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The Spatial Practices of Privilege

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Figure 1 Peabody and Stearns, children's cottage on the grounds of the Breakers, Newport, Rhode Island, 1886 (courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Libraries)

The Spatial Practices of Privilege

ABIGAIL A. VAN SLYCK
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In July 1886, the *Mercury* of Newport, Rhode Island, reported that “Cornelius Vanderbilt . . . had built at his Ochre Point residence a Toy house for the pleasure of his children.” The story made no comment on the architectural features of this one-story, two-room cottage: not the whimsical figures supporting the roof of its porch, its bay windows, its half-timbered gables, nor the brick chimney rising high above its low roof line (Figure 1). The cryptic note included only three other facts: the architects were Peabody and Stearns of Boston; the builder was a Mr. McNeil, also of Boston; and the cost was \$5,000.¹

Astute *Mercury* readers would have known that Vanderbilt was the grandson of another Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794–1877; known as Commodore Vanderbilt), whose steamship lines had laid the groundwork for a family fortune that subsequent generations increased by investing in railroads. By the time his own father died in 1885, the younger Cornelius (1843–1899; often identified as Cornelius II) was chairman of the board of the New York Central, Hudson River, and Michigan Central Railroads and one of the richest men in the country. His father’s bequest of \$67 million had consolidated his place among America’s multimillionaires, a small, but highly visible group whose

lives—particularly outside the boardroom—were a topic of great public interest.²

Many *Mercury* readers would also have known that Vanderbilt’s Ochre Point residence was the Breakers, a rambling Queen Anne-style house designed by Peabody and Stearns for tobacco heir Pierre Lorillard (Figure 2).³ Completed in 1878, Lorillard’s Breakers was just one of the many sizable summer “cottages” constructed by New York millionaires bent on transforming Newport—once a bustling eighteenth-century seaport city—into the chief venue for their summer social season. Vanderbilt had purchased the Breakers in 1885 and set about making changes that would allow his wife, Alice Claypoole Gwynne Vanderbilt (1845–1934), to entertain on a grand scale. (House and hostess became so closely identified that Mrs. Vanderbilt came to be known locally as “Alice of the Breakers.”)⁴ By the end of 1886, the Vanderbilts would engage Peabody and Stearns to update the interior finishes of the main house and to construct an expansive new dining room.⁵

Yet, before commencing that work, the Vanderbilts’ first undertaking at the Breakers was the construction of the “toy house” for their growing brood: sons William Henry (1870–1892 and known as Bill), Cornelius III (1873–1942 and known as Neily), Alfred Gwynne (1877–1915), and Reginald Claypoole (1880–1925), and daughters Gertrude (1875–1942; later, as Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, the founder of the Whitney Museum of American Art) and Gladys Moore (1886–1965).⁶ If the timing of the “cottage,” as the family called it, suggests its importance to the Vanderbilts, so too

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Figure 2 Peabody and Stearns, the first Breakers, Newport, 1877–78 (Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, Rhode Island)

did their choice of architects. By 1886 Peabody and Stearns were emerging as Boston's preeminent architects, well known for large houses in seacoast locations.⁷ Equally telling was the cottage's cost. At a time when a full-scale middle-class house and its lot could be had for \$3,000, spending \$5,000 to build a two-room children's cottage on land one already owned was unprecedented, at least in the United States.⁸ Even in Europe, elaborate domestic structures for the use of youngsters were few and built primarily for royal offspring.⁹

The Breakers underwent a dramatic transformation in the 1890s. After an 1892 fire destroyed the main house, the Vanderbilts entrusted its rebuilding to Richard Morris Hunt, who had designed (or was in the process of designing) at least four other houses for Cornelius II's brothers.¹⁰ By the time of young Gertrude's coming-out ball in 1895, the gardens had been redesigned, the stables and greenhouses removed, and in place of the picturesque wooden house stood a stately, symmetrical limestone pile that evoked the palazzi of Renaissance Genoa (Figure 3).¹¹ Having survived both the fire and the subsequent reworking of the estate grounds, the children's cottage is the only remnant of Peabody and Stearns's work at the site. Unchanged (save for coats of white paint), the cottage has had millions of visitors since Gladys Vanderbilt Széchenyi first opened the Breakers to the public in 1948. Acquired by the Preservation Society of Newport in 1972, the Breakers currently attracts 350,000 visitors annually.¹²

