup>98</sup>

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96. William Raymond, Biographical Sketches of the Distinguished Men of Columbia County (Albany, 1851), p. 35.

97. William Irving to William P. Van Ness, February 14, 1817, and William P. Van Ness to William Irving, February 18, 1817, Van Ness Papers, New-York Historical Society.

98. Raymond, Biographical Sketches of the Distinguished Men of Columbia County, p. 35. William P. Van Ness' last two publications appeared in 1814 and 1826. The first, consistent as a subject with his newfound status in the federal judiciary, was entitled, Reports of Two Cases in the Prize Court for the New York District. The second, a throwback to his earlier days of partisanship bore the stamp of advocacy, including the pen name Aristides: A Concise Narrative of General Jackson's First Invasion of Florida, and of His Immortal Defence of New Orleans. It may be viewed as an obvious attempt to curry favor with the man in public life whose star burned brightest.

By then Van Ness no longer owned the estate at Kinderhook. It had been sold "by or under the direction and superintendence [sic] of [Thomas Bolton] one of the Masters of the Court of Chancery of the State of New York, at Public Auction, to the highest bidder," as "mortgaged premises," on April 28, 1824, in consequence of a decree of January 5, 1824.<sup>99</sup> Acquiring the property for \$8,500 was William Paulding, Jr.<sup>100</sup>

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99. Deed, Thomas Bolton to William Paulding, Jr., Columbia County Deed Book 9, Folios 46-50, recorded May 19, 1824, Office of the Clerk of the County of Columbia, Hudson, New York. The auction was held at the Columbia County Court House.

100. Collection of deeds and memoranda relating to "Lindenwald," the home of President Martin Van Buren, Columbia County Historical Society.

## II. In the Ownership of General William Paulding

The circumstances of William P. Van Ness' relinquishment of the family estate must have been traumatic. It was auctioned off to satisfy a judgment against him and his wife Ann, the City Bank and Mechanics Bank of New York, and William Paulding, the ultimate purchaser himself, in favor of Richard Varick, complainant in the suit. Whether a foreclosure or some obligation resulting from his other enterprises or damages resulting from some act or deed, it was a total loss and can be assumed to have made Van Ness and those living with him anything but happy.<sup>1</sup> Though residing in New York City, they doubtless had occasion to spend time seasonally in Kinderhook while yet owners of the estate. Now it was gone.

William Paulding, Jr., was an old acquaintance of Van Ness', having been engaged in New York politics as well as personal dealings with him for years before acquiring the estate. Though virtually an unknown today, left out of the Dictionary of American Biography and the subject of no full length biography, he was a man of impressive stature in his own day. Born in Tarrytown in 1769, he enjoyed a long life, dying there on February 11, 1854. His family was prominent in the life of New York and the nation. Father William represented Suffolk County in the Provincial Congress that met in 1775 and served on the New York Committee of Safety and as Commissary during the war. Uncle John Paulding led the detachment that intercepted Major John Andre and thus revealed Benedict Arnold's treachery. Brother James Kirke Paulding, an early intimate of Washington Irving, collaborated with him in putting out

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1. "Mr. Pope has attested to the execution of the Mortgage forwarded to me by your brother. . . . I will with pleasure attend to your directions on this subject. Accept the assurance of my friendship." William Paulding, Jr., to William P. Van Ness, November 2, 1809, Van Ness Papers, New-York Historical Society. The judgment directed "that all and singular the mortgaged premises mentioned and set forth in the Bill of Complaint in said cause, part and parcel of which said premises are herein after particularly described, be sold by or under the direction and superintendence of one of the Masters of the Court of Chancery. . . ." Collection of deeds and memoranda relating to "Lindenwald," the home of President Martin Van Buren, Columbia County Historical Society.

the periodical Salmagundi, and in a long literary career wrote a number of realist novels, poetry, and tales, becoming along the way the "chief Dutch interpreter of the New York Dutch." He also expanded upon an antipathy for English influences, perhaps born under the influence of impressions received from nine relatives who served in the American Revolution, to war on the stilted English usage of the day, satirized accounts of English travelers, and engaged in much literary criticism. He served as Secretary of the Navy in Van Buren's cabinet and later traveled extensively with him.<sup>2</sup>

William Paulding, Jr., benefited from a classical education and training in the law. He set up practice in New York City, and entering politics, emerged finally from the pack as a Democratic congressman from 1811 to 1813. After serving in the New York State Constitutional Convention of 1821, he was elected Mayor of New York City. While a first term incumbent, he had occasion to head the citizen delegation that greeted Lafayette on his celebrated return to America, welcoming him on the deck of Cadmus on August 15, 1824, and eulogizing him at New York City Hall the next day. He was mayor again from 1827 until 1829. As a man of high style, he lived in one of the city's finest blocks, known as "Paulding's Row." An imposing public figure to begin with, Paulding was made the more so by preposterous stances. There is a story that the Albany Regency during the late 1820s considered naming him to run for governor. The formidable De Witt Clinton then occupied that seat, and Van Buren felt Paulding would offer him no match. To his political associates he explained his position:

. . . that deep as was his respect for Paulding he had strong objections to running him against Clinton. One was that Paulding and most of his county had been opposed to the

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2. Dictionary of American Biography (New York, 1934), XIV, 321-22, and James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, eds., Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography (New York, 1888), IV, 679-81.

construction of the Erie Canal; another was that their choice had a monomania regarding his physical perfections, believing himself strong as Hercules and handsome as Adonis. Van Buren recalled that his vanity of Paulding was common gossip in the State, and reminded his hearers of Clinton's powers of ridicule, and pictured Paulding laughed out of the campaign by Clinton's sallies.<sup>3</sup>

In the absence of Paulding family papers, his use of the estate can only be supposed. His personal base out of town was the Tarrytown area, and it may be wondered that he would care to journey as far as Kinderhook for the pleasures of the countryside. Yet, it would appear that he had plans for it at one time or another. Not only did he hold title for fifteen years, but he added to the extent of acreage while in ownership. As surveyed for Paulding on September 29, 1834, the total had grown to 137.32, or slightly less, with the addition of 0.29 acres purchased from James Vanderpoel.<sup>4</sup> But as certainly these plans miscarried. When acquired by Van Buren, the place was rundown and neglected. It may have been that Paulding's only concern was to make as advantageous a sale as possible. Little enough consideration has been given in the past to Paulding. Entirely overlooked has been an involvement of his that began toward the end of his fifteen-year span of possession and may have been instrumental in bringing it to a close. This was nothing less than his connection with one of the great architectural survivals of the nineteenth century, Lyndhurst.<sup>5</sup>

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3. Wilson and Fiske, Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography, IV, 682, and Lynch, Epoch and Man, pp. 307-08.

4. "Field notes of Gen. William Paulding's farm in Kinderhook as surveyed, September 29, 1834," in Collection of Deeds and Memoranda relating to "Lindenwald," the home of President Martin Van Buren, Columbia County Historical Society.

5. Little enough about Paulding can be found anywhere.

Thus, while still master of the Van Ness estate, Paulding had engaged Alexander Jackson Davis to build a summer retreat for him and his son, Philip, outside Tarrytown, New York. Much has been written about Philip's role in the building project, owing in no small measure to the part he played in maintaining business contacts with Davis during the period of construction between 1838 and 1841. Planning may have started as much as a year earlier, to judge from the evidence, but it is all but certain that once committed to so ambitious an undertaking nearer to home, that Paulding, whatever his interest in the Van Ness property heretofore, would in time disengage himself from it. Doubtless, the influence of William Paulding, Jr., on the work from beginning to end was a major factor in the scale and elaboration of means that went into it.

About this other house, a few observations are relevant to what was to happen farther up the Hudson Valley. Davis, previously an artist, lithographer, and draftsman before entering the architectural field, was a young man still to make his reputation when he accepted the Paulding's commission. He was able thus to pick up his work again when the second owner, George Merritt, enlarged and perfected the design after 1864. Critical judgment has likened this two-stage operation to the production of two Gothic American houses of the first importance, and has pronounced the effect of the whole as "the first domestic example of the Gothic revival in America."<sup>6</sup> The effect of Davis' work notwithstanding, it is clear that the bug had bit William Paulding, Jr., years before he succumbed to the charms of that architect's work. In becoming involved with the Van Ness property, he manifested the desire for a rural seat graceful enough to serve as a suitable backdrop against which to preen his feathers. That in time like influences would impel him to build a far grander and more ornate mansion was predictable. Known in Paulding's time as the Knoll, or Paulding Manor, or Paulding Place, the new family seat felt the owner's hand from scratch. Before Davis took a more active part, details worked up from his plans by local carpenters fell short of

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6. John N. Pearce, "A. J. Davis' Greatest Gothic," Antiques, CII (June 1965), 684.

the desired mark: "The work had progressed without Mr. P's being sensible of the value of professional services."<sup>7</sup> Yet, the Pauldings retained a share in the operations even after being so duly impressed, and acted as a final court of judgment in the selection of every little detail. Furthermore, they hung over the carpenters as they executed Davis' designs.<sup>8</sup> After the Pauldings and Mr. Merritt quit the scene, the noted financier, Jay Gould, owned this house, and it remains to this day in high state by virtue of a generous bequest of his daughter, Anna Gould, Dutchess of Talleyrand-Perigord, to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.<sup>9</sup>

With the Van Ness house no longer in his league, Paulding was ready to sell. In the market at this very time was his old friend, President of the United States, Martin Van Buren.

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7. Ibid., 684-85.

8. Ibid. Phillip Paulding wrote at some point, "My object in coming down is to look at some of your books, select some tracery for the windows, and get you to make a drawing of it. The carpenter is anxious to commence the making of it. I think it will be a great addition to the appearance of the house to add some more detailing to the windows."

9. Frank Kintrea, "The Realms of Gould," American Heritage, XXI (April 1970), 49-54.

### III. The First Ten Years of Lindenwald

The new owner and his son were wined and dined in great style. And why not? He was President of the United States, fresh from a triumphant procession up the Hudson Valley, ending amid a lachrymose reception in the village square at Kinderhook. He had pledged to crowds there as he had also done a day earlier in Hudson that he would end his days among them. It was July 21, 1839, and not quite four months earlier Martin Van Buren had taken the step that brought substance to his pledge, in buying the Paulding place, barely a mile-and-a-half from town. Smith Thompson Van Buren, the President's third son, was enjoying himself greatly. But a year into his majority, he found being lionized quite to his taste. The tour, admittedly a political swing through territory important in the coming congressional election and thus important to his father's chances for reelection the following year, had aroused Whig antagonism and the snubs of city councils dominated by them. But popular demonstrations more than made up for their peevishness. And no more so than in the New York Dutch countryside, where it counted most. Now, the day after their reception at Kinderhook, they viewed the newly acquired property, and considered what name they should give it; Smith Thompson reported to brother Martin later:

We have had a very pleasant time since I last wrote you. At Kinderhook we spent a day & dined at the Van Ness Place -[Kleinoood?] no more! We had a capital dinner of Fricasse and ham, washed down with Champaigne [sic]. We tried hard to get up a good name; but it is very tough work. The present favorite is "The Locusts" of which there are a great number about. The only objection is that the same name is used by Cooper in the "Spy" for one of his places.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Smith T. Van Buren to Martin Van Buren, Jr., July 31, 1839, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress. In the exclamatory "Kleinoood no more!" appears for the first time what is believed to have been the Van Ness name for the place. Penned indistinctly in Smith's letter, it was

That the final choice would be "Lindenwald" does not appear until two years later, when Van Buren finally moved in. At the time he had no presentiment of this, feeling confident that he would yet have the pleasure of a second term before retiring from a very long political career to the tranquility of his beloved Dutch countryside. But the caprices of politics were to return him to this scene as another of the "Hudson River Gentry" in his particular villa long before his want.

Though not recorded at the county seat until seven years had passed, and the property stood completed with desired additional parcels, the original deed was executed on April 1, 1839.<sup>2</sup> No word of the attendant circumstances has come down to the present. How the sale proceeded and the bargain was struck may well be imagined. And the motivating factors on both sides are equally clear. Both gentlemen were making provision for their futures though in quite different ways, the one with a step upwards in class and the other to the finest house in the community for which he longed. The agreed on price was \$14,000. As described in the deed, the property consisted of one lot containing 31 acres and a second lot containing 99 acres, one road, "the Land along the mill road, . . . [purchased of James Vanderpoel] Containing about twenty nine One hundredths of an acre . . . and all on it."<sup>3</sup>

The phrasing "and all on it" included all the Van Ness structures as well as any Paulding may have added and those farmhouse complexes

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1. (Cont.) deciphered by Lynch, Epoch and Man, p. 435 as "Kleirood." "Kleirood" translates as "jewel," "gem," or "trinket" from the Dutch. As employed here it would denote something precious. "Kleirood" is not to be found in the dictionary. The words "klei" or clay, and "rood" or red could be translated freely into red brick--hardly prepossessing for so notable a building.

2. Although registered with New York City's commission of deeds on June 19, 1839, the deed was not recorded in Columbia County until April 4, 1846. Deed, William Paulding to Martin Van Buren, April 4, 1846, Columbia County Deed Book II, Folios 425-27.

3. Ibid.

remaining from earlier holdings. Nothing specific relating to any of this can be found in the deed.

To this original piece Van Buren subsequently added three others between 1843 and 1845, bringing the total acreage of Lindenwald to about 220. The first of these was acquired from Lambert and James Dingman and wife, Maria Dingman, by deed of July 25, 1843, and consisted of 28-9/40 acres "along the line of the orchard Lots of . . . Van Buren."<sup>4</sup> It was composed of two smaller lots, an "east lot" comprising 14 acres, 2 roods (quarter acres), and 18 square rods and a "west lot" comprising 13 acres, 2 roods, and 18 square rods.<sup>5</sup> For this piece Van Buren paid \$1,693.50 plus \$1.00 to Elizabeth Dingman to quit claim "all her rights and claims" to it. The next of these pieces was acquired from the same Lambert Dingman "and others" by deed of September 7, 1843, and comprised 12 acres, 3 roods, and 24 perches (square rods), for which he paid \$1,225.50.<sup>6</sup> This one was located west of the Old Post Road at the south corner of Van Buren's main property. The third and last of these purchases was acquired from Peter I. Hoes and wife and Lawrence Van Buren (the brother of Martin Van Buren) by deed of October 28, 1845, and comprised 43 acres, 1 rood, and 30 perches, for which he paid \$2,140.00.<sup>7</sup> These enlargements of the estate answered various purposes in developing an ideal holding, for the most part put to specific use. The first, however, appears to have given particular satisfaction because of a mystique it held for him in symbolizing a restoration of family

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4. Deed, Lambert, James, and Maria Dingman to Martin Van Buren, July 25, 1843, Columbia County Deed Book JJ, Folios 545-47.

5. "Field Notes of lot sold by Lambert Dingman and others to Martin Van Buren, May 20, 1843," in Collection of deeds and memoranda relating to "Lindenwald," the home of President Martin Van Buren, Columbia County Historical Society.

6. Deed, Lambert Dingman and others to Martin Van Buren, September 7, 1843, Columbia County Deed Book LL, Folios 90-91. There are 160 square rods to an acre and 40 to a rood.

7. Deed, Peter I. Hoes and wife and Lawrence Van Buren to Martin Van Buren, October 28, 1845, Columbia County Deed Book MM, Folios 46-47.

holdings. Writing to Joel R. Poinsett somewhat in advance of establishing ownership outright, but doubtless after having made payment and entered into a purchase contract, he exulted: "I have been so fortunate as to purchase a very valuable addition to my place, being the land between the orchard & the Creek, which you saw, & which I did not ever hope to obtain."<sup>8</sup> That the completed estate was a source of ever redeeming pride to him is evident in the signed note he penned a few years later upon receiving the original deeds adorned with the family name:

New York Feby 22<sup>d</sup> 1848 Mr. Charles W. Van Ness has this day placed in my hand the original deeds from the trustees and heirs of Peter Van Alstyne denoted to the late Peter Van Ness for the place now owned by me which I am to hold for the benefit of all concerned.<sup>9</sup>

With the expected date of occupying the premises full time still years away, Van Buren's first step in taking his new property in hand was to provide for its maintenance and continued operation. Though still on the campaign trail, he wrote from Niagara Falls not only about government business but to obtain help for the estate and data on improvements:

Mr. Meher has promised to furnish me with a good gardener whenever I want him. I wish him to send him to Kinderhook by the 20<sup>th</sup> of Sepr., to remain until December - I want him also to ascertain from Col Smith's (living near Saml. Harrison' Place) what the expense was of his brick wall on the North side of his Garden - viz how much a foot or a yard & what its thickness & height. Also whether a fence of equal height made of thick

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8. Martin Van Buren to Joel R. Poinsett, June 25, 1843, Joel R. Poinsett Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. There is reason to believe the purchase of the second piece although deeded on September 7, 1843, was effected the year before. Listed conspicuously among the payments made in 1842 is one of \$1,225 on August 1 to the "Evans' Estate." Funds and Disbursements for 1842, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

9. Van Ness Papers, Columbia County Historical Society.

perpendicular slabs well clapboarded so as to be perfectly air tight, would not answer the same purpose - it would, according to the estimate furnished me, be one third Cheaper.<sup>10</sup>

This long wall was built without delay, and served as a vital feature in his orchard and garden plans as well as a distinctive feature, that caught the eye of visitors. Van Buren spent four days looking over the place before leaving Kinderhook to take up his tour and returned for a fortnight in September before making his way back to Washington. He had already formed some definite ideas of what would be needed to make it a productive farm and the mansion suitable for his purposes.