Architecture, Childhood, and Privilege

Hunt's Breakers has been well documented in the history of architecture, where its design is recognized as playing a key role in the success of the lavish entertainments with which Cornelius II and Alice Vanderbilt made a place for themselves in society.¹³ Yet, the children's cottage has been assiduously ignored, perhaps because a small-scale, intentionally charming building purportedly designed for play does not appear to be a serious work of architecture. Certainly, it has been treated as distinct from the main house and unrelated to the adult activities and concerns manifest there.¹⁴

Yet, as a costly building designed by nationally recognized architects for an adult client they clearly hoped to cultivate, the children's cottage at the Breakers is—by most reckonings—a serious work of architecture. What is more, it is integral to an understanding of the Breakers, inasmuch as adulthood and childhood (like gender, race, class, and other social constructs) are constituted in their relationship to one another. This may have been particularly true in the nineteenth century, when the urban middle classes in Europe and America yoked their emerging class identity to their ability to provide their offspring with “a good and happy childhood.” As Marta Gutman and Ning de Coninck-Smith have noted, this understanding of childhood was based on several interrelated beliefs: that children were fundamentally different from adults; that childhood should be protected, nurtured, and playful; that a child's education



Figure 3 Richard Morris Hunt, the second Breakers, Newport, 1892–95; children's cottage visible on the left (Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, Rhode Island)

should be centered on mental, emotional, and physical development; and that clothes, toys, and even child-sized furniture were essential to translate this ideal of childhood into lived experience.¹⁵ Middle-class family life and household space were increasingly reorganized around children, who gave up productive labor in favor of what Karen Sánchez-Eppler has characterized as “emotional work,” specifically “requiring and expressing the family’s idealized capacity for love and joy.”¹⁶ Ever more insulated from adults in spatial terms, the bourgeois child was increasingly inseparable from adults’ perceptions of themselves.

Children played an equally important—yet quite different—role in the articulation of upper-class identity, especially among the Vanderbilts and other newly rich Americans who were apprehensive about their social status. Anxious to distinguish themselves from the middle class, they chose not to pursue the sentimental ideal of childhood favored among the bourgeoisie, although they had the financial resources to do so with vigor. Rather than organize their lives around the daily routines of their children, they focused on translating economic capital into cultural and social capital, the latter

defined by Pierre Bourdieu as resources “linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.”¹⁷ For these parvenus, the acquisition of social capital was perhaps the more elusive achievement, and these American aristocrats (as they liked to think of themselves) poured their wealth, time, and energy into the “unceasing effort of sociability” that Bourdieu has identified as central to the process in which social “recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed.”¹⁸ Although typically characterized as leisure, hosting and attending balls, tea parties, and other entertainments constituted a form of labor, especially for the women who acted as hostesses, but also for the men who often played large roles in commissioning the elegantly appointed houses—a major form of cultural capital—that served as the settings for these gala entertainments. In this sense, the acquisition of cultural capital and the maintenance of social capital were mutually supporting efforts.

In these social circles, children were explicitly excluded from adult sociability but implicitly central to their parents’ drive for social status. Although Thorstein Veblen singled

out the leisured woman as a public announcement of her husband's material wealth (for one thing, her restrictive clothing made it impossible for her to engage in "all vulgarly productive employment"), his formulation of conspicuous consumption applies equally to clean, well-dressed, leisured children.¹⁹ In other respects, however, children were both more important and more threatening than their mothers to the family's social status, as they possessed untapped potential for establishing social connections, even as their own social inclinations were unpredictable and difficult to control. A daughter might marry a European aristocrat and thus bring her family a treasured form of social capital they could not attain in other ways. Yet, it was equally possible for a child to befriend someone who would expose the family to distasteful and socially damaging connections.²⁰ Thus, at a time when middle-class offspring were becoming emotionally priceless to their families, the children of American aristocrats were valuable to their parents in a more concrete sense—dynastic resources that needed to be husbanded (in both senses of that word) in order to establish, maintain, and enhance their family's place in the upper echelons of society.