In no time at all Van Buren had the farm back into operation. Two cows were bought for his account on September 27, 1839. During the early months of 1840, a John R. Harden supplied Timothy seed, clove[r] seed, salt, plaster of Paris, butter tubs, and buckwheat. In the fall, 16 flour barrels were added. Meanwhile a Thomas Mulligin, the gardener perhaps, drew pay for "works in the Garden of the President." His work assignments included the fish pond, rye field, and hothouse. He also worked on the fence of the "rying Ground."<sup>11</sup> A number of others were employed at Lindenwald these same months, aiding in the transformation of grounds and outbuildings. Significantly too, by January 1841, there were payments for hay and oats as well as two months' care of horses. A draft contract in Van Buren's hand also indicates that during this time he agreed with a Mr. Marquette for working the farm on shares. The division of produce took care of Van Buren handsomely.<sup>12</sup>

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10. Martin Van Buren to Levi Woodbury, September 1, 1839, Levi Woodbury Papers, Library of Congress. Woodbury replied on September 9 that the wall was a brick and a half thick, had a granite coping, and added that the "whole wall cost \$1,000 - Mr. Maher [sic] thinks, that a wooden one could be built at Kinderhook for \$400 which would answer as well, though not be so humble."

11. Account Book, April 16, 1840, Van Buren Papers, Columbia County Historical Society.

12. Draft contract with Mr. Marquette for working the farm upon shares, [1841], Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

Little in the sparse surviving materials of the period relate to the mansion proper. Those that do are particularly significant. Apparently, he had ordered the work to begin on the house in advance of his arrival in Kinderhook, for, as he wrote to Andrew Jackson around May 15:

You will see by the enclosed [apparently account from newspapers] I have at last got home. My health has never been better, nor my spirits either. I found the improvements I had directed on my place in great forwardness, & hope to get into it by the 1st of June.<sup>13</sup>

In part these "improvements" involved redecorating, but at least one of them entailed extensive remodeling: the redesign of the main hallway of the first and second floor to remove the staircase and open both chambers for functions requiring oversized chambers. Such a move is comprehensible in terms of Van Buren's stature and societal anticipations, though achieved only at a price. A smaller and less graceful stairway was partitioned off from an adjoining chamber. Although specific reference was not made to this undertaking, a strong circumstantial case can be made for its having occurred at this time. This was the only time before 1849 that the mansion was worked on for one thing. The other circumstance had to do with arrangements for wallpapering the rooms. While in New York City, Van Buren had dropped by a firm of that line, Pears and Faye, in the company of Butler's wife, Harriet, to consider what patterns might be used to advantage at Lindenwald. While there he gave consideration to the first floor hallway. After selecting one pattern, he changed his mind in favor of something much more showy and fashionable. This was the 1831 *paysage à chasse* (landscape of the hunt) pattern, set off by a wallpaper balustrade, designed by Deltil, and manufactured in that year by the Alsatian firm of Jean Zuber. This design could only be installed after removal of the staircase, as it covered both long walls of the hallway. This celebrated design is still there.

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13. Martin Van Buren to Andrew Jackson, [May 15, 1841], Levi Woodbury Papers, Library of Congress.

The above is a reconstruction implicit in an exchange between Mrs. Butler and the former President while the last hectic work progressed. He wrote first, on or about May 15:

Will you have the goodness to select the paper for me mentioned in the enclosed memorandum of Messrs. P. & F. Man. You will see by this memorandum the reason for haste. After you have made the selections messrs. P. & F. will, with the advice of my friend William [Butler] Find the first speedy conveyance to Stuyvesant so that I may have the paper at the earliest practicable moment write me by mail that I may send down for it. I have numbered Mr. Thurston's memorandum - & can only make the following suggestions. For the rest you must decide for yourself.

- No. 1. This is for the hall upstairs including the temporary Bed Room at the end of it. Let the paper be neat but not expensive Something like that we first selected for the lower Hall might do.
- No. 2. This is to be the best Bed Room & is downstairs. Paper should be good.
- No. 3. Let this be of the same kind with that which was sent for the dining Room, yellow with gold &c.
- No. 4. Martin's Bed Room - neat but cheap.
- No. 5. Bed Room upstairs - may be a little more expensive.
- No. 6. Messrs. P. & F. will know.

The memorandum contain a general remark which is founded on Roughness of the Walls & will be understood by P. & F. - <sup>14</sup>

Equal to the occasion in every respect, Mrs. Butler had a reply ready by May 17:

I received your commissions late on Saturday Evening & this morn<sup>g</sup> took a carriage & hastened to execute them - I sent up or requested the young man who waited on me to do so, two kinds of paper for the lower bedroom - one at \$1 for a piece the other 10/ that at a dollar, one of the firm thought would be the best & said he would stand between me and harm - That for Martin's room 5/ is Miss Butler's choice & she did not shrink from the responsibility - There is certainly nothing exciting in the colors & to an invalid it will be rather quieting to the nerves - The Hall paper you will observe is an old favorite of mine - The paper for the upper bedroom, Harriet Said she would have an eye to her own comfort as she might occasionally be an occupant of the room. We looked at a large number of the fine papers & they will be sent up for you to make your selections - The borderings for the fine bo ds [sic] you will take like the borderings on the rooms for which they are intended. There was no pattern among them that would match very well with the drawing room paper - there was one gold one which I thought might answer for the dining room - They reiterated [sic] their promise to send it all up by the Superior this P. M. and I reiterated [sic] my desire that it should be - Mr William Butler presented himself at our house just as I was preparing to go out - I did not see him - I mention it that you may know

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14. Martin Van Buren to Harriet Butler, [May 15, 1841], The Joseph Downs Manuscript and Microfilm Collection, The Henry Francis duPont Winterthur Museum.

of his safe arrival. How very neat all your rooms will look with all this new & beautiful paper upon them - 15

The selections were certainly made along the lines suggested by the above, for the matter did not come up again. Bed linens and floor coverings also became Harriet Butler's province and she was only too glad to oblige. A second feature of the remodeling emerges from her exchange with Van Buren as well as a third, not to be found in the house; as well as a few flourishes commendatory of his decision to retire to the country rather than the city:

. . . I am glad to hear from Smith that your store room is made. It will need a good lock & the key always in the hands of a trusty person - Then you will find it a very good plan to have purchased on a magnificent scale. . . . Your poultry-yard is really in a growing condition - you ought to be grateful to Providence for casting your lot at this dusty, dry hot time amid green fields and fish Ponds & creeks - We are parched and covered with dust - and longing to fly to the country - but our lot is cast here amid omnibuses, cabs & carts - and instead of morning carol of birds - sheep etc, charcoal etc, with an occasional scream of radishes is the only morning music we hear. . . . 16

It may well have been at this time that the rear wings (which were demolished to make room for the 1850 addition) were added for kitchens and the gatehouses built at the entrances, although there is no documentation bearing on either from this period. From Mrs. Butler's freely-expressed letters also comes a sense of the process by which Van

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15. Harriet Butler to Martin Van Buren, May 17, 1841, Van Buren Papers, Columbia County Historical Society.

16. Louise Hardenbrook, "Letter to Martin Van Buren," The Bulletin (Columbia County Historical Society), July 1938, pp. 16-17.

Buren, with many valuables from his years in high office as well as many items of furnishings to be displayed, adjusted to an establishment of quite a different style than the White House. In adapting Lindenwald to his needs, many minor alterations were to be expected, time-consuming and often unexpected. The result was that his hopes as expressed to Jackson of moving in by June 1st, fell short by more than a month of his actual date of occupancy. Not only had he to settle members of the family who accompanied him but servants as well. They would have to put the household into an operational state before he took actual possession. The heats of summer were upon them before he slept his first night in the sleigh bed at Lindenwald.

Moving day passed without special notice getting into print or correspondence. All the principals were probably too exhausted to serve notice. For the first time the estate's new title appears in letter headings on July 12. The troublesome problem of making their choice apparently was solved at the last moment, for, as Smith Thompson wrote to Governor William March on the 21st: "I don't know whether you will be able to recognize the place by its new name, but you will understand that it is the retreat of a certain Ex-P. and a charming retreat it is too - infinitely preferable, I should say, with its shade and breezes, its quiet and its independence, to the White House, or the dusty metropolis in which you are luxuriating."<sup>17</sup> Obviously, the name had not come up before. Writing to March himself two days later, Van Buren admitted that the dearth of news from Kinderhook was owing to what he referred to as "the extreme pressure of my avocations."<sup>18</sup> But a day later, he appears at his expansive best, proud of his achievements:

. . . my success in improving my place has far exceeded my most sanguine anticipations. The expenses, owing to the extent

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17. Smith T. Van Buren to William March, July 2, 1841, Manuscript Collection, Morristown National Historical Park.

18. Martin Van Buren to William March, July 23, 1841, ibid.

of the place, the size of the House etc, and the length of time it has been substantially unoccupied, have, it is true been great, but . . . they have not been in vain. Everybody that visits me appears to be astonished at the change. . . . Nothing but the House & the trees are where they were. . . . The garden upon which vast sums were in former times expended, was, when I bought the place (two years ago) a corn field with only here and there a poor tree. I have confessedly had, this season, the first cabbage, the first potatoes, Beets . . . and as early Beans, Corn, & Peas as have been grown in this neighborhood of flourishing farmers, and splendid farms. In the first articles I was nearly two weeks ahead of all my neighbors, including the village in which there are several gentlemen whose ambition is in that way directed. Add to this several Breakfasts upon fish taken from a Pond made by myself from Springs, & you will not think . . . <sup>19</sup>

And because of the extensive work going on about the grounds, he was not yet finished. Writing again to Jackson on the 30th of the month, he reveals the nature of these last "improvements":

I have been extremely busy all summer getting my place in order, & have nearly succeeded. The carpenters are however yet on the grounds, making s[t]ables, wood houses, etc. Barring the pressure upon my purse, the[e] occupation has been pleasant enough & any body that sees it says that I have made one of the finest places in the State.<sup>20</sup>

Though he despaired of hosting the ailing former President, he found his cup overflowing with family now of two generations: "John has taken to

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19. Martin Van Buren to Levi Woodbury, The Francis P. Blair Family Papers, Library of Congress.

20. Martin Van Buren to Andrew Jackson, July 30, 1841, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

himself a wife, & with a joyous wedding party have been spending two weeks with me in great glee. The Major [son Abraham] & his wife are now on their way in perfect health bringing with them a grand-son of about six weeks age."<sup>21</sup>

Expensive as these additions to the supporting structures were and as depressing to Van Buren's funds, they were to continue to another year and beyond. But the effect was indeed what he reported to intimate correspondents. As described by a newspaper correspondent in September 1841, the same points were emphasized:

The other day, I was led by curiosity to visit Kinderhook which I had never seen before. It is one of the pleasantest villages I know, situated amid a country of swelling uplands and fresh meadows that skirt the winding streams. . . .

About two miles south of the village is the dwelling of the ex-President Van Buren. It is a plain, substantial, commodious house, built in the year 1797, of the best materials, and with more regard to comfort than show, by General Van Ness, father of a late mayor of Washington. It stands at a little distance from the road, in the midst of grounds planted with trees and shrubbery. Mr. Van Buren's farm consists of one hundred and thirty-seven acres, part of which lies in forest, and some portion is the rich, moist meadow of Kinderhook River.

Here Mr. Van Buren employs himself in the cultivation of his newly purchased estates, which, before he came into the possession of them, were much neglected. There was a garden to be made, for the fine old garden of General Van Ness had gone to decay; there were fences to be set up, and paths to be laid out, and decayed fruit trees to be replaced; there were

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21. Ibid.

shade trees which had grown up in wild luxuriance to be cleared away, and meadow lands overgrown with dwarf adders to be reclaimed.

Thus far the state of the farm does credit to his skillful administration. A large garden has been laid out, with a green house, and a long wall for espaliers and for the protection of fruit trees, a copious spring has been made to supply a succession of fish ponds, and the process of making into good meadows the moist lands covered with useless bushes, is going on with great activity. I remember that the Evening Post said something not long since about Mr. Van Buren's cabbages, but I looked for them in vain; they were early cabbages, the earliest and finest in the whole country, but they went to the kitchen long ago. I saw a great variety of young pear trees, ordered from Hamburg eight weeks before, and now in the ground, healthy and flourishing; they were of those fine kinds lately introduced by the improvers of the pear, who are making it the most delicious of all table fruits, and a table fruit of all seasons.

The ex-President begins the day with a ride of ten or fifteen miles on horseback; after breakfast he is engaged with workmen till he is tired, and then betakes himself to the library, which he is constantly enlarging.<sup>22</sup>

This sympathetic pen sketch obviously inspired by Van Buren's conversation, follows in its essentials the line taken in his correspondence and is revealing in specific references to treatment of the grounds. Its slight reference to the house itself, indicates again where most of the time and money were being spent. Not until Van Buren's return to the

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22. Reprinted in Washington Globe, November 19, 1841, from an earlier printing in the New York Commercial Advertiser.

soil was complete did he give more consideration to the "plain, substantial, commodious house."

In continuing this work through 1842, Van Buren paid additional wages to tradesmen and laborers. For the first time in his accounts there crops up the name of Barent Van Slyck, a carpenter who later figured prominently in the remodeling of the house.<sup>23</sup> Two entries cover general expenses for such work as was still underway. The first in the amount of \$200 paid for "Improvements & furniture" while the second in the same amount paid for "Wages on Farm & Garden over & above what farm Garden & orchard pay." The latter entry is explained further in a letter of July 30th to Andrew Jackson, in which he confided: "I find my farm in excellent condition, crops . . . promising. I hope to sell enough of it to pay the Workmen in the Gardens, & on the farm which is my ultimatum."<sup>24</sup> An estimate of expenses for the period from May 1, 1842, through the end of the year, though concerned for the most part with sundries, does list oxen, seed rye, flower pots, servants' wages, and carpets and curtains.<sup>25</sup>

As 1842 neared its end, Van Buren looked back with satisfaction on the achievements of four seasons:

. . . My interest in farming increases daily, & I hope will continue to do so. How many of the Whigs would believe me, if I were to tell them that the Subject occupies my attention infinitely more than the Presidential Election? We are all in excellent health and spirits . . . I have deferred our visit to N. York until the last of July. I have to spend a month at

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23. Funds and Disbursements for 1842, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

24. Martin Van Buren to Andrew Jackson, July 30, 1842, ibid.

25. "Probable Expenses from 1st May 1842 to 1st Jan 1843," ibid.

Albany with Smith who has gone to House Keeping [recently married in that city]. We have more over succeeded in making Lindenwald so comfortable, that we are loath to leave it.<sup>26</sup>

With the addition of the second of his three extra land parcels in 1843, the one that took him to the banks of the local creek, Van Buren entered yet another stage of "improvements." His Philadelphia correspondent, Henry L. Gilpin, formerly Attorney General in his administration, who by that time had visited Lindenwald, echoed Van Buren's delight with the purchase and his plans for it:

. . . I hope you do not intend to change your plan of keeping your farm principally in a meadow - the sweep of meadow down to the creek, bordered by the woods and the hills beyond, is so beautiful that I would not, if I were you, put either fences or corn fields in the range.<sup>27</sup>

But this play on Van Buren's sensibilities did not prevent adding structures where they were deemed necessary:

. . . I have built me what I call a beautiful cottage (for my foreman) on the brow of the Hill, & a large Hay Barn in the

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26. "I send you a control from Citizen Bonnies, but am ashamed to say that I have not yet made the experiment myself. My gardener, who was charged with it was so busy that he got no further than to dig his hole, collect the Straw & gather his water, when the ice came & put an end to all further operation. Early in the Spring if I live I shall test the matter fully, which I have no doubt Col. Singleton has already done." Martin Van Buren to Joel R. Poinsett, December 13, 1842, Manuscript Collection, Morristown National Historical Park.

27. ". . . You should get a book lately published called Liebig's Agricultural Chemistry [Chemistry in its Application to Agriculture . . . 1842] which contains some curious and interesting researches on the subject of which it treats." Henry D. Gilpin to Martin Van Buren, n.d., Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

Meadows since you were here, & am as busy as a bee in finishing off my improvements. That done & I will mature my plans for that life of quiet contentment for which I have so long looked in vain, & the opportunity to enjoy which has now been so suddenly, & I cannot but think fortunately, thrust upon me. . . .<sup>28</sup>

For three years past, Van Buren had looked very much like a presidential candidate. He specifically denied ruling out another campaign, but made it clear that he would not actively seek the nomination. He maintained, nonetheless, a high profile, rebuilding Lindenwald's farming potentiality for all to see, touring the western states, visiting Henry Clay at Ashland, and holding an 1842 reunion with Andrew Jackson at the Hermitage. He also took stands publicly on issues of the day. He warned that annexation of Texas would mean war with Mexico, while expressing a willingness to abide by the will of the electorate in that matter. Outmaneuvered in 1844 by the expansionists when the Baltimore convention adopted the two-thirds rule, he withdrew his candidacy to promote harmony, settling for a platform of his own choosing. Thus, in mid-1844, for the first time he faced a future having no definite future prospect of public service. No longer the Democratic Party's standard bearer, he, nevertheless, felt as keenly as ever about issues involving principle and policy.

Not anticipating that there would be yet one more presidential canvas before complete retirement from the political scene, Van Buren plunged again into his intensive farming activity. His accounts for 1844-45 record not only payments to Hoes and Dingman "for Land," but purchase of another cow as well as "Ducks and Fowls."<sup>29</sup> He had by now broadened

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28. Martin Van Buren to James S. Wadsworth, June 8, 1844, Papers of the Wadsworth Family, Library of Congress.