For American aristocrats enhancing class status was a complicated process that had a spatial component (creating new kinds of architectural spaces), as well as a generational one (managing the social interactions of their children in distinctly gendered ways). Space was integral to the project of using children to enhance privilege, while children were essential to using space to accomplish that goal. Yet, the relationships among space, class, gender, and generation were sometimes contradictory and not always easy to discern and interpret. Like their wealthy peers, the Vanderbilts tended to emulate the social and spatial practices of the British aristocracy, looking back to a time in which dynastic ambitions were understood to trump individual happiness. Yet, they were also enmeshed in a cultural moment in which the nuclear family was normative and the meaning of childhood had been transformed. They may not have embraced middle-class modes of family life, but they did not remain completely untouched by the cultural attitudes that buttressed them.

The children's cottage at the Breakers speaks directly to these contradictions. In its form and content, it evoked middle-class domesticity, but did so in the service of an upper-class identity that sought to distinguish itself from the middle class. Ostensibly a site of play, it was also a place of work, both for the Vanderbilts' servants as well as for the Vanderbilt offspring, whose activities in the cottage were integral to preserving their value as potential conduits of social capital. Modeled on an almshouse and devoted to the homely skills of cooking and sewing, the building made claims to

humbleness that were refuted by its size and expense and by spatial arrangements that supported the Vanderbilt children and their parents in seamless performances of their privileged status.²¹

Domestic Space and Elite Identity

The importance of using domestic space to consolidate class status is suggested by the extended building campaign undertaken by the Vanderbilt family in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This included Vanderbilt Row on New York's Fifth Avenue, as well as a number of country houses, notably the Breakers and Biltmore (1892–95), the Asheville, North Carolina, estate of George Vanderbilt, a brother of Cornelius II.²² This family building campaign is regularly interpreted as the product of intense sibling rivalry, and certainly brothers Cornelius II and William K. Vanderbilt saw themselves in competition to succeed their father as head of the family and its business affairs, while Alice Vanderbilt was deeply disapproving of her sister-in-law Alva.²³ But the constant round of building, expanding, and rebuilding suggests that the Vanderbilts—individually and collectively—were also involved in an effort to create new types of domestic containers in which they could build and maintain their place in society, while managing an unprecedented degree of public scrutiny. This struggle was less with their siblings (who faced the same challenges) and more with their own abilities to imagine these spaces and to articulate their needs to architects and other designers.²⁴

This tension was exacerbated by the fact that there were few elaborate houses to use as points of reference, even in New York, which had emerged after the Civil War as the social capital of the nation. As Wayne Craven has pointed out, New York elites of the previous generation—so-called Knickerbockers—favored brick and brownstone townhouses that could be quite grand, but that shared key characteristics with their middle-class neighbors.²⁵ With the emergence of new social practices, particularly lavish private entertainments, the Vanderbilts and other Gilded Age millionaires found their domestic routines in flux. Increasingly they needed new types of rooms (ballrooms, picture galleries, and large dining rooms), while their need for some traditional room types—notably the parlor—evaporated.²⁶ The houses that emerged in response to these changes were not merely lavish in the extreme (although that is perhaps their most visible characteristic); they were also remarkably complex spatial models of human relationships, places that supported the performance of a range of social identities that were constantly constructed in relationship to one another.