29. "Expenses and Disbursements from the 1st April [18] 45 Extraordinary," Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

his purview and become involved with viniculture. Writing to another enthusiast, former Senator John M. Niles, publisher of the Hartford Times, in 1843, he reported:

. . . I am about planting an additional number of grape cuttings & will be happy to receive the fruits of your experience upon the subject generally with such instructions as [may be] . . . suggested. I planted in the hot House only foreign vines I had had last year the finest grapes I ever tasted. The vines do not look quite so promising this year . . . Those I propose to plant none will be Isabellas & [undecif.] & they will be placed in the open air. My green House has not [been] well attended during the winter, but I have now a first rate Gardner [sic], I hope. . . .<sup>30</sup>

His successes apparently continued. Some years later he was being solicited for vine cuttings.<sup>31</sup> Van Buren took great pride in the quality of potatoes grown at Kinderhook, and a part of his considerable correspondence with Francis P. Blair is taken up with arrangements for getting seeding stock to him for his farm in Maryland:

. . . I send to day to the Vessel three Barrels of Potatoes to your direction . . . You must not be alarmed about their size. The small ones are always kept for seed & are in every respect as good as larger. You will not be disappointed in their quality for they require a long season . . . They are preferred in the N York Market . . . by a Shilling or two a bushel.<sup>32</sup>

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30. Martin Van Buren to John M. Niles, April 16, 1843, John M. Niles Papers, Connecticut Historical Society.

31. Martin Van Buren to Gouverneur Kemble, April 23, 1847, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

32. Martin Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, March 27, 1846, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress. "I shall have reason to [be] proud when I can exhibit my best stock of cows and horses as derived from old Hickory & the best vegetable products of my farm from you. . . ." Francis P.

At another time he corresponded on the subject of acquiring and planting Osage orange seeds; and a supply was sent to him.<sup>33</sup> The correspondence is also peppered with exchanges on the subject of fruit trees, a particular preoccupation of Van Buren's that never faded throughout his long proprietorship of Lindenwald. On occasion he supplied earnest petitioners with pear, plum, and other fruit trees with missionary zeal for their reputation.<sup>34</sup> By 1846, he was again expanding his plant in a series of projects that carried into 1847:

. . . The extent of my engagements last fall in making improvements, & their repetition upon a still larger Scale this season, added to the personal cares of taking the personal direction of my farming affairs instead of working upon those as have altogether made me so much a man of business as to induce some apprehension that I may also fall from grace. But I am determined to resist the common mansavarice, to the uttermost.<sup>35</sup>

All this work did not involve only farm buildings, enclosures, draining, cold frames, and the like. Writing to Gorham A. Worth at New York City on November 6th, he playfully confessed to the installation of a bathing facility:

It was ungrateful in me not to acknowledge promptly your kind & early attention to my interest affair. . . .When you visit me again you shall wash off the impurities of Mammon in the Bath

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32. (Cont.) Blair to Martin Van Buren, n.d., ibid.

33. Ibid., April 22, 1848.

34. S. D. Bradford to Martin Van Buren, April 22, 1848; George H. Martin to Martin Van Buren, December 11, 1843; William H. Haywood to Martin Van Buren, March 11, May 30, 1849; ibid.

35. Martin Van Buren to Gouverneur Kemble, June 2, 1847, ibid.

which has been put up in part with the interest you have  
[been] so kind as to collect for me. . . .<sup>36</sup>

This new set of "improvements" was expensive, a fact from whence Van Buren had a certain sense of pride, judging from his sly references to them when corresponding with intimates: "If I were to tell you half the improvements I have made since you were here & am still engaged upon it would make you stare. Paulding says I am stark mad & will soon be Bankrupt!"<sup>37</sup> Yet the following May, the work was proceeding full speed, with Van Buren in the middle of it. To Worth again that month he wrote: ". . . it has been my intention to drop you a line as soon as I get through with my Painters, Carpenters, Masons & Ditchers of each of which class of Worthies I have a small host & will have for a month or two more & then I shall be proud to show you what I have done."<sup>38</sup> Ten days later, he became more specific though still coy with his broker: "I counted yesterday the number of people - painters, carpenters, Masons Farmers & ditchers &c I had in employ and found them to reach the enormous number of twenty Six, one fifth of which were of the last, and most useful denomination."<sup>39</sup>

By this time he had run the course as far as developing the estate went. Never again was he to commit so much of his time and money to pursuits of this description. The results obviously satisfied even so unquenchable a thirst for betterment as Van Buren's:

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36. Martin Van Buren to Gorham A. Worth, November 6, 1846, *ibid.*

37. Martin Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, November 18, 1846, The Francis P. Blair Family Papers, Library of Congress.

38. Martin Van Buren to Gorham A. Worth, May 23, 1847, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

39. *Ibid.*, June 3, 1847.

My farm contains only 225 acres & I have under the plough 82 acres viz 30 in Rye (we sow no wheat here) 20 Corn 28 oats & 4 potatoes - 24 in fine clover for pasture and 85 in fine Timothy & a few acres of Cover for Cutting. If you want to know how they all look come & see. I say nothing of my garden & nursery & orchards, but [what] will you say to 15500 young apple trees & 200 young pear trees for sale.<sup>40</sup>

Practically none of this extensive construction work went into the house. It contributed prettily to the fitting image of a free soiler, which even as he wrote this Van Buren was becoming. John B. Van Buren, the President's oldest son, had kept the flame alight following the disappointment of 1844, and the expectations of Van Buren's legion of adherents in the Democratic Party's Barnburner faction as well as the party at large and the electorate beyond. Nominated by the Free Soil Party with Charles Francis Adams as his running mate, he lacked the party organization equal to the task of winning the election, and having few illusions about the outcome, allowed campaigning to be done by his son John. His tally did split the party vote and deny the presidency to Cass, the Democratic nominee. In his last hurrah, Van Buren had played the spoiler.

Now nothing stood between Van Buren and his devoutly desired retirement--final and irrevocable. Sixty-six years of age, in robust health, and full of plans for perfecting his farming operation, writing his memoirs and political testament, as well as enjoying a leisurely social and family life, he looked to the future with confidence. John, the politician, and Abraham, the soldier, would visit from time to time. The latter's wife, Angelica, formerly his White House hostess, and her family would continue to spend the summer with him. His youngest son, Martin, sickly

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40. To which he added plaintively, "I have no time to [proof] read this." Martin Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, June 22, 1848, *ibid.* This letter is also found in the Francis P. Blair Family Papers, Library of Congress.

and as a consequence destined never to make his way in the world, would continue to live at Lindenwald. But Van Buren wanted someone to share the farm operation with him, and in time succeed him. Smith Thompson Van Buren, the third son, had yet to strike his stride in life, and was thus free of other responsibilities. He had married the daughter of a wealthy Albany businessman, who could be expected to find Lindenwald convenient enough. Van Buren had become concerned over Smith's future and was at pains to see him engaged in something worthwhile. And Smith was prepared to make himself available subject to certain conditions.

IV. Richard Upjohn, The "Great Architectural Oracle," and Lindenwald

Van Buren broke the news to his closest correspondent, Francis Preston Blair, early in 1849. All manner of turmoil was about to break loose again at Lindenwald. He had been happy with things as they were, but there were other considerations that had changed their complexion. Smith Thompson Van Buren was coming to live with him and had to be provided for:

. . . Dont think me deranged when I say to you that my quiet & as was generally supposed my perfect or at least comfortable establishment is to be turned topsy turvey, & the music of its feathered visitors drowned in the harsh sounds of the ax, the saw, & the trowel - this is poetry for you. Still such is the prospect of things. I have for years been trying to stir up Smith to an exertion of his talents, which are of a very high order, but which have unhappily been smothered by too much wealth. He has at last become disgusted with the vices of idleness & City life & a short time since very unexpectedly announced to me that if it comported with my views to constitute him the heir apparent of Lindenwald (the possibility of which I had once intimated to him) he would come at once, dabble enough in the profession to afford opportunities for public speaking and go at once & permanently into the rough and tumble of life. My sons all cordially concur in the arrangement & it is concluded. His wife has seconded all my efforts & is a very perfect little lady. . . . Smith made it an indispensable condition that he should be permitted to add sufficient to my House to make as many rooms as he may want without entering upon what I now have. I at first rejected this as impracticable without detriment to the appearance of the old House. But he & his wife have been to New York to consult the great architectural oracle (Mr Upjohn) and as I anticipate the response (which I have not read) will be that to accomplish the object satisfactorily radical changes will become necessary - such as taking down the present stable wings & erecting Towers in their places - the addition of Dormant [sic] Windows

& God knows all what. So you see we are to have a bustling summer of it.<sup>1</sup>

This announcement leaves little doubt as to the author of the changes that transformed Van Buren's comfortable and well-loved abode into the house of today. That the building takes the form, pattern of circulation, location of entrances, hallways, staircases, and location and numbers of rooms was owing to Smith Thompson Van Buren's insistence and his father's condescension; on the demand for privacy and space equal to the younger man's tastes and desires. Far from a manifestation to some latter-day awakening of Van Buren's aesthetic senses, it reflects his third son's coming, as a man of fashionable concerns and awareness, of the latest architectural movements to affect America. And this awareness sent him to the office of one of the high priests of Gothic Revival architecture, Richard Upjohn. In playing Iago in this small domestic drama, Smith went far beyond the demands of privacy and space to imprint a new style onto the consistently Federal period Van Ness house, insuring removal, along the way, of a distinctive feature of the original composition - the stable wings that perhaps had sheltered the Van Ness' thoroughbreds in their day, and even then probably contained Van Buren's famous English coach, high-fronted sleigh, and buffalo robe. Extensive as the changes were to be, they were not intended to disguise the essential characteristics of the old house but rather to enhance them with easily digested but stylish touches. The additions would be tacked on in such a way as to leave the facade recognizable, or at least identifiable. Changes sacrificing older structures would be confined to the rear mews, where constructive alteration would be welcome.

Blair's reply was predictably enthusiastic:

. . . I rejoice very much in Smith's movement - That a man of his genius should be dormant upon money bags, having such motives to inspire his ambition in his fathers history, seemed to

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1. Martin Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, March 5, 1849, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

me impossible - I always looked forward to a time when he would take the field and make it appear that you had two Percy's in the fight for the receiver of the family in the next generation. He wants nothing to assure his success, but not to be too chary of his reputation - His repute for talents makes him afraid to display himself but he may disappoint expectation. . . . The only thing that seems disagreeable to you in this heir apparent invasion of Lindenwald, is an additional recommendation to me - It is a capital improvement to the place to cover up the flatness of old Peter Van Ness's domicile under presiding towers, if they can be added with architectural appropriateness - The towers will be in fine keeping with the pines and if the roof of the old house can be pointed sufficiently with Dormant [sic] windows to blend well with the new elevations, I cannot perceive why the Castle of Lindenwald may not in some generations become worthy of the Romantic Legend which has already made it the scene of preternatural power. But while all the sawing stonecutting & axing and other vulgar everyday business is going on I think it would be decorous for the Magician to quit the scene and . . . [visit Silver Spring]. I wish to be plain spoken & beg that you and Martin would leave Smith & his babel tower to confound one another & come [to visit. ]. . .<sup>2</sup>

Rumor carried the word to Gilpin in Philadelphia even before Blair replied to Van Buren:

. . . We heard that . . . Mr. Van Buren had been masculated by you so completely that . . . [he is] going to leave Albany and learn the philosophy of farming in the school of Lindenwald so as to be prepared to establish at no distant day an American

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2. Francis P. Blair to Martin Van Buren, March 30, 1849, ibid.

"Holkham" for . . . [himself]. Is this so? I hope so for . . . [his] sake - and yours too. If it is, I think I shall plot with Mr. Van Buren to effect my scheme of the summers lease on the brow of the hill, looking over the meadow; which you promised but relinquished for the more solid improvements; that, and the walk round it through the orchard I shall claim as my suggestions.<sup>3</sup>

Sometime between the March 5th letter to Blair and April 9th, Upjohn visited Lindenwald for the first time, and decisions were made on the extent and scheduling of the work. On the latter date, Van Buren confided to his New York banker his hopes and doubts about the dubious venture, and mused about the meaning of it all:

. . . We are to undergo a great Revolution here. Desirous of making more effective provision than old Peter [Van Ness] did for keeping Lindenwald in my family (. . . to secure good treatment to my plants & trees, for which, being the result of my own labours, I feel a strong attachment), I have undertaken to select its future owner whilst I am in full life and health. I have therefore assured Smith that if he and his Wife will come and live with me, & make Kinderhook their permanent Residence, he shall have Lindenwald at my death, & to amuse myself with the changes which he would be sure to make when I was no more I have agreed that he may go to Work now as far

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3. Holkham Hall, Norfolk, England, was built between 1731 and 1764 for Thomas Coke, Lord Lovell, later created Earl of Leicester, and has been termed a product of "Burlington's obsession with Roman grandeur." It has also been termed a "neo-Palladian reaction to Blenheim," the great pile given by a grateful nation to Marlborough. Huge, and featuring a great hall in the Palladian manner, the original Wilton Tower, and "lowered villa-like flanks," it caused Hussey to state, "There is no grander architectural prospect in England." Henry D. Gilpin to Martin Van Buren, March 28, 1849, ibid.

only as it relates to the buildings. He has therefore had the architectural oracle Upjohn here, and the works of demolition & substitution are to commence in a few days. What curious creatures we are. Old Mr. Van Ness built as fine an House here as any reasonable man could, . . . its taste of what as then . . . deemed the best. William P. came and disfigured every thing his father had done. I succeeded him, & pulled down without a single exception every erection he had made, 7 with evident advantage. Now comes Smith & pulls down many things I had put up and makes alterations without stint. The four operations will cost nearer fifty than forty thousand dollars for the buildings alone. What non-sense.<sup>4</sup>

In and between the lines of these musings are references to things past that, if not flights of fancy or included for rhetorical effect, bear on earlier emendations, followed by others quite as extensive by Van Buren himself, that require closer examination. Also his apparent need to find consolation in one aspect or another of the bargain struck with Smith - whether it be in the expected preview of things to come or those limitations that restrict the changes to the house and leave his prized gardens and associated structures alone - make apparent the element of rationalization in the communication.

The same considerations apply to a second letter, written to Blair the same day, while his mood of moment still prevailed. He had been considering visiting the Blairs, seemingly to get away from the imminent hubbub, but could not get himself to leave at that particular time:

. . . Smith has been here with the great man Upjohn and the latter is now making out his plans & drawing, when finished the work of demolition & substitutions are to commence. I was

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4. Martin Van Buren to Gorham A. Worth, April 9, 1849, ibid.

perfectly satisfied with things as they were & am equally so with what is proposed. The idea of seeing in life, the changes which my heir would be sure to make after I am gone, amuses me. It is certainly not a little creditable to [the] Boys, who Mrs. Butler once said, had brought themselves up well, that I should have no difficulty in making so important a disposition of my property in my life time. They are all united in favor of its propriety.<sup>5</sup>

Besides, there were many things to be done about the estate, that called for his attention:

. . . Our weather is extremely fine but I have not yet started the plants which in your Climate will appear tardy. But here it is not. My last years crop showed a necessity for more Barn Room & my men are helping to get out the Timber. In a day or two the Plough will move.<sup>6</sup>

Despite Van Buren's misgivings over the treatment to be accorded the house, he summoned up an air of good grace, even injecting a note of humor into the proceedings. To a prospective visitor in mid-April he suggested: "come up on Saturday next & see the old House before the work of destruction commences."<sup>7</sup> He could afford to be lighthearted, in one sense, as the considerable expense to be borne would not be his worry. As intimated in his letter to Blair ("he should be permitted to add . . . to my House"), Smith would pay the bills. As Van Buren was to confide further to Blair at a later date, ". . . As this is Smith's first

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5. Martin Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, April 9, 1849, The Francis P. Blair Family Papers, Library of Congress.

6. Ibid.

7. Martin Van Buren to Gorham A. Worth, April 15, 1849, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

great venture in this line it will be a good lesson to him and that is the principal importance attached to the circumstance of expense as his means are abundant."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, throughout the undertaking Smith took matters firmly in hand, dealing personally and at length with the architect, and being prepared to see it through.

When Smith contracted Richard Upjohn early in 1849, the great architect was riding a wave of popularity resulting from the first great successes of his career. From a start with Greek Revival villas around Boston in the 1830s, he moved on to the Gothic mode. By 1846, he had scored a triumph with New York City's new Trinity Church. Sudden fame brought him commissions for houses, public buildings, commercial buildings, and a great many more churches. While gathering these in, he began to work in Italian Renaissance style as well. Both influences were to be incorporated into Lindenwald.<sup>9</sup>

By late April earlier anticipations of drastic changes stood confirmed. Smith visited Upjohn's offices again during the third week of that month to see how the design was coming along, and in all probability to coordinate the demolition process with the construction to follow.<sup>10</sup> None of the plans and drawings had as yet been delivered to the site, nor were they to be for six weeks. Relying only on what had been related to him or sketches seen during Upjohn's visit, Van Buren assured his friend Worth that during his next visit, he would find the "place greatly altered & I hope somewhat improved." He added, resignedly: ". . . The old house, though associated with many pleasant recollections had ceased to be comfortable & . . . [we] owed it to the ladies to make

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8. Martin Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, December 12, 1849, The Francis P. Blair Family Papers, Library of Congress.

9. Dictionary of American Biography (New York, 1934), XIX, 125, and Wayne Andrews, American Gothic: Its Origins, Its Trials, Its Triumphs (New York, 1975), p. 63.