Figure 4 Seymour Guy, *Going to the Opera*, 1873; left to right: William Henry Vanderbilt, son Frederick, wife Maria Louisa, son George, daughter Florence, son William K, daughter Lila, daughter Margaret, son-in-law Elliott F. Shepard, a servant, daughter Emily, another servant, daughter-in-law Alice, son-in-law William Douglas Sloane, and son Cornelius II (used with permission from The Biltmore Company, Asheville, North Carolina)

The Vanderbilts' New York houses reveal the gradual emergence of new kinds of domestic space. Commodore Vanderbilt built his first house in Manhattan in 1845 at 10 Washington Place at Fourth Street. An ample four-story building with simple Federal details designed by Trench & Snook, it was a middle-class townhouse writ large, with a double parlor on one side of the entry hall and a reception hall and dining room on the other.²⁷ The Commodore's son, William H. Vanderbilt, followed suit in 1867, when he built a house on the southeast corner of Fifth Avenue and Fortieth Street. As shown in *Going to the Opera*, a family portrait painted by Seymour Guy in 1873, the room types and spatial arrangements of the house, with its double parlor, were familiar from 10 Washington Place and countless middle-class domiciles (Figure 4). The family's wealth was made manifest only in the size of the parlor and its human and material contents: the

presence of servants, the elaborate opera gowns of the family's grown daughters, the interior's fashionable décor, its up-to-date lighting technology, and the beginnings of what would become William H.'s vast art collection. Yet, despite these signs of the family's wealth, the apparatus of middle-class domesticity remained in place.

By about 1880, however, the Vanderbilts began moving in new directions. Not only did they relocate ten blocks north on Fifth Avenue (initiating a new neighborhood of elite housing), but the houses they built on Vanderbilt Row between 1877 and 1882 also departed from the domestic conventions of the Knickerbocker elite and the upper-middle-class in their materials, size, elaboration, and—eventually—in their room types and spatial arrangements as well. Both William H.'s house (a portion of the triple palace he built to house himself and two married daughters) and William K.'s French chateau

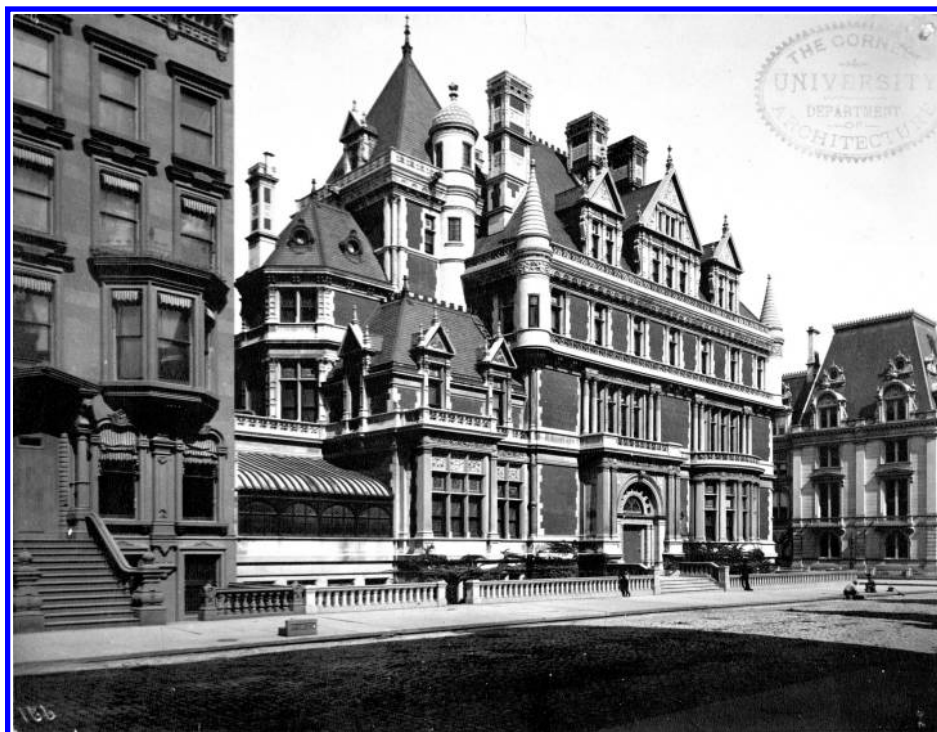


Figure 5 George B. Post, Cornelius Vanderbilt II house, northwest corner of Fifth Avenue at West Fifty-seventh Street, New York, 1879–82; West Fifty-seventh Street façade before the 1894 expansion (Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Libraries)