10. Smith T. Van Buren to Richard Upjohn, April 13, 1849, Richard and Richard M. Upjohn Papers, New York Public Library.

the change."<sup>11</sup> To Charles Sumner he complained: "I shall be driven from my House for a few months by Carpenters & Masons."<sup>12</sup> In fact, he did make arrangements to get out of their range: "I had hired a House in the Village for the summer and fall, but when the hour of removal arrived Martin & I flinched & decided to remain."<sup>13</sup> In spite of the inconvenience, it was planting time and agricultural operations had to go on: "I am head over heels in farming concerns & have pretty much made up my mind to spend the rest of my days exclusively in the country."<sup>14</sup>

From his close friends came a chorus of encouragement to strengthen his rationale. From Gilpin came an impish note:

. . . let me tell you how glad I was to learn . . . that Smith and his wife are going to join you at Lindenwald. . . . Their consideration too in not taking possession of your rooms so as to exclude certain annual visitors who expect free quarters is a new mark of their prudent consideration for which my wife and myself will give them our particular thanks.<sup>15</sup>

Blair reinforced his earlier sentiments, concentrating his particular attention on Smith's new-found ambition to enter politics, with Kinderhook his home base, as it had been his father's many years before:

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11. Martin Van Buren to Gorham A. Worth, May 17, 1849, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

12. Martin Van Buren to Charles Sumner, May 24, 1849, Sumner Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

13. Martin Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, June 16, 1849, The Francis P. Blair Family Papers, Library of Congress.

14. Martin Van Buren to Gorham A. Worth, May 17, 1849, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

15. Henry D. Gilpin to Martin Van Buren, June 13, 1849, ibid. "I hear that you are remodelling your house and that Smith is to live with you which I should consider a good arrangement for all parties." Azariah C. Flagg to Martin Van Buren, July 9, 1849, ibid.

. . . I should like to hear how your Turrets rise and whether Smith & his wife still feel that they can relinquish the . . . Noise of Albany for the quiet of Lindenwald and whether the humor holds of embarking as you did in the Forum of Hudson. Smith I reckon will have no such keen fellow as Williams to encounter & certainly none of the fiendish rancor with which federation assailed your debut in the world - but this will be all the worse of Smith, who only wants a struggle to show his strength - . . . <sup>16</sup>

Smith was, in fact, to get all the struggle he could want just getting the alterations to the house done, as will be seen.

On May 30, 1849, the first set of plans and drawings left Richard Upjohn's office and started up the Hudson River in the care of one Barney McGuire, a mason from New York City, selected to do the foundations, walls, chimneys, and all associated masonry of the alterations. Carefully recorded in the firm's "Plan Book," a log of all drawings sent out from Upjohn's office between July 6, 1846, and April 20, 1854, are the dates and brief inventory of all such removals relating to Lindenwald during the period of construction in 1849 and 1850. In this instance, perhaps owing to the considerable number of drawings involved, even the courier was noted.<sup>17</sup> These entries are reproduced in their entirety as an appendix of this report. They are revealing of the extent of the alteration in particular instances, though most of Upjohn's work is readily identifiable upon examination. The plans and drawings themselves, with the exception of Upjohn's watercolor perspective drawing, have disappeared. In summary, this first set included four floor plans, four elevation drawings, and working drawings (plan,

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16. Francis P. Blair to Martin Van Buren, July 20, 1849, ibid.

17. Manuscript, Richard Upjohn "Plan Book," Avery Library, Columbia University.

elevation, or sections), some full size, of 29 features or combinations of features. Included among them, in order of occurrence were the house's ash pit, tower stairs to attic, flues, skylight, dormer windows, second-story bay window, bedroom's double window, small tower windows, library's bay window, return of cornice, library's single windows, east and west gable windows, all chimneys, back porch, inside door, north entrance door, tower cornice moldings, "new building" cornice, hall cornices, nursery cornices, bedroom cornices, bathroom cornices, dormer window details, second-story bay window details, skylight window details, details of addition's room jambs, sills, base and architrave, window cap and bracket, back porch details, and north door. These cover effectually all functioning units of the house's rear addition. It was to provide for Smith Thompson and Ellen Van Buren and their children a separate entrance and skylighted hall off which communicated a bedroom, nursery, and bath. At the end opposite the entrance door, a smaller hallway led to the tower stairway. Beyond this chamber was a library addition, accessible both to Smith's addition and his father's preserve in the main house. A chamber behind it probably was built as what later was referred to as the "billiard room." The entire one-story addition had basement chambers corresponding to the ones on the floor above, but not touched upon directly in these drawings.

This first set of plans and drawings was followed on July 25, 1849, by a plan for the "hall stairway and Bracket to support architrave," on August 10, 1849; by a plan for the library door and the jamb of the tower "doors," on October 19, 1849; by a "Plan of door" (to the breakfast room, as it turns out), on November 13, 1849; by drawings of the tower stair's newel, baluster, and bracket, on January 7, 1850; and by a "Plan for Bath Case" and plans and elevations for the front porch, on July 22, 1850. All but two of these plans and drawings were sent to the care of Smith, those for the bath case having been made over to Van Buren, himself, and those for the tower stair features to one T. B. Van Slyck, who, as it turns out was the project's carpenter. Thus, some 37 drawings or sets of drawings relating to specific features as well as the four floor plans and ten elevations were prepared in Upjohn's offices at 64 Broadway in New York City. Forwarding of these plans and drawings

proved necessary because Smith provided general supervision of the work, providing many of the services today performed by general contractors.

The agreement between Richard Upjohn and Smith Van Buren, as arrived at during March and April 1849, including provision for the tradesmen involved, and later restated by the latter, was never expected to result in an expensive and time-taking engagement:

. . . When I first spoke to you on the subject I mentioned the sum which I wish to expend in the proposed improvements at \$5000; and with this understanding the plans were offered to Masons & carpenters for estimates. The offer of Barney, at \$2492; for the Mason work was accepted, which sufficiently establishes the cost of that part of the work.

The estimate of the carpenters (I forget their names) at \$2850: was considered the most favorable, & would also have been accepted, but for an impression on my part that I could get the work done cheaper by employing Van Slyck by days-work.<sup>18</sup>

Whether as a result of the mode of operation adopted or the effect of other factors, the work did cost more than expected and dragged on long after the expected time of completion. For an extended period after Barney McGuire caught the steamer for Stuyvesant Landing, no word issued from the project site. McGuire broke the silence in October with queries and answers covering a range of problems encountered in the work. His letter indicates that the masonry work stood largely completed, having reached the "top of the Tower," and identifies the billiard room by making the first known reference to that chamber:

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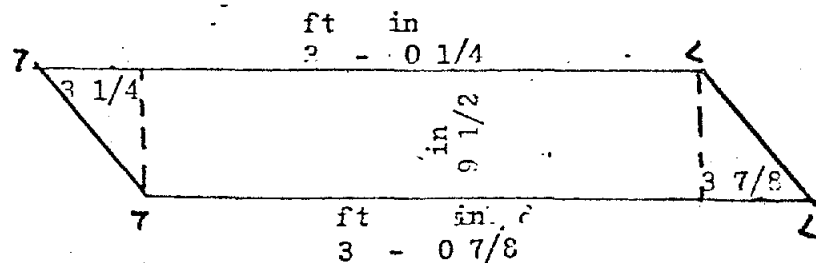
18. Smith T. Van Buren to Richard Upjohn, May 17, 1850, Richard and Richard M. Upjohn Papers, New York Public Library.

I have recd your letter on yesterday afternoon, the width of the Chimney Breasts are as follows Viz.

	ft		in
Nursery	5	-	4
Library	5	-	2 5/8

The Bed room fire place has no projection, the opening of the fire place is ft 2 ft. - 5 3/4

The Shelve of the Bath room Mantle will be of the following Shape



Front

There is a fire place in the Basement under the Nursery of 5 ft. - 3 in. Breast.

I took the form of the Bath Room Shelve on a Board of 9 in. 1/2 wide it runs under the Square at One end for that Width. 3 1/4 inches and On the Other it runs over it 3 7/8 inches. I would wish you to write to Mr. Vanslyck, about planking the piers in the top of the Tower according to your directions he has done Nothing with it as yet. the Scaffolding remains up on the top as yet - which is liable to catch every

gust of wind. I would wish to know if the Billiard Room is going to be laid out according to the plans, as I will have done here in two weeks, and Mr. Vanslyck says he knows nothing about it.<sup>19</sup>

This was followed fewer than three weeks later by a letter of carpenter Van Slyck, bringing up certain problems, and revealing for the first time the plan for a breakfast room. From the discussion of the difficulties involved, it seems apparent that this room was in the corner of the old house adjacent to the tower and library:

. . . I received your favour yesterday with the drawing for the breakfast room door and write to inform you that I cannot get a two foot six inch door in the opening the Largest Size that I can get in is two feet the opening is made close to the partition wall of the old hall which brings the arcatrave [sic] of the Library door we have got the Stairs up to the Second Storey [sic] I have given them Seven and a quarter inches rise and nine and one third inches tread as Shown on the plan we are to work at the Tower and shall soon be ready for the Columns and Caps which you will please to say whither [sic] we are to make them hear [sic] or you will have them done in the citty [sic] we can make them here as well as they can be made in the citty [sic].<sup>20</sup>

To this Van Slyck, unmindful of the storm brewing, added proudly: ". . . we have got the work so far advanced that Mr Van Buren as [sic] moved is [sic] furniture into the house."<sup>21</sup>

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19. Barney McGuire to Richard Upjohn, October 4, 1849, ibid.

20. T. B. Van Slyck to Richard Upjohn, October 23, 1849, ibid.

21. Ibid.

In this instance the practice of using a local man, paid by the day, came back to haunt Smith. Van Slyck had placed the stairs wrong, constricting the hallway, making the architraves of the various openings come out wrong, and narrowing the doorway opening at the bottom of the stairs. Busy in Albany, Smith did not provide the superintendence needed to enforce the corrective instructions, and bridled at the expense entailed. Now, in November, racing time with winter closing in, Smith went ahead, ignoring the remedy, and thus compounded Van Slyck's error. In the end, he bequeathed the house an imposing stairway in a graceless and cramped hallway:

Mr. Vanslyck requests me to say that he will be ready for McGuire the last of next week. I have also to say that he omitted to make the change at the foot of Tower stair-case by my advice. When I saw you in Albany a month or six weeks ago I understood that the first flight would be taken down at once & at the expence [sic] of the carpenters, to make it accord with the plan. The next time I came here I found that this had not been done; altho' it is to be attended to. There being work enough to do to get the house enclosed & to make it habitable, I at once determined that I would suffer the inconvenience of a narrow passage at the foot of the stair, rather than give even so slight an excuse for further delay, & that nothing already completed should be disturbed. I told him therefore to dispense with a Post. & to carry the hand-rail around the edge of the lower step as it was.

Having established a case for his failures, and indicated his disappointment over progress to that time, Smith took to the offensive over the work of his city-bred mason:

If you had been here since McGuire left I am sure you would have seen enough to satisfy you of the justice of my complaints. The flues from the Wash-room, Bed-room, and Bath-room have smoked so badly that the walls are entirely black, and the ceiling also of the Bed room destroyed. If the

mantel pieces should have arrived, according to promise, I am not able to decide whether in the present condition of the flues & walls they ought to be put up. I am at a loss to account for his course. He promised me to cut holes thro' the walls for the plumbers, & yet they tell me that he declined it as no part of his business, & left them to cut for themselves, at the risk of breaking into the flues, the location of which no one but himself understood. The window on the North side of the attick [sic] & one which you directed to be made longer to light the passage next to my brother's bed-room, have been left, altho' there was enough time to have done all these small jobs while he was waiting for the flaggings. I find also, on digging around the cess-pool to insert pipes, that the walls of it are round paving stones, of single thickness, depending upon sand walls outside to hold them up. The plumber thinks it will fall down as soon as water gets to it - if not before, & crush the lead pipe which empties into it. It is moreover covered with plank, & in no long time would have let a horse or an ox into it at the top if it failed to tumble in from the sides. . . .

There are some little things omitted by McGuire which I have not mentioned, because I suppose he intended to bring them along on his return; such as cement for the cistern, and iron-bars for the areas & windows. But how are the flues to be remedied, & all the damage they have caused.

Smith's disappointments had changed entirely the family's plans for the winter, he reported to Upjohn:

I need not repeat to you that all these things coupled with the intolerable dilatoriness of the carpenters have disappointed us all very much. We have been obliged to give up the idea of living in the house this winter, and shall be obliged to stop all the work, when it may be in a fortnight from Saturday next. If anything is to be sent up from New York, it should be done

immediately, especially some plan to close the top of the tower against the weather should be determined on & put in hand . . . I return to Albany tonight where I should be glad to hear from you.<sup>22</sup>

Little more than a week passed before Smith began preparing to close up shop and leave. None of the problems had been settled, and he appealed urgently to Upjohn for his help in preparing Lindenwald for the winter:

I did not answer your letter immediately, because I expected to meet Barney & the mantel pieces at Lindenwald, which place I left Saturday night, without, seeing any signs of either.

I wrote you that this present week would be the last which I could devote to the work, as the necessity of getting my children established for the winter compelled me to risk the season no longer: the delays & vexations attending the affair having kept me already too long unsettled. If you can let me know by return mail, or by telegraph, what day you can be at Kinderhook & how you propose to go, I can meet you there, but on Monday next (the 10th) I shall be obliged to take my children to New York, where I shall not be able to leave them.

Barney's reply about the flues and the damage to the walls is not admissable, because the damage resulted mainly and in the first instance, from smoke caused by a single fire in the wash room (first started by himself to try the draft and afterward continued by the servants for household purposes) returning into the other rooms where there were no fires: viz.

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22. Smith T. Van Buren to Richard Upjohn, November 22, 1849, ibid.

into the Kitchen thro the open-door, and into the Bed-room and the bath-Room thro' their respective flues.

Another test of the cause of the difficulty, and of the direction in which the flames lies, was afforded on Saturday last. For the accommodation of the glazier a fire was started in the room in the old house under the breakfast room, where a fire has been used every winter since the house was occupied by my father, & the consequence of tinkering with the flues was that the smoke filled the breakfast room to such a degree that the glazier was obliged to seek another place for his work & the fire was necessarily extinguished.

I cannot but think you will find that in addition to using all the old iron to be found as walls for his flues, Barney has not observed the directions given him as to their course.<sup>23</sup>

Smith left promptly for New York after December 10th, the somber notes of his correspondence with Upjohn behind him. Van Buren, also preparing to leave, had this to say about the situation following the first season of building:

. . . We have nearly finished our Improvements except painting and Mr Upjohn has been eminently successful in his plan. The work has also been well done but the expenses enormous - \$10,000 will hardly clear our skirts . . . Smith & his little family are already at New York for the winter & I am

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23. "I should like very much to meet you at K. this week as I wish to ascertain how much of the work will remain unfinished & to consult you as to the best way of completing it." Ibid., December 3, 1849.

to join them after N Year. We will be at the New York  
Hotel . . . <sup>24</sup>

Martin, Jr., stayed behind at Lindenwald through the winter to watch over things. The interiors were worked on through the cold months, and it befell the youngest Van Buren son to supervise them. By the second week in April, Van Buren had returned to the scene of activity, ready for the next phase to begin:

. . . Pa returned on Friday last, . . . & is very well contented to get again within the precincts of Lindenwald as yet in part assaulted by Masons & carpenters the latter of whom I've been during this mild winter endeavoring to drive to a finish, but they appear to have an unusually strong tenacity for these premises. <sup>25</sup>

Smith had returned too, doubtless before his father, and McGuire finished his work and drew his pay:

. . . I promised him to say to you that the Wash-room flue is at length cured - having experienced the reverse of the natural rule, viz. being smoked before it was cured: and well smoked it was.

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24. Martin Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, December 12, 1849, The Francis P. Blair Family Papers, Library of Congress. Gilpin, seeking as always to placate his former chief, wrote soothingly: "As to your extravagance at Lindenwald - it will gratify and amuse you - and surely there is nothing that adds such to the happiness of life when with drawn from such engagements as those that engrossed so much of yours, as to your thoughts and time, arranged in a way to suit your wishes and even your fancy. I long to see the improvement for with just such notions of comforts and convenience and Upjohn's zest and skill to execute them, I daresay you have made a very complete work." Henry D. Gilpin to Martin Van Buren, January 27, 1850, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

25. Martin Van Buren, Jr., to Francis P. Blair, April 14, 1850, Blair-Lee Papers, Library of Congress.

You will take his receipt on giving him the check.

You see what I say [quoted in enclosed letter of McGuire's] about the chimnies [sic] on the North side. I think these will have to be opened at the top also, by & by. Pray hurry on the Library & Hand-rail. Did I understand that they were to be done by the same hand? I saw a Library designed for Mr. Barnard in Albany - which pleased me, & only cost \$200. It was black walnut and plain - but was as much prettier than Mr. \_\_\_\_\_'s (in 14th St.) as Kelly's was before Barnards. Let me hear from you whenever you have come to any conclusions.<sup>26</sup>

By May 4, Smith was in receipt of a set of plans for the library. It was to be finished under contract separate from those covering the rest of the work to date. He had a June 1st date of completion in mind:

The plans &c. enclosed are all right. As to Library you seem to have forgotten our arrangement: which was that you should have the plan (when completed) estimated upon by one or two competent persons at New York and then let me know the result, & that the person taking that job might also put up the hand-rail on the Tower stairs: & include that in his estimate.<sup>27</sup>

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26. Smith T. Van Buren to Richard Upjohn, April 20, 1850, Richard and Richard M. Upjohn Papers, New York Public Library.