(designed by Richard Morris Hunt) included parlors on their main floors. Yet, William H.'s Japanese parlor—exotically decorated to showcase its owner's growing porcelain collection—was a far cry from the room depicted in *Going to the Opera*.²⁸ Moreover, these parlors were dwarfed and outnumbered by a new array of gala entertaining rooms (in addition to the enduring dining room): a drawing room, library, and 48-by-32-foot picture gallery in the father's house, and a library, breakfast room, billiard room, and salon (almost a third larger than the parlor) in the son's chateau. At West Fifty-seventh Street, Cornelius II commissioned George B. Post to design a house in the early French Renaissance style (Figure 5). There he did without a parlor entirely, at least after this new house was expanded in 1892–94. In its final iteration, the house included, on the ground floor, separate reception rooms for ladies and gentlemen; on the first floor, a library, breakfast room, small salon, large salon, and three double-height spaces: ballroom, smoking room, and dining room. The fifth floor accommodated a bowling alley.

Unlike middle-class houses in which the parlor gathered the family, the new generation of Vanderbilt houses featured room types that segregated their inhabitants for much of the day by sex, age, and class. The billiard room, the smoking room, the library, and the dining room were understood as male spaces, while the drawing room and breakfast room accommodated the social activities of women. Accompanied by increasingly complex arrangements for disguising the

presence of a large number and variety of service spaces (as well as their human operatives), this multiplication of entertaining spaces facilitated a degree of spatial separation between men and women and between gentry and servants that Annmarie Adams has pointed out was “a significant indication of class.”²⁹

The Demise of the Parlor

While the emergence of these new room types is meaningful, the disappearance of the parlor is also significant for an understanding of class-based differences in parent-child relationships. Middle-class Americans associated the parlor with emotional intimacy within the nuclear family, itself a social entity gaining in importance even as it was shrinking in size.³⁰ Consider, for instance, *Family Devotion*, an idealized scene of a middle-class parlor published by Currier and Ives in 1871 (Figure 6). In it, youthful parents and their three young children gather around a parlor table and its small circle of light. Seated in their chairs, father and mother frame the scene, defining the space inhabited by the children. While mother and children turn their attention to the father, who is pictured in profile reading aloud from the Bible, the frontal presentation of the mother and her physical contact with the two younger children highlight her importance to the family structure. The children may be read either as passive recipients of their parents' religious instruction or as the wellspring



Figure 6 Currier and Ives, *Family Devotion: Ask, and It Shall Be Given You; Seek and Ye Shall Find, Matt. VII:7* 1871 (Popular Graphic Arts Collection, Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, cph 3b50177)

of the moral sentiment that pervades the scene. As Karen Sánchez-Eppler argues, nineteenth-century temperance literature was full of tender young moral agents whose submissiveness and innocence were responsible for the redemption of their fathers.³¹ In either case, the parlor here is both the incubator for and the outward expression of close relationships between parents and children. Indeed, the title has a double meaning; as these family members use the parlor as a setting for religious devotion, they also enhance their devotion to one another as a family.

Contrast that scene with Seymour's 1873 representation of the Vanderbilts in the parlor they would abandon by the end of the decade (see Figure 4). At one level, *Going to the Opera* suggests that William H. and his wife Maria Louisa imagined the parlor in ways that their middle-class contemporaries would have recognized—as a venue for the display the family's cultural refinement and as a site where parents and children could acknowledge and celebrate the familial bonds uniting them. Yet, the scene is hardly a celebration of close emotional ties between youthful parents and their small children. In 1873, William H. and Maria Louisa Vanderbilt had been married thirty-two years and had produced four sons and four daughters who ranged in age from twelve to thirty. Three of these children were married and by the end of the year would have produced four offspring of their own. These married children stand in the right foreground of the canvas; their spouses sit near them or stand in the middle-ground beyond. They almost dominate the scene, except that the sharp gazes of the two married daughters return the viewer's attention to their dignified father, who sits in perfect profile in the left foreground, pocket watch in hand. Their mother is a secondary figure in the middle ground beyond;