27. Now obsessed with cost and harried as time passed, Smith admonished Upjohn to include all time of expense in his estimates: "The estimate should be for the whole expence [sic] including expences [sic] of travelling, freight, board while here (which is 18/ pr. week) & everything else - leaving no extra charge whatever: and should be for completing everything as described or drawn in the plans; & perhaps a limit might be agreed upon as to time, altho' if the workman pays his own board & time, I suppose there will be no unnecessary delay. . . . Will you oblige me by sending me the estimate as soon as possible. Ibid., May 5, 1850.

Feeling that he had been stung in charges for the work already completed, Smith now sought rather unbecomingly to economize. But with the estimates in hand, he hardly knew which way to turn:

The estimates for the Library differ so much that I must submit the matter to your discretion. If you know & can rely upon the person who offers to do the work for \$300, of course, you will give it to him. Please let me know, in your reply, whether you have so determined. The sooner it is completed the better, altho' I suppose the contractor will have sufficient inducement for dispatch on his own account.<sup>28</sup>

Smith also was having trouble getting the tower completed. With his day carpenters standing around, waiting for decisions, he could see dollar signs floating away:

Will you please to send me immediately answers to these questions: (as the carpenters stand, with their tools in their hands, waiting the word) -

- I. Are the cap & base of the baluster which you sent me square or round? - They have been turned around - which is thought by one of the workmen (the only one good for anything) to be wrong.
- II. Is there to be a wainscoting inside the tower behind the balusters, as appears to be the intention by the drawing of the section? - This is claimed to be the case by the carpenters - but I do not think it can be so. There does not seem to be any necessity for enclosing the place any more than would be done by the balusters - and it seems

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28. "P.S. How many feet of wire-work did you say? I cannot make out your figures. Please tell me also if you can about what the glass for the glass door will cost." Ibid., May 13, 1850.

to me that the wainscoting would destroy the effect of the balusters, as seen from outside - and that the expense of the wainscoting might be avoided, unless there is a necessity for it. Please decide these points.<sup>29</sup>

He had also run into difficulty with his father over the effect of the rear hall on the front hall lighting, and looked to a glass door for a solution:

My father complains that I have made his hall dark, by my improvements. For this reason I should like to get the glass door made as soon as possible, before he gets the idea so fastened that he will not give it up after the remedy is applied. There is a great workman here who claims to be able to make the door well, if he had the drawing. . . . Please tell me also if you can about what the glass for the glass door will cost.<sup>30</sup>

This door had been subject to earlier discussion between Smith and Upjohn, and a plan had already been requested:

You may send me at your convenience also the drawing you mentioned for a Glass door leading from the old Hall to the new. You will bear in mind that it should be constructed with a view to the assaults of children as high up as they can reach while yet in their years of indiscretion. The dimensions of the door way, or rather of the present door are as follows: height 7 ft. 11 in. Width 3 ft. 8 7/8 in. The wall being about 20 inches thick you can judge the depth of the jam[b]s.<sup>31</sup>

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29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., May 5, 1850.

Early in May, Van Buren reported, for all the effort, the end was not yet in sight: "Smith & I are busy as Bees in getting through with our improvements - a never ending job."<sup>32</sup> By June this tune had changed. Returning from a visit with friends in Providence, Rhode Island, he could draw a new perspective on the state of Lindenwald, as painting was in progress:

. . . We are yet surrounded by Workmen (Painters) but hope to be soon delivered from them. When all is done we shall be amply rewarded for all our expenses and trouble. Mr. Upjohn has well sustained his character as an Architect & one of our greatest enjoyments will be to show Mr. Gilpin & yourself the new beauties of Lindenwald which are really of no common character. Smith & his Children are with me & we are at this moment in much distress on account of the sickness of his charming and only boy.<sup>33</sup>

By the end of June only the glass door and the porch drawings remained to be delivered. Everything else was at least in process:

I have had a visit from Mr. Halenback [Hollenbeck] who promises to be here with his book-cases about the 15th July. I wish you would let me have the drawings for the Porch, complete - large & small with such specifications as may be necessary to have the work estimated on at that date; viz July 15th. I mean to get an estimate from Mr. H. when he comes, & would like to have them a day or so before.

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32. Martin Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, May 6, 1850, The Francis P. Blair Family Papers, Library of Congress.

33. Martin Van Buren to Mrs. Henry D. Gilpin, June 13, 1850, Henry D. Gilpin Papers, Poinsett Section, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

If you have the drawing for the Glass Door you may send it to me, & I will get it made.<sup>34</sup>

A month more passed without notable events; though the door plan had reached Lindenwald, the bookshelves had yet to be installed:

. . . I wish to remind you that the Library man will be here on Monday, and that I am without the Porch-plans, on which I wish to have his estimate. I have retained the plan for the Door also for his examination. I think an ordinary door (painted white like the other wood work in the Hall - instead of Blk. walnut) will answer, with the Glass of white plate containing 4 large panes, & a border only such as you have drawn, of stained glass. What do you think of this?

Please let me hear about the porch immediately, as I do not know that Mr Hollenbeck will be here over a day or two.<sup>35</sup>

Unbeknownst to Smith, the porch plans had been dispatched from Upjohn's office five days before, on July 22, but had miscarried to his address in Albany used customarily by the architect.<sup>36</sup>

Evidently, Hollenbeck, the cabinetmaker, completed his work on time, for on August 14, 1850, a Thomas Moore of 108 Beekman Street, requested that Upjohn provide data for his contribution to the bookshelves: "Please give me the length & width of mesh . . . for Mr V

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34. Smith T. Van Buren to Richard M. Upjohn, June 28, 1850, Richard and Richard M. Upjohn Papers, New York Public Library.

35. Smith T. Van Buren to Richard Upjohn, July 27, 1850, ibid.

36. "I enclose the letter for Wingham, which please forward to him as soon as possible." Presumably a tradesman involved with the work, perhaps painting, Wingham does not reappear after this laconic reference. Smith T. Van Buren to Richard M. Upjohn, August 6, 1850, ibid.

Burens Secretary & as near as practicable the Size of wire to be made of."<sup>37</sup> By August 22, Moore announced: "The doors for Mr Van Burens book Case are all done, and Subject to your directions."<sup>38</sup>

More months passed, without comment of any description. Then, on December 2, 1850, Van Buren wrote to Gilpin: "The men are this week putting the finishing touches to as beautiful a Porch as you ever laid your eyes upon & we are certainly very much delighted with the whole affair. . . . Smith & his children are with me well & happy."<sup>39</sup> This marked the end of the "great Revolution" that had consumed the better part of two years, converted Lindenwald into a two-family house, and vastly interrupted the peace and well-being of the aging Martin Van Buren.

It would appear that Van Buren's hopes for Smith's rehabilitation were less than perfectly answered by his performance as superintendent of building, as far as that went. Increasingly disillusioned by the

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37. Docketed on the reverse side "Van Burens House Cabinet." Thomas C. Moore to Richard Upjohn, August 14, 1850, ibid.

38. "I send on herewith for your inspection & hope they will please any directions you may send me relative to forwarding will be attended to I presume they will not require to be boxed." Ibid., August 22, 1850.

39. Martin Van Buren to Mrs. Henry D. Gilpin, December 2, 1850, Henry D. Gilpin Papers, Poinsett Section, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. By the middle of the following summer, the project of the past two years was all but forgotten and Van Buren was back to farming full draft; "For once I can say that our Improvements are finished & I am anxious that Mrs Blair and yourself shall see Lindenwald in its present dress." To which he adds: "My crops are excellent & I am in the midst of my Harvest. Our wheat in this vicinity is uncommonly good. I sowed but 30 Bushels but have assumed that it will produce me \$500 & have on that assumption ordered my friend March at Madeira to convert it into five hundred dollars worth of choice wine, as the most agreeable way of providing a fresh recollection of the crop. Of hay and oats we have too much by far. Fortunately I have [a] new Farmer who is not used to such crops and will gather them with zeal." Martin Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, July 15, 1851, The Francis P. Blair Family Papers, Library of Congress.

pressure of circumstances that detracted from the effect of his effort, bedeviled by irresolution as he sought to rectify mistakes for which he bore responsibility, taken advantage of by workmen who knew the amateur when they saw him, Smith nonetheless carried through the undertaking with results that satisfied, from all appearances, those who would have to live there.

When in May 1850, frustration over the tower stairhall overtook Smith, he reacted with characteristic response: "The balusters are up I got so tired of the carpenters that I told them to put up the work, and I would take it down again if it was not right. The wainscoting is not on."<sup>40</sup> The time had then come to pay the piper, and negotiations that are revealing of additional details about the structure as well as the professional relationships of the principals began. Upjohn offered a basis of charge for determining his commission in a letter of early May. Smith replied as follows:

. . . I am somewhat puzzled by the expression in your letter, referring to the commission on the "cost of your [my] works" to know whether my expressions & calculations on the subject will agree with your own, or not. The only way however to ascertain, is to tell you frankly what mine have been & are, & to ask you to do the same by me in return. . . . [he then states his desire to use the original masons and carpenters estimates as a basis rather than the larger amounts he paid to Van Slyck, and to exclude those projects separate from the addition itself from the first calculation and add them afterwards] If I am correct in assuming these views as the basis of our account, you will find it stated on the other side, as correctly as the nature of the case will admit. . . .

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40. Smith T. Van Buren to Richard Upjohn, May 17, 1850, Richard and Richard M. Upjohn Papers, New York Public Library.

Estimate of Mason's work	\$2492.
Do ___ Carpenter's ___	2850.
Do ___ Library (including wire work)	340.
Do ___ Porch ___	500.

Supposed cost of Hand rail to be  
made by the Library Contractor, or  
some other person \_\_\_\_\_

	50.
	<u>6232</u>
	5
5% com _____	\$ 311.60
Deduct heretofore paid	<u>150.</u>
Bal. --	\$ 161.60

To this should be added the Blk. walnut door and the caps for  
tower-columns - the latter cost about \$15. The former I do not  
know. I have added in the check 75 cts. being 5% on \$15.  
Check . . . \$162.35.<sup>41</sup>

Upjohn's response to Smith's calculations is not known. McGuire's  
response to Smith's earlier calculations on his behalf were not favorable  
and became subject to further correspondence between architect and  
client. Inseparable as the details of charges and those of structure,  
Smith's allegations are presented in their entirety, for what they reveal  
about elements of Lindenwald's physical characteristics:

I wish you would say to Barney McGuire that his bill for  
Extra-work includes two charges which require to be considered  
at least.

1. The charge of \$15. for iron work over the areas  
[window wells]. These areas with the iron grating  
were laid down in the original plans and cannot be  
considered extra. There was one window on the  
south side furnished with upright iron rods, not  
included in the original plan: but this could not cost  
\$15.

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41. Ibid.

[in margin: "Plastering under prestonware oven"]

2d. The cistern. Your father wrote me that the charge (sixty odd dollars) was high & that the price of making a cistern 8.<sup>ft</sup> by 8.<sup>ft</sup> was between \$30 & \$40: but that Barney thought mine was 8. by 13. I have had it measured, & it is 8.<sup>ft</sup> by 9 ft. 10 in. Its capacity however, (that is the space below the waste-pipe is just about 8 ft by 8. You will see that measured to the very top, however, it is over 3 feet less than his recollection of it.

His work altho', in the main, well done enough, has in some respects given me constant trouble. In altering the top of the chimney-stack his men left so much mortar & rubbish on the roof that the leaders from the gutter became choked, & some had to be taken down & new ones substituted. The Laundry flue continues to smoke as badly as ever - rendering the use of the room impossible frequently, & always more or less uncomfortable: & I have had a mason here almost all the time pointing up some rough work, & tinkering on the flues.

Under these circumstances a charge for extra-work is not very palatable, but I am willing nevertheless to pay his bill when it is corrected in respect to the two items I have mentioned.<sup>42</sup>

In the end Smith paid McGuire's bill, deducting for the areas (window wells) included in the original estimate, so as to "have no further discussion." He expressed himself "willing to consider our business closed to our mutual satisfaction, and will always say so at his request."<sup>43</sup>

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42. Smith T. Van Buren to Richard M. Upjohn, June 28, 1850, ibid.

43. Smith T. Van Buren to Richard Upjohn, July 27, 1850, ibid.

The hill of old Kinderhook did not sing with critical acclaim for the achievements of Upjohn and Smith Van Buren. Considering the air of expectancy that greeted the initial announcements, surprisingly little seems to have been written afterwards - a sign perhaps of the effect. In superimposing the round-headed windows of the attic level, over the second floor's tripartite window, in poking bay windows out the end wall, in adding the four-story Italianate tower with its lancet windows at the top, and in erecting the eclectic Romanesque/Gothic porch at the front, Upjohn had done just enough to the house to be confusing. He worked to the same end on the interior. Those touches of archways and fireplaces "in the Italianate style" contrast markedly with the earlier Federal trim found elsewhere. In fact, most of the expense and effort went into the additions that brought the number of rooms to 36, established two family living zones, and introduced such then modern conveniences as kitchen ranges, and bathrooms into the house. Though obtuse, Upjohn's superimpositions are not crushing. More recent evaluations range from caustic comment: "In the Victorian era the exterior fell victim to the mania for irrelevant gables, oversized dormers and jigsaw decoration;" "Upjohn obliterated the simplicity of the old mass by adding a steep front gable, consoled and gabled dormers, an eccentric cornice, a grotesque stoop, a supposedly Italianate tower . . .;"<sup>44</sup> to appreciative tribute: "a picturesque example . . . with an odd tower; distantly Italianate, it has all sorts of contributing flavors, like spices."<sup>45</sup> This last critic sees it as an example of the movement among the best New York architects of the time to "design freely beyond the limitations of the then dominant Greek and Gothic manners," and concludes that it was "bound to lead to creative change." Upjohn's biographer,

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44. Harold D. Eberlein and Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard, Historic Houses of the Hudson Valley (New York, 1942), p. 112, and Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of New York (American Guide Series), New York: A Guide to the Empire State (New York, 1940), pp. 564-65.

45. Talbot Hamlin, "The Rise of Eclecticism in New York: The Contributions of Four Architects and Two Materials," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, XI (1951), 4.

also a direct descendant, comments mildly, "The change in character of a good colonial house cannot but be deplored by any lover of the older forms of American architecture," leaving non-lovers to form their own opinions.<sup>46</sup> If no milestone in the history of architectural development, Lindenwald was full of meaning in the lives of the assorted Van Burens who lived there and the many important guests who stayed there.

More than a decade of good years remained to Van Buren after the last painter departed and life resumed its routine flow. From there issued his support of the Compromise of 1850. He courted Margaret Silvester, daughter of his first law teacher there and in the village - and lost. He sent and received farm products, his potatoes and Blair's brandied peaches. In 1853, he left for Europe, taking Martin, Jr., for his health and as his amanuensis for the projected autobiography. This trip was cut short by Martin's death, and he returned home for the burial. Smith's hoped-for career in Kinderhook never developed; his first wife died and presently he married Henrietta Irving, Washington Irving's niece. Living with his family at Lindenwald, he assumed Martin's place at his father's side. Politics in general and the course of the nation dismayed the former President. A strong Unionist, he became depressed with adverse war news. Asthmatic, in June 1862, he took to his room, where on July 24th, his sons by his bedside, he passed away. For three days before burial, his remains lay in the first floor's main hallway while visitors from all over the state paid their last respects. An entourage of 81 carriages and hundreds on foot saw him to the grave from Lindenwald.

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46. Everard M. Upjohn, Richard Upjohn: Architect and Churchman (New York, 1939), p. 94. He also finds: "This work was interesting from two very different points of view: the fame and position of the owner proved valuable to the architect on the occasion of his trip abroad, and one of the oldest furnaces built by Richardson and Boynton was installed here, showing that it was just about this date that central heating began to appear."

## V. The Property in Later Years

Contrary to the intention of an earlier day, Van Buren did not leave Lindenwald to Smith. The hopes then entertained, founded on Van Buren's belief that he possessed the finest mind of any of his sons, that he would find himself, failed to materialize. Smith the estate manager, Smith the political leader never advanced beyond the stage of imaginative longing. Whether he lacked the taste for either or the resolution to give it a go may be wondered. Perhaps the new start that he and Ellen, his first wife, had determined he should make, lost its momentum when she died. After his father's death, he moved to Beacon, New York, much nearer his second wife's place of origins. At any rate, the will as drawn by Samuel J. Tilden, and written out by Van Buren himself, and signed by him on January 18, 1860, made this provision for the property:

. . . I hereby give, devise, & bequeath to my three sons Abraham, John, & Smith Thompson . . . all my real estate wheresoever situated, to be equally divided between them, their heirs & assigns forever, subject to the following conditions & reservations, viz first that out of the . . . [receipts] of the Sale of Lindenwald there shall be reserved & paid over to my son Smith Thompson, his heirs or assigns the sum of seven thousand five hundred dollars in full satisfaction for his advances towards the expenses incurred by the additions to and improvements upon the dwelling House & outbuildings with the expectation that the place would be devised to him upon terms that would be equitable in respect to his brothers, the payment to be without interest during my life time. Secondly that upon the sale of Lindenwald the property shall be offered in succession to my sons, beginning, for the reason above assigned & no other, with the youngest, if the son accepting the same is willing to pay therefore as much as the place can be sold for in the market.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Last Will and Testament of Martin Van Buren, Surrogate's Office, Columbia County, New York.