rather than framing the action with her husband, she herself is framed by her two youngest sons. Bracketed by the figures of William H. and his eldest son Cornelius II (who ignores his father), *Going to the Opera* presents a distinctly patriarchal version of family structure, even as it hints at the tensions involved in transmitting patriarchal authority from one generation to the next. Family unity is represented here as a matter of dynastic continuity. Emotional closeness may have existed among various individuals, but it was not the glue expected to bind the family together. The Vanderbilts had little use for a room type closely associated with fostering the tender emotions that united middle-class parents and their offspring, and it is little wonder that parlors soon disappeared from the plans of their houses.

The next generation went even further than William H. in treating their offspring as resources whose marriages were integral to the failure or success of dynastic ambitions. This was notoriously true for William K.'s daughter, Consuelo, who was forced by her mother, Alva, to marry the ninth Duke of Marlborough in 1895, despite the fact that the eighteen-year-old girl was in love with a rich young American man to whom she considered herself engaged. Although loveless, the marriage was for some years a success in dynastic terms in that it produced two male heirs and provided Marlborough with funds to maintain Blenheim Palace, his ancestral home.³² In her turn, Alva (who divorced William K. the same year) achieved an entrée into a form of aristocracy the United States could not offer her.³³ Scandalized by Alva's behavior, the rest of the family did not attend Consuelo's wedding. Yet, their actions reveal similar aspirations and a comparable willingness to discount emotional happiness as a factor in approving their children's choices in

marriage partners. Cornelius II and Alice, for instance, refused to speak to their son Neily when in 1896 he successfully resisted patriarchal authority and married Grace Graham Wilson, whom the senior Vanderbilts considered an adventuress.³⁴ Like Alva, Alice (widowed in 1899) also had the pleasure of seeing a daughter married to a European aristocrat, when in 1908, her youngest child, Gladys, wed the Hungarian Count László Széchenyi.

The Vanderbilts' desire to connect themselves to European aristocrats was widely shared among American multimillionaires and may have derived from a desire to secure for themselves a social status that money could not buy—despite the fact that public opinion held that that was precisely what they had done.³⁵ If these parents treated their children in ways that were anathema to their middle-class contemporaries, they were nonetheless like their bourgeois critics in wanting to do all they could to help their offspring thrive, both in their youth and as adults. Like their middle-class critics, they continued to live as nuclear families and to understand childhood as a distinct phase of life. The differences arose primarily in the preparation they gave their children to accept their social privilege as a matter of course.

Children's Spaces in an Elite New York City House

The Vanderbilt's domestic arrangements speak to the challenges they faced as parents. If they had little need for parlors, they did require nurseries like those in middle-class houses, rooms that protected adult areas of the house from the sights, sounds, and smells of infants.³⁶ Unlike their middle-class contemporaries, however, the Vanderbilts and other American aristocrats also built a wider range of children's rooms—to complete the spatial segregation that organized the rest of the house; to give spatial expression to distinctions among children, by age, gender, and rank (as determined by birth order); and to provide settings in which children could prepare for their adult roles.

The types and functions of various children's spaces were explained in detail by British architect Robert Kerr in *The Gentleman's House; or, How to Plan English Residences, From the Parsonage to the Palace*. Despite its nationalistic title, this 1864 book was influential on both sides of the Atlantic, where it was the Bible of the spatially segregated, parlorless planning embraced by the Vanderbilts and their ilk.³⁷ The author's tendency to illustrate these spatial principles with plans of manor houses may well have increased the book's popularity among wealthy Americans who modeled their behavior on the social practices of British aristocrats and often harbored aspirations of joining their ranks, if only through marriage.