And, though Smith was not the son to preserve Lindenwald in the family, son John, living in New York, heeded the sentiments about the holding from whence the dead former President had received so much pleasure, as expressed in the preamble to the will:

I Martin Van Buren of the Town of Kinderhook, County of Columbia, and State of New York, heretofore Governor of the State, and more recently President of the United States, but for the last and happiest years of my life, a Farmer in my native Town, do make & declare the following to be my last will & Testament. . . .

Acting under the second of the above "conditions and reservations," John elected to buy up his brother's shares and take full title to the estate. Nothing remains to explain his motivations in so doing. The will was proved and ordered admitted to probate on August 1, 1862. Then, the brothers in their capacity as executors under the will's terms, took the steps necessary to determine the value of the property:

Aug 4 Lindenwald. Present all the Executors.

Tuesday. Minutes of the last two meetings approved.

Resolved. That in order to ascertain the "Market value" of the portion of the Testator's Estate called "Lindenwald" the same be offered for sale in parcels to suit purchasers as follows:

1.<sup>st</sup> The farm-house, and farm with barns & outhouses thereon including the portion of the Orchard in which the farm-house stands & excluding the residue of the 31 acres heretofore known as the House Lot - comprising, as thus described about 200 acres, at the price of \$105 pr. acre.

2.<sup>nd</sup> The Mansion House & the residue of the House Lot not included in the above description, comprising about 25 acres with the carriage-house & stables;

Green house; Lodges & other outbuildings thereon at the price of \$20,000 - or

3<sup>d</sup>. The entire property for \$40,000.<sup>2</sup>

Implicit in this resolution of the executors was the possibility that they would have sold the farm separate from the mansion had someone met their price. This resolution in addition to making clear the procedures followed in disposing of Lindenwald, adds to the store of knowledge about the estate's dependency structures. As does a later entry in the executor's minutes, "That Smith T. Van Buren be authorized to have the sheep-house on the farm repaired at the expense of the Estate. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, the public response was not to their liking. Nine months later, by deed of "Abraham Van Buren, and Sarah Angelica, his wife, and Smith T. Van Buren, and Henrietta E., his wife, to John Van Buren (all heirs of Martin Van Buren)" of May 6, 1863, the entire estate was sold for \$20,000.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Smith took back not only what he put into the house in 1849-50 but received an additional \$10,000 as well. The value of savings and other items of the estate readily liquidated covered all this to the extent that this was but a paper transaction, though John after deduction of the \$20,000 from his share was certainly the poorest of the lot.

"Prince John" Van Buren, "tall and handsome, and of elegant manners and appearance" was born in Kinderhook on February 10, 1810. He received his pre-college education in Albany, New York, and

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2. Minutes of Proceedings of Executors, of &C., Estate Record Book, 1862-63, pp. 100-01, Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

3. Ibid., p. 102.

4. Deed, Abraham and Sarah Angelica Van Buren and Smith T. and Henrietta E. Van Buren to John Van Buren, May 6, 1863, New York County Deed Book No. 19 of Conveyances, Folios 192-93, Office of the Commissioner of Deeds, County of New York, New York City, New York.

graduated from Yale in 1828, having gambled and drunk his way through. After studying law with Benjamin F. Butler, he was admitted to the bar in 1831. He accompanied his father, newly appointed to the Court of St. James, that year, himself as an attaché of Legation. There the traits noted by Godkin brought him attention and made him a favorite at court: "aristocratic in his bearing, in his habits, in his training and tone of thought."<sup>5</sup> Lionized during a later visit, placed in a court guest list before the dukes, he was dubbed by the Whig press "Prince John," and the sobriquet was his from that day forth. Back in America, he entered politics, and soon was a member of the Albany Regency. As Attorney General of New York after 1845, he prosecuted the anti-rent cases. His greatest influence, however, was exercised in state political conventions. A Democratic radical, he was an organizer of the "Barnburner" faction. He took a prominent part in the Free Soil convention of 1848, playing a stellar oratorical role, and convincing his father to accept the nomination. Returning to the Democratic Party the following year, he espoused the doctrine of popular sovereignty in Kansas. With the coming of the Civil War, his influence diminished. He lost the state attorney generalship in the 1865 election, and died the following year while backing Andrew Johnson and his post-war policies. Both as a lawyer and politician his eloquence and zeal while speaker made him popular and effective.

His personal habits left more to be desired. High-living not only injured his reputation but his pocketbook too. The tragic death of his wife in 1844 took him to the "gaming table and flowing bowl," as Lynch has put it. He took more than one turn on Wall Street, and the practice of law in New York City opened other avenues for expressive activity. Perhaps they set the stage for what happened next.

For a time after taking title to the estate, John lived there with his grown daughter and tried to manage it, but there were too many problems inherent in the posture he had assumed. Writing to Tilden during the summer of 1863, he explained his prospects:

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5. Quoted in Lynch, Epoch and Man, p. 286.

. . . Thanks to a good farmer [Collins, his father's overseer], I am promised fair crops and, thanks to the war, they should command fair prices; but I find I have upon my hands an establishment very much beyond the strength of Anna and myself, and so distant from my office as to cut me off from my profession. I shall be obliged, therefore, to change my arrangements.<sup>6</sup>

Then not quite a year after acquiring the property, John deeded it on April 11, 1864, to Leonard Jerome, for a consideration of \$35,000, "subject to a lease made by the party of the first part [Van Buren] to Isaac Collins for one year from the 1.<sup>st</sup> day of April 1864."<sup>7</sup> In exchange, Van Buren took back a mortgage in the amount of \$25,000 from Jerome, secured by a bond "in penal sum of Fifty thousand dollars."<sup>8</sup> Interest on the mortgage was set at six percent, payable half yearly.

Leonard W. Jerome was born on a farm in upstate New York in 1818, and died in England in 1891. He completed his education at Union College after a period at Princeton, and entered newspaper publishing in Rochester with a small daily, The Native American. He gave over that faltering enterprise after wangling appointment as consul at Trieste. Returning around 1854, he found his way into the stock market, for lack of better employment. Specializing in short selling, he became a millionaire during the panic of 1857. Liberal with his funds, optimistic of approach, and active by disposition, he built one of New York's great houses on Madison Square, with a

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6. John Van Buren to Samuel J. Tilden, September 4, 1863, quoted in John Bigelow, ed., Letters and Literary Memorials of Samuel J. Tilden (New York, 1908), pp. 184-85.

7. Deed, John Van Buren to Leonard Jerome, April 11, 1864, New York County Deed Book No. 21 of Conveyances, Folio 427.

8. Collection of deeds and memoranda relating to "Lindenwald," the home of President Martin Van Buren, Columbia County Historical Society.

private theater for staging the pianistic exploits of his talented daughter, Jennie. He became a great patron of the turf, and with his friend, August Belmont, did much to improve it, founding the principal organizations, building race tracks, and fostering contests. He also patronized vocalists, Jennie Lind, among them, and knew many celebrities of the stage well. He had a place in Newport and a steam yacht to get there. Most of all he enjoyed hazarding a chance, whether on Wall Street or at a club gaming table. His larger fortune disappeared overnight in 1867, when he was brought down by a strongly organized group. For a time he was one of the more important operators in the market, but was out of it by the time the great tycoons of the nineteenth century's last quarter emerged from the pack and rolled up unprecedented scores.

He was also the father of that "Jennie" who has become so well known of late to the television viewers as the wife of Lord Randolph Churchill and the mother of Winston Spencer Churchill.

An indelible impression of the aging Leonard Jerome has come down to the present through the facile pen of a contemporary. It is of a ". . . tall, large, bony figure attired in a loose-fitting, old-fashioned black frock-coat, a white waistcoat and gray trousers:"

. . . The face is bronzed with exposure to the weather; the gray eyes are large but heavy-lidded; the hair is iron gray and close cropped; a long, drooping moustache conceals the mouth . . . [he] who was once quite . . . gay . . . and gave dinner parties which are still famous, . . . now lives a quiet life and prefers his game of pool or cards to any other excitement, except racing.<sup>9</sup>

To proper New Yorkers, he also was not quite reputable. George Templeton Strong, the diarist, referred to him as a "stockjobber" and in his role as a patron as "San Jeronimo."

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9. Stephen Fiske, Offhand Portraits of Prominent New Yorkers (New York, 1884), pp. 198-203, and Robert Irving Warshaw, The Story of Wall Street (New York, 1929), pp. 174-81.

But in 1864, he was at the peak of his run. There has been a persistent story that Jerome won Lindenwald from Van Buren in a card game, and the gaming table itself survives. The notoriety of both men make it plausible enough, but the writer has not been able to document it, although not prepared in the absence of any considerable body of papers for either man to discount it. A factor in leaving it undecided is the difficulty of determining any good reason for Jerome's interest in Lindenwald to begin with. The house was not up to his standards while the pasturage, though beguiling to a horse-breeder, was remote from his concerns. Jerome loved a wager at the track or gaming table, and John could not resist election betting - for amounts up to \$5,000. Though men of vastly disparate means, both believed in a friendly game "under respectable auspices." If we may assume that a few hands of stud or some other light game left John \$10,000 short, with no ready asset but Lindenwald to apply against his arrearage, we may as assuredly expect Jerome to have accepted the deed to the place in exchange for the amount won, giving a mortgage for the balance of \$25,000. Frequent Jerome family trips to their Newport cottage can be documented; none to Lindenwald, the Jennie Jerome piano notwithstanding. Jerome had interest enough at the time of acquiring the estate to have prepared a beautifully inscribed abstract of title. On October 30, 1866, shortly after John's death, the mortgage was recorded at the Columbia County clerk's office as satisfied.<sup>10</sup>

Jerome sold Lindenwald on January 23, 1867, to Kinderhooker, George Wilder, for \$25,000 only, interestingly enough, at a time of crisis in his affairs over Pacific Mail, the operations that finished him in the market.<sup>11</sup> During its course, he converted all readily liquidatable holdings to cash. Wilder sold it to John Van Buren (not the nonpareil of that name) and James Van Alstyne for \$35,000 on November 7, 1873,<sup>12</sup>

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10. Collection of deeds and memoranda relating to "Lindenwald," the home of President Martin Van Buren, Columbia County Historical Society.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

subject to a \$20,000 mortgage.<sup>13</sup> On April 20, 1874, they conveyed "the greater part of the premises known as "Lindenwald," otherwise unspecified, to Adam E. Wagoner, Freeman E. Wagoner, Erastus Wagoner, and Sylvester Wagoner for \$10,000 and their assumption of Wilder's mortgage.<sup>14</sup> This appears to be the first division of the property, with the sellers retaining part of the farmland.

During Wagoner's period of ownership, a George Alfred Townsend, wrote this description of Lindenwald for a New York City newspaper in 1891:

. . . on the lawn are many very old fir or pine trees, a nearly circular cluster of which masks the residence in part from passers-by. . . . Drives from the two widely separated gates meet at the house, which is of brick, painted yellow, and seven windows wide. The main building has two stories and a large garret. Three chimnies [sic] rise above this main or front part of the house - two to the north, a wide one to the south. The middle of the front is pedimented, and a dormer slides forward on each side of this gable, which in the bedroom story below has a large triple central window, with a curved pedimental top and two windows on each side. The two on the south show where Van Buren died. Before the center of the main story is a small covered portico, with an easy flight of steps and balusters. To the left was the ex-President's living room or double parlor; to the right the sitting room and dining room. The oblong house is four windows deep on the north side, and at a guess 70x45 feet ground plan. A colonnade or arched porch separates it from a domestic building, mainly kitchen and laundry, which further deepens the house across its whole back. This doubtless was Van Ness's original house. The library Mr. Van Buren added in the rear of the south side and

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13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

built next to it a tower, like a dongon keep, with an Italian summit, the openings few and slitted; the object, stateliness and the view [are its features]. . . . On the little porch the door knocker affected me with its date - '1797' - a small blue or black brass object in which is a head in relief. . . . Beyond the door appeared a fine straight hall which was paced as being about fifty five by fifteen feet and appeared to be eleven or twelve feet high. Its four doors were in early carpentry of this century with manipulation around the tops. At the rear nearly concealed in the side of the hall, under a sort of alcove, was the stairway, pretty wide and low and long stepped. The feature of this hall, I had almost said its beauty, is the foreign wall paper, in large landscapes, representing hunters on horseback, and with guns and dogs breaking into Rhenish vales, where milkmaids are surprised and invite flirtation. The human figures are almost a foot high; the mountains and woods and streams, panoramic, the colors dark and loud . . . about three panels were on each side of the landscape five or six feet high with sky above that [goes] to the ceiling. . . . <sup>15</sup>

Lindenwald remained in the Wagoner family until November 15, 1917, when it was sold to a Dr. Bascom H. Birney. On his death it was deeded to his daughter, Mrs. William De Prose. In later years it was a residence, a tea house, and a nursing home. Throughout this period it changed but little. Melvin J. Weig of the National Park Service, in making the first survey and report on the structure in 1936, stated: "Some utility bathrooms, water system, hot air heat, and slate roof have been added by the De Prose family. Until their ownership, also, the mansion was never opened to the general public."<sup>16</sup> He found it apparently, "in a satisfactory state of preservation." In 1940, Lindenwald

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15. Quoted in Edward A. Collier, A History of Old Kinderhook . . . (New York, 1914), pp. 376-77.

16. Weig, "Lindenwald," The President Martin Van Buren Homestead, p. 23.

was described in the WPA guide to New York State as originally a "typical post-Colonial, central-hall brick dwelling" that had been renovated and enlarged by Richard Upjohn: "Today the place is haunted by an eerie, romantic quality deepened by disrepair and unkempt planting."<sup>17</sup>

Mr. Kenneth F. Campbell bought the house and thirteen acres of ground around it from Mrs. De Prose for about \$12,000 in 1957. The following year, he rehabilitated it for his and Mrs. Campbell's use, making some window changes and altering some of the partitioning. He also installed a new first floor kitchen in the rear. Of greater consequence, however, was his replacement of the Upjohn front porch, removed by the previous owners for which he substituted a portico across the entire front of the building, with balustrade, supported by four columns, two stories in height.

Lindenwald was acquired from Mr. Campbell by the National Park Service in 1973.

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17. Federal Writers' Project, New York: A Guide to the Empire State, p. 565.

## APPENDIX

Excerpts from Manuscript, Richard Upjohn "Plan Book," Avery Library,  
Columbia University:

May 1849

May 30 S T Van Buren Taken by Barney Maguire [sic]  
[p. 68] Ground Plan 2<sup>nd</sup> and attic  
stories also basement N E S  
& West Elevations 1/8 Section  
through ash pit Ground and  
basement plans stairway from  
tower to attic plans and sections  
Section of flues to 1/2 in  
Skylight, Dormer Windows, plan,  
elevation and section 2<sup>nd</sup> story  
bay window, plan  
Inside and outside elevation 2 sections  
Double window of bed room,  
Plan inside, and outside, elevations  
and sections, Small windows in tower,  
Plan inside and outside elevations,  
and sections, Bay window in Library  
inside and outside elevations, section,  
and return of cornice, Single windows  
of Library etc inside and outside  
elevation Plan, and section, Window  
E & W Gables outside elevation,  
section plan, Plans and elevations  
of all chimnies [sic], Back porch,  
plan, elevation and section, Inside  
door Elevation, and section Entrance  
door N Side plan, Elevation, and  
section, all to size of new building,  
Cornices of hall, nursery bed room  
and bath room  
Details of dormer window  
" " 2<sup>nd</sup> story bay window  
" " skylight window,  
[p. 69] jamb, sill, base and architrave of  
rooms Window cap and bracket  
Details of back porch and north  
door all full size

July 1849

July 25 S T Van Buren  
[p. 73]

Plan hall stairway 1/2 in scale  
and Bracket to support architrave  
full size

Sept 3<sup>rd</sup> Smith T  
Van  
Buren  
[p. 76]

Plan of Mr Van  
Burens house viz  
Library door jamb of  
tower doors to 1 in scale  
and full size

October  
19 Smith T  
Van Buren  
[p. 78]

Plan of door to 1 in  
scale and full size

November  
13 T B Van Slyck  
[p. 80]

A newell for Tower also  
baluster full  
bracket full size

January 1850  
7 Martin Van  
Buren  
[p. 83]

Plan for Bath  
Case to 1 in scale  
and Detail full size

July  
22 S T Van Buren  
Albany  
[p. 96]

Plans of front porch  
1/2 in scale 2 elevations, 2 plan  
3 sections, & all the details  
full size

Insert in above:

August [1849]  
10 Barney McGuire  
[p. 74]

4 Elevations of Martin  
Van Buren's house sent by  
the barge Wyoming

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### PRIMARY MATERIALS

#### Manuscripts

As a man of the nineteenth century, Van Buren wrote voluminously and used the mails extensively, the more so for having at his command franking privileges through long years of federal office-holding. His correspondence is to be found everywhere, with many depositories having a representative selection. The job of searching out the many that touch on Lindenwald was greatly simplified by the great and effective effort that has gone into The Papers of Martin Van Buren project at the Ogontz Campus of Pennsylvania State University. There since 1969, have been gathered the most complete collection of direct copy materials of Van Buren manuscripts ever compiled. Processing as well as accumulating these materials has made virtually everything with a Van Buren signature readily available to the researcher.