Kerr identified the treatment of children's spaces as one of the chief distinctions of class. In houses above "a certain mark," he noted, "the completeness of the withdrawal [of children] will be the chief object."³⁸ The precise location of this withdrawal depended on both the age and gender of the child. Infants and younger children of both sexes were cared for in a nursery under the supervision of a nurse. In its most complete form, the nursery was an extensive suite of rooms: a day nursery, a night nursery (preferably with a bathroom attached), a nursery scullery (expected "in every case of pretension") and, "in superior houses," a nurse's room as well. Arranged like "a cheerful Sitting-room," the day nursery needed to be large enough to accommodate the play of the children of the house, their friends, and the children of their parents' guests. Fitted with beds for several children and the nurse, the night nursery would ideally have "a cheerful morning aspect . . . and a comfortable fireside for seasons of illness." Kerr noted that "the most usual position for the Nurseries in a good house is at that point where the Family Sleeping-rooms and the Servants' rooms meet at the Back Staircase, and on the First [in American usage, second] Floor."³⁹ In the plans Kerr used in the second and third editions of his book to illustrate what he considered ideal arrangements, the nursery suite was on the servants' side of the back stairs, suggesting that the nursery was closely associated with the abject—preverbal infants, soiled bibs, and dirty diapers (Figure 7).⁴⁰

Older children of both sexes slept in their own bedrooms, but were expected to spend their waking hours in the school room, where their daily routines were overseen by a tutor (for boys) or a governess (for girls). Like the nursery, the fully equipped school room was a suite of spaces: the school room itself (a combination study/day-room for the pupils and sitting room for the governess), a bedroom for the governess (preferably close to the bedrooms of the young ladies), a separate entrance lobby, and a washroom with water-closet. Unlike the nursery, the school room—housing as it did children old enough to control their bodily functions—could be placed in close proximity to the family bedrooms. Boys, according to Kerr, could be expected to leave the school room before their sisters to attend boarding school. Girls, presumably, would spend their days in the school room until they were old enough to join the adults in other parts of the house.⁴¹

The built evidence suggests that Cornelius II and Alice Vanderbilt were aware of the principles of spatial segregation described by Kerr, although they adapted them somewhat to their particular needs. In the first iteration of their New York house on Fifth Avenue at Fifty-seventh Street, the relatively constricted site meant that the spatial segregation of children was achieved vertically, with most of the building's third floor dedicated to their use, well