The principal collection of Van Buren papers reposes in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. In 1910, under the editorship of Elizabeth Howard West, that division published an invaluable guide, the Calendar of the Papers of Martin Van Buren Prepared from the Original Manuscripts. . . . As to the completeness of the collection, Mrs. West had this to say:

. . . There are many gaps, due in part to his self-confessed inattention to the care of his papers; in part to his practice of keeping his files within manageable limits by destroying correspondence deemed to be of little value; in part, no doubt, to the importunities of autograph hunters, before and after his death. [p. 5]

She also explains how they made their way to the Library of Congress:

. . . With the exception of trifling additions by purchase, they were acquired by the Library of Congress in 1904 and 1905 through the valued gift of Mrs. Smith Thompson Van Buren and Dr. Stuyvesant Fish Morris, who had inherited them from Smith Thompson Van Buren the son and literary executor of the President. [p. 5]

In addition, the Library of Congress has several collections of Van Buren's political associates that were productive of data concerning Lindenwald, again obtained through the papers project. They include the Blair-Lee Papers, the Francis P. Blair Family Papers, the Levi Woodbury Papers, and the Papers of the Wadsworth Family.

Collections in other depositories that yielded useful data by way of the papers project offices include the John M. Niles Papers at the Connecticut Historical Society, the Henry D. Gilpin Papers, and the Joel R. Poinsett Papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Sumner Papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

From the Joseph Downs Manuscript and Microfilm Collection of the library at The Henry Francis duPont Winterthur Museum came a single letter of great importance.

The Office of the County Clerk of Columbia County, Hudson, New York, has deeds and related data for the property and a useful 1855 census descriptive of the estate as a functioning entity. The Last Will and Testament of Martin Van Buren was located in the Surrogate's Office, Columbia County. The deeds for the property from 1863 to the present are located in the Office of the Commissioner of Deeds, County of New York, New York City, New York.

The Albany Argus, available on microfilm at the papers project for the years in question, provided a few items of note, and an important description of Van Buren's homecoming in 1841.

From the manuscript collection at Morristown National Historical Park came several letters contributing to knowledge of the 1840s situation.

Columbia University's Avery Library is the place of deposit for the plans and drawings of the architectural firm of Richard and Richard M. Upjohn. The firm's "Plan Book" is also to be found there, with its logging out of materials prepared by Upjohn and his associates.

The New York Public Library's Manuscript and Archives Division is the place of deposit for the correspondence and account books of the firm of Richard and Richard M. Upjohn, including an apparently complete file of letters received by the firm pertaining to the remodeling of Lindenwald in 1849-50.

The New-York Historical Society has the Van Ness Papers, a microfilmed selection, numbering about 400 pieces, from various of their manuscript collections under other surnames. These are random and incomplete but valuable for study of Lindenwald, given intensive scrutiny.

The correspondence files at Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites have many leads to sources, as well as materials relating to administration of Lindenwald from 1973 to 1976 and inspection responsibilities prior to its acquisition by the National Park Service in 1973.

The Columbia County Historical Society at Kinderhook, New York, has materials relating to Lindenwald in its collection of Van Buren Papers and Van Ness Papers, notably letters pertaining to the 1841 redecoration received by Van Buren from Harriet Butler. A file is also maintained under the head "Lindenwald" containing a miscellany gained through the years. The society's listing of deeds and memoranda relating to Lindenwald has proved to be an invaluable tool. The will of Peter Van Ness is also to be found in the society's collections.

## Printed Documents

The Speeches at Full Length of Mr. Van Ness, Mr. Caines, THE Attorney-General, Mr. Harrison and GENERAL HAMILTON in the Great Cause of the People, Against Harry Croswell on an Indictment for Libel on THOMAS JEFFERSON, President of the United States. New York, 1804.

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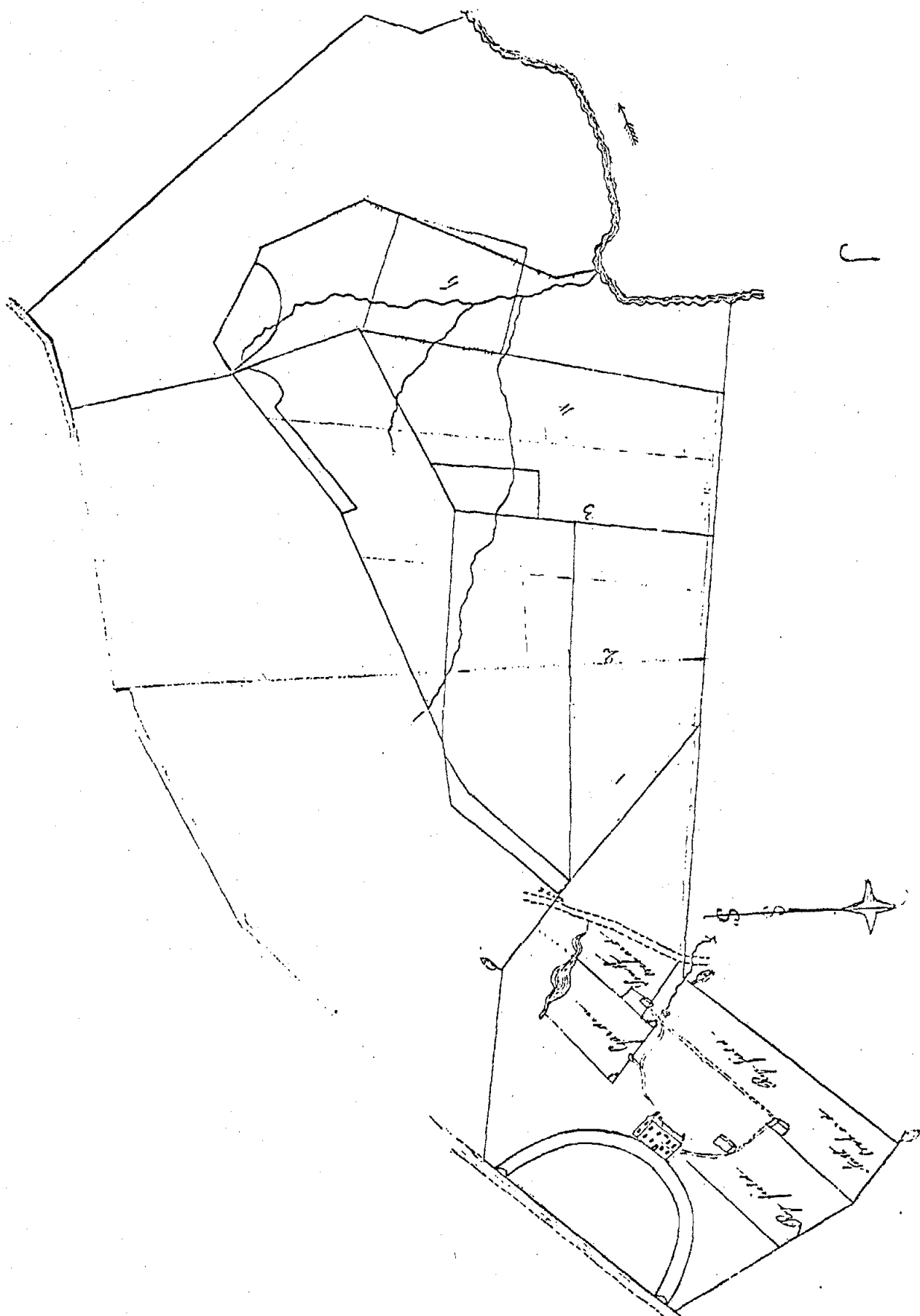
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Appleman, Roy. "Notes on Martin Van Buren Property by Mrs. Van  
Alstyne."

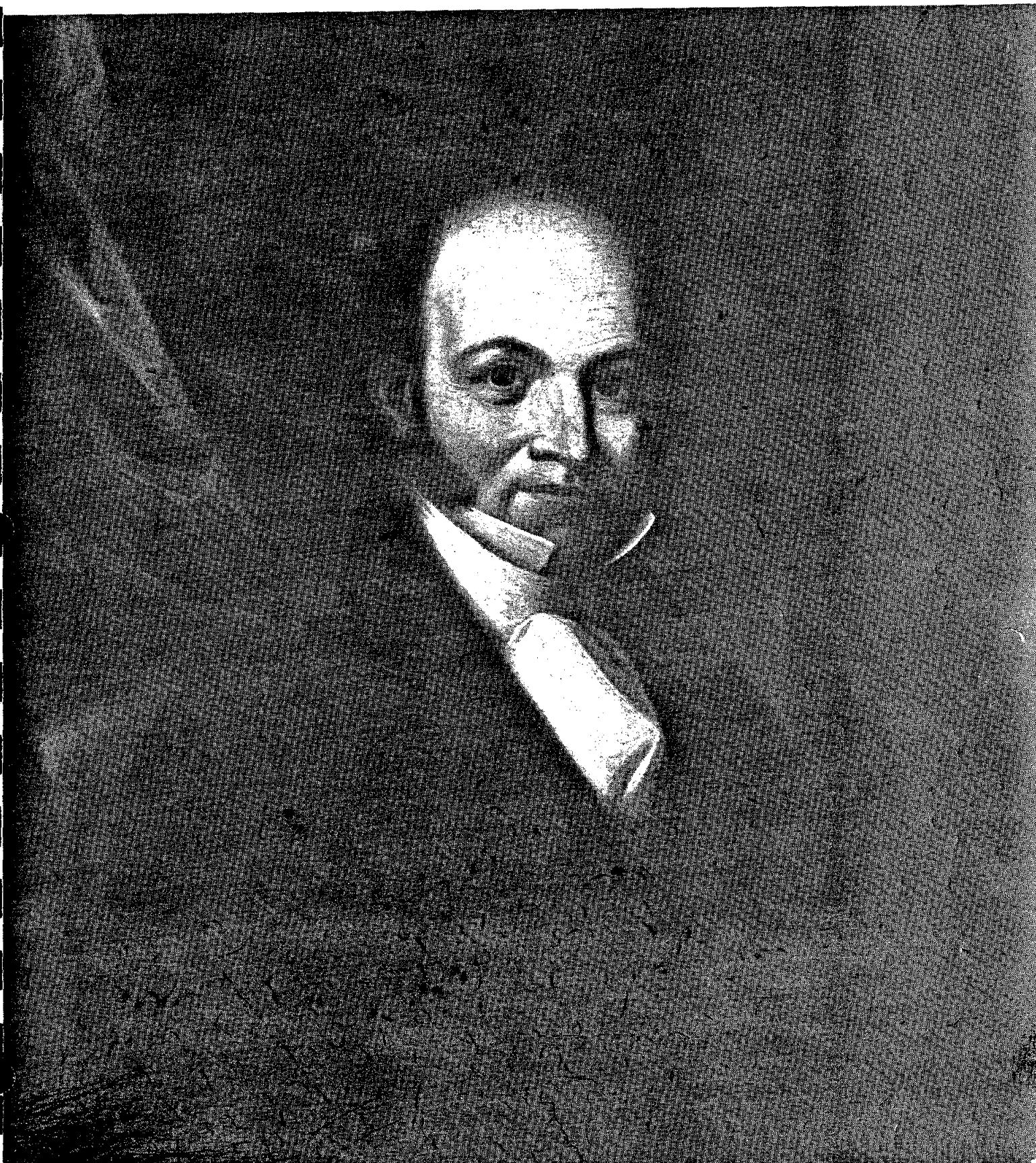
Weig, Melvin J. "Lindenwald," The President Martin Van Buren  
Homestead, Near Kinderhook, New York. November 3, 1936.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Ground Plan of Lindenwald Property, ca. early 1840s.



II. Portrait of Martin Van Buren, ca. 1840s.



III. Photograph of Martin Van Buren, 1862.



IV. Photograph of Smith Thompson Van Buren, n.d.



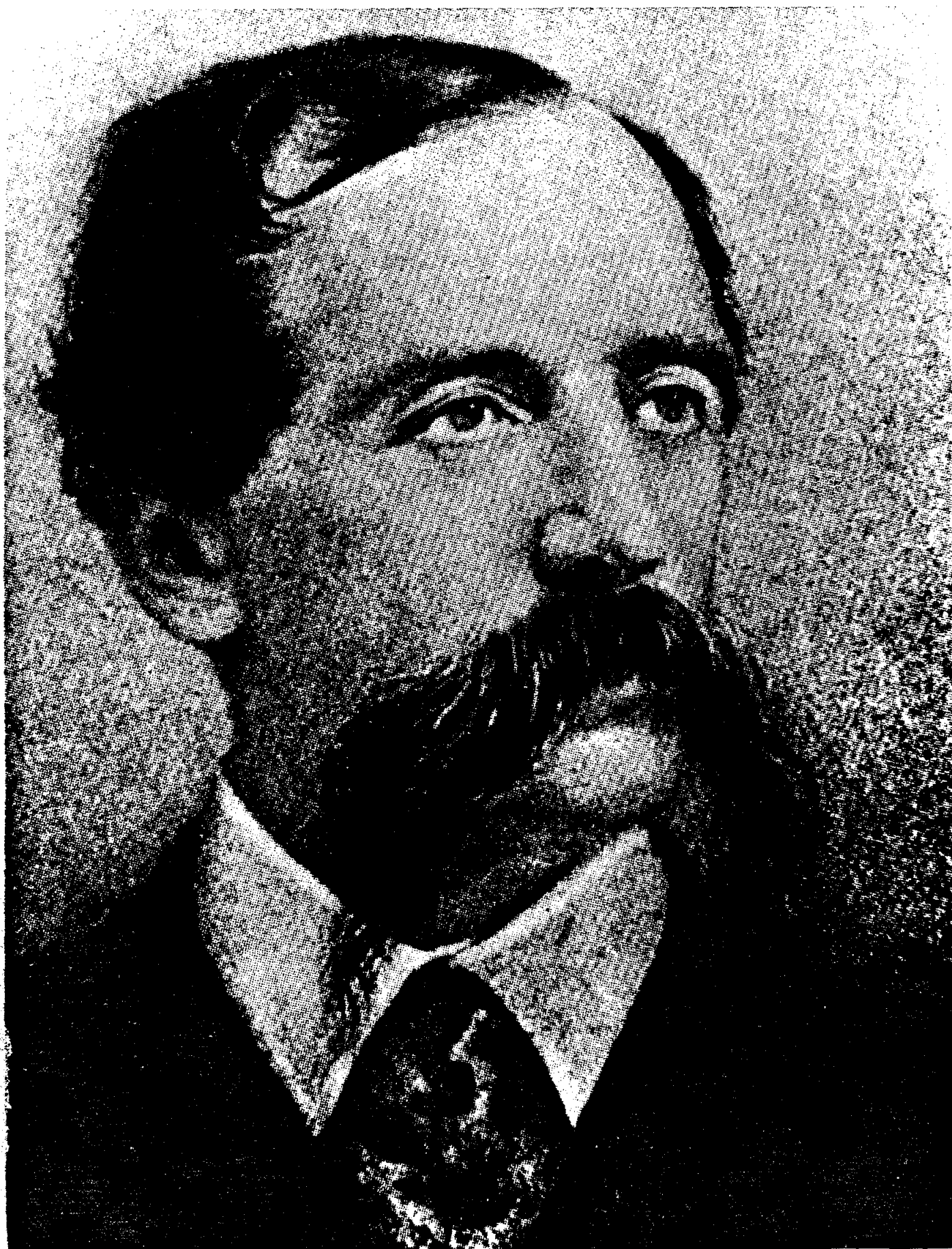
V. Engraving of John Van Buren, n.d., by J. C. Buttre.

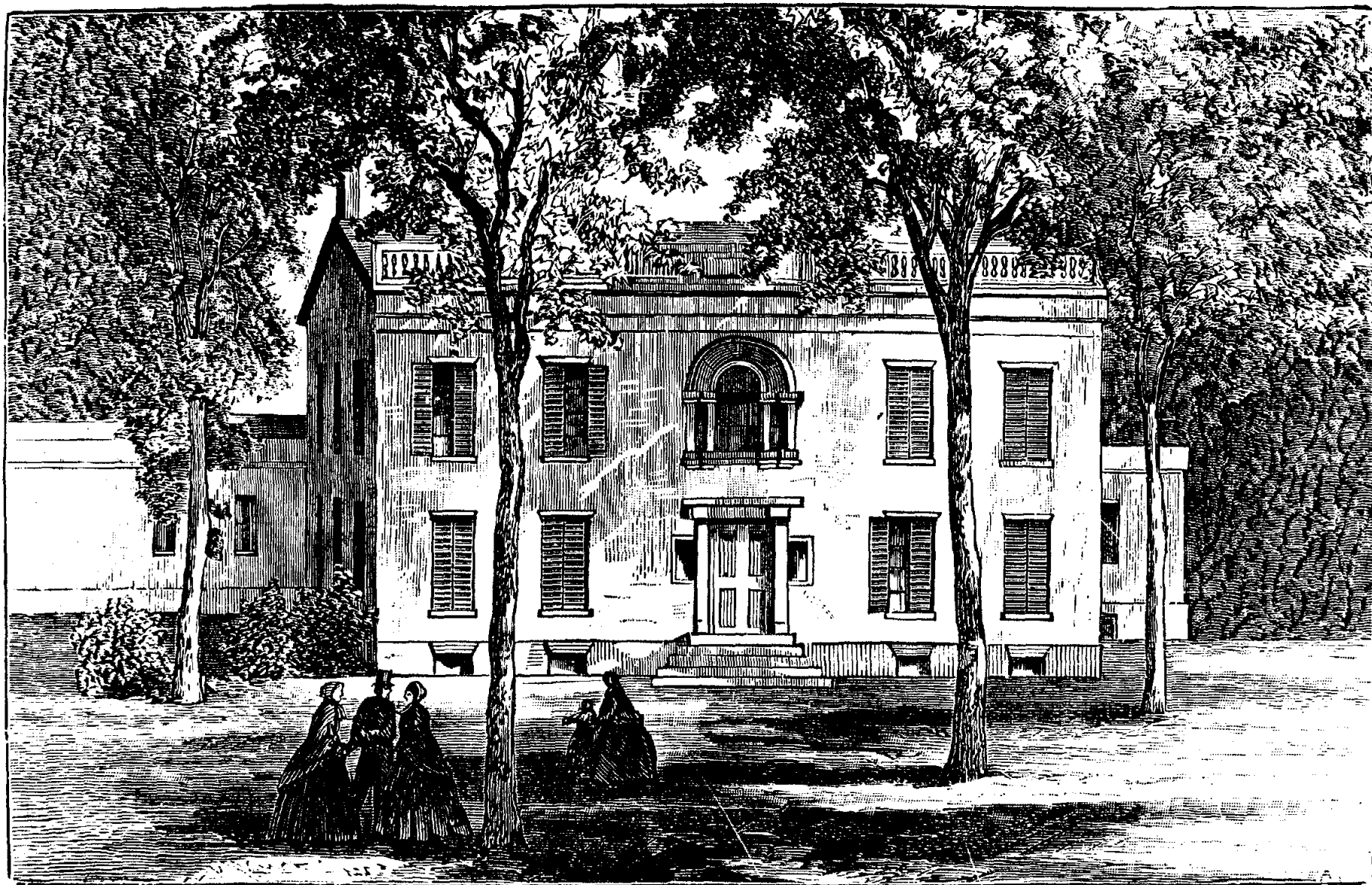


JOHN VAN BUREN.

After an engraving by J. C. Buttre

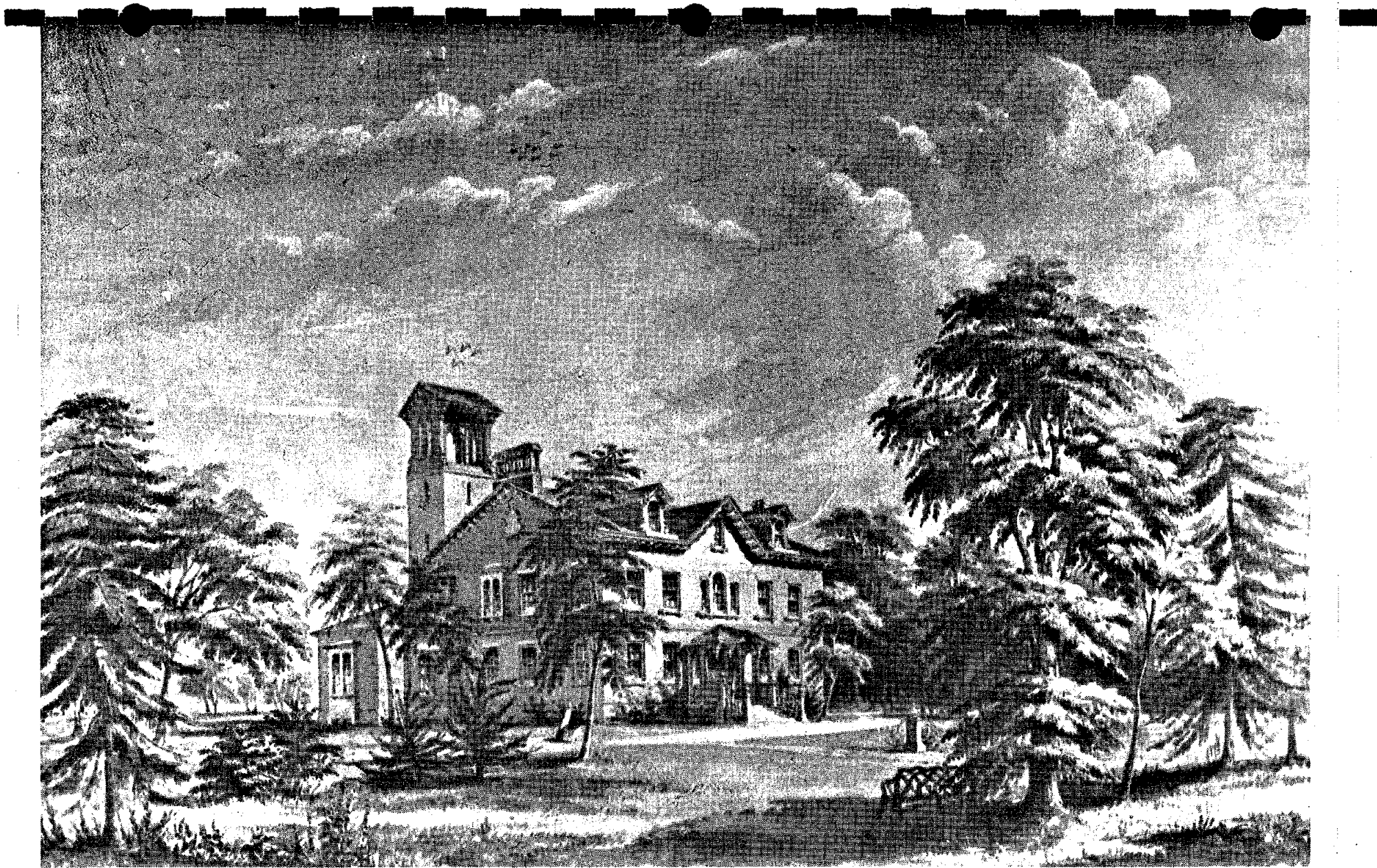
VI. Photograph of Leonard Jerome, n.d., from Ralph G. Martin, Jennie, The Life of Lady Randolph Churchill: The Romantic Years, 1854-1895 (New York, 1969).



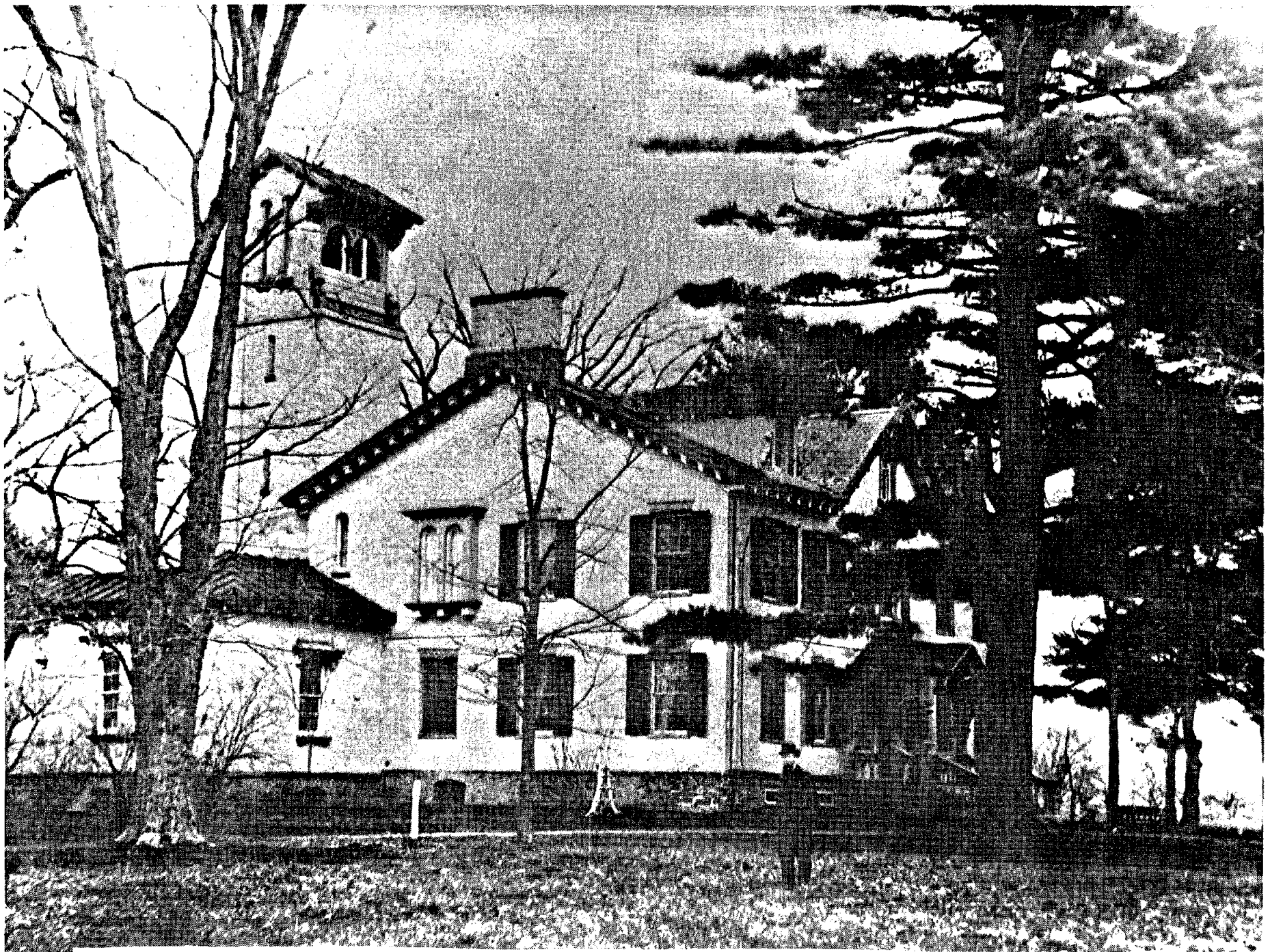


RESIDENCE OF MARTIN VAN BUREN.

VII. Drawing of Lindenwald, ca. 1847.



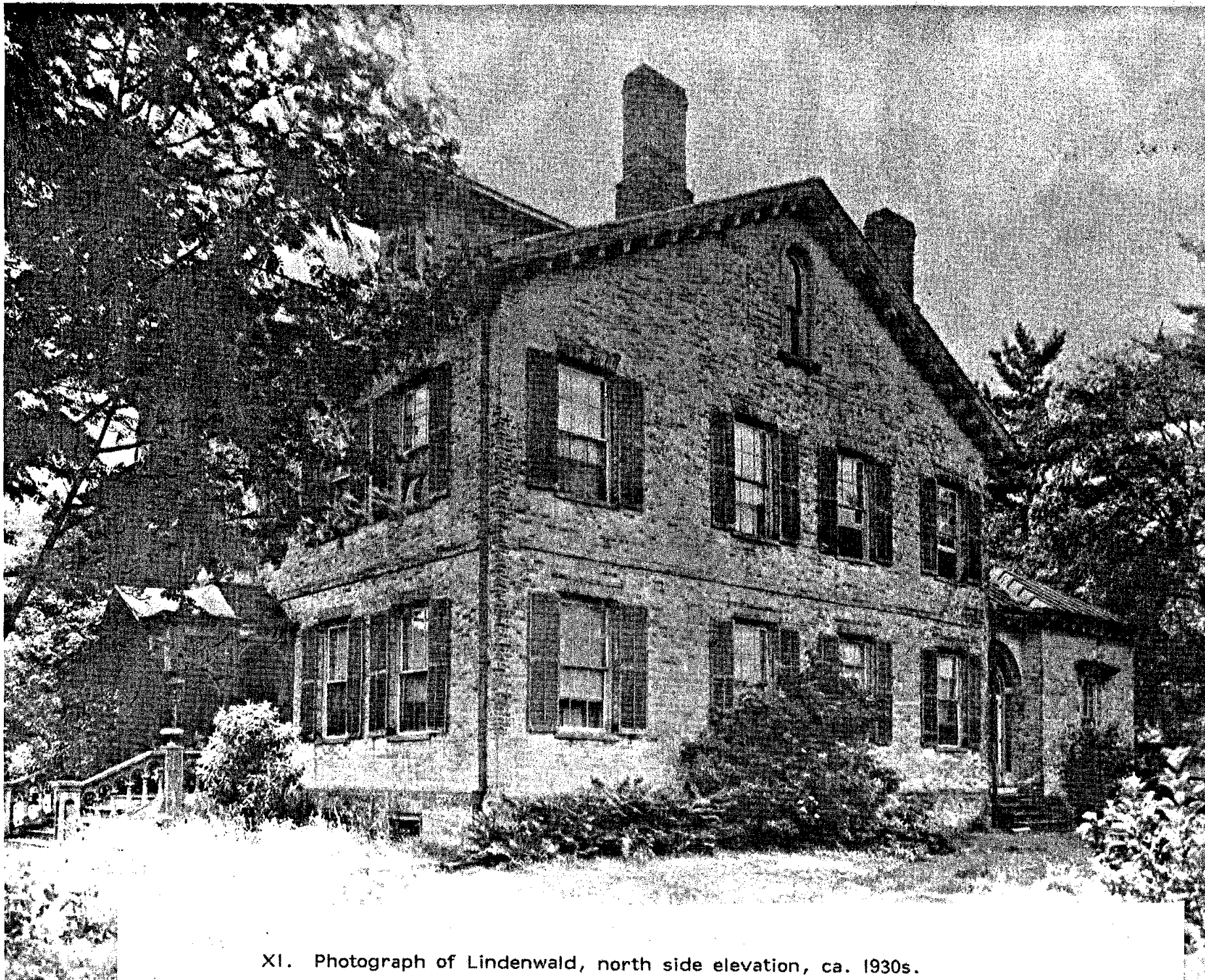
VIII. Drawing of Lindenwald by Richard Upjohn, 1849.



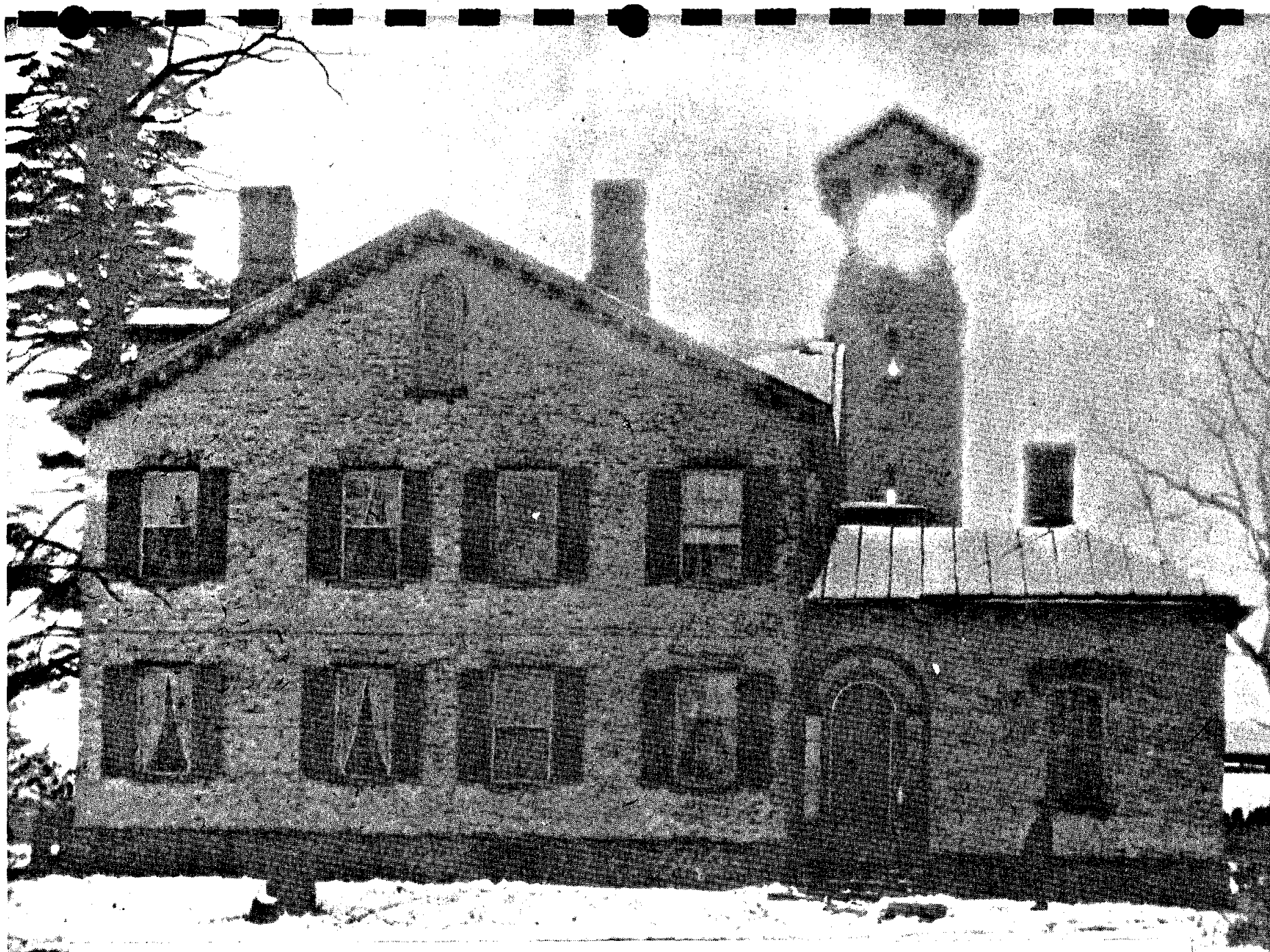
IX. Photograph of Lindenwald, south side elevation, ca. 1890s. Courtesy  
of Hazel Whitbeck Collection



X. Photograph of Lindenwald, east front elevation, ca. 1913. Courtesy of New York State Archives.



XI. Photograph of Lindenwald, north side elevation, ca. 1930s.  
Courtesy of Rowles Studio Collection.



XII. Photograph of Lindenwald, south side elevation, 1937.

Courtesy Historic American Buildings Survey (Nelson C. Baldwin, photographer).

As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, parks and recreation areas, and to ensure the wise use of all these resources. The department also has major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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