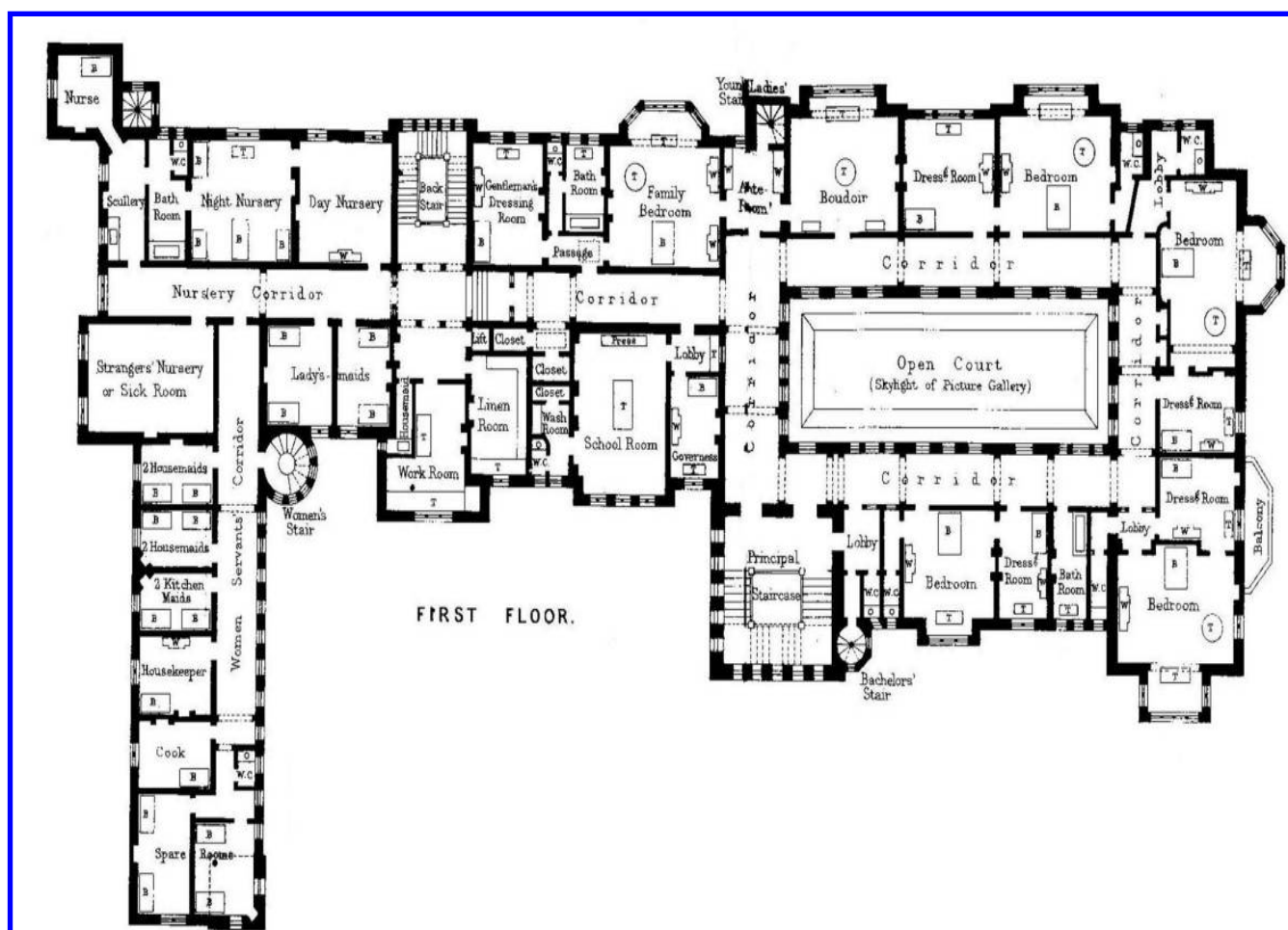


Figure 7 Robert Kerr, Bear Wood, Berkshire, 1865–74, second-floor plan, as published in *A Gentleman's House*, 2nd ed., 1865; in upper-left corner: the nursery suite is on the service side of the back stair; on the other side a corridor leads to a family bedroom and the school room, adjacent to a room for the governess

away from the ground floor rooms devoted to adult sociability (see Figure 5).⁴² The third floor featured the key room types that Kerr recommended for the care and maintenance of elite youngsters: a school room at one end of the hallway and, at the other, day and night nurseries opening onto a subsidiary corridor that helped insulate them from the main hall (Figure 8). A spiral stair led down from the night nursery to the dressing room shared by the senior Vanderbilts, giving the parents relatively easy access to their small children.⁴³

In 1894—some eight years after the construction of the children's cottage at the Breakers—the Vanderbilts expanded their New York house and renovated many of its existing rooms. In large part, these changes were motivated by the desire for an expanded range of spaces for gala entertainment (notably a vast first-floor ballroom) and by the aspiration to keep pace with changing tastes (shifting from the Aesthetic Movement interiors initially designed under

the leadership of John La Farge to Louis XIV and Louis XV interiors, many of which were created in Paris by Jules Alard et Fils).⁴⁴ Yet, in elaborate drawings that show the entire building and all its human inhabitants, architect George B. Post made it clear that he and his clients understood the house not solely as a set of gala rooms that fulfilled its destiny during fancy-dress balls, but as a carefully designed container for an elaborate social system that functioned around the clock, day after day, and of which children were integral parts.

The expanded house continued to facilitate the withdrawal of children from the main part of the house, while allowing for the different treatment of sons and daughters of different ages. Female children were kept closer to their parents, perhaps because their presence was considered less disruptive to adult routines or because they were considered in greater need of parental oversight. In contrast, spaces for male children were kept at some remove, allowing boys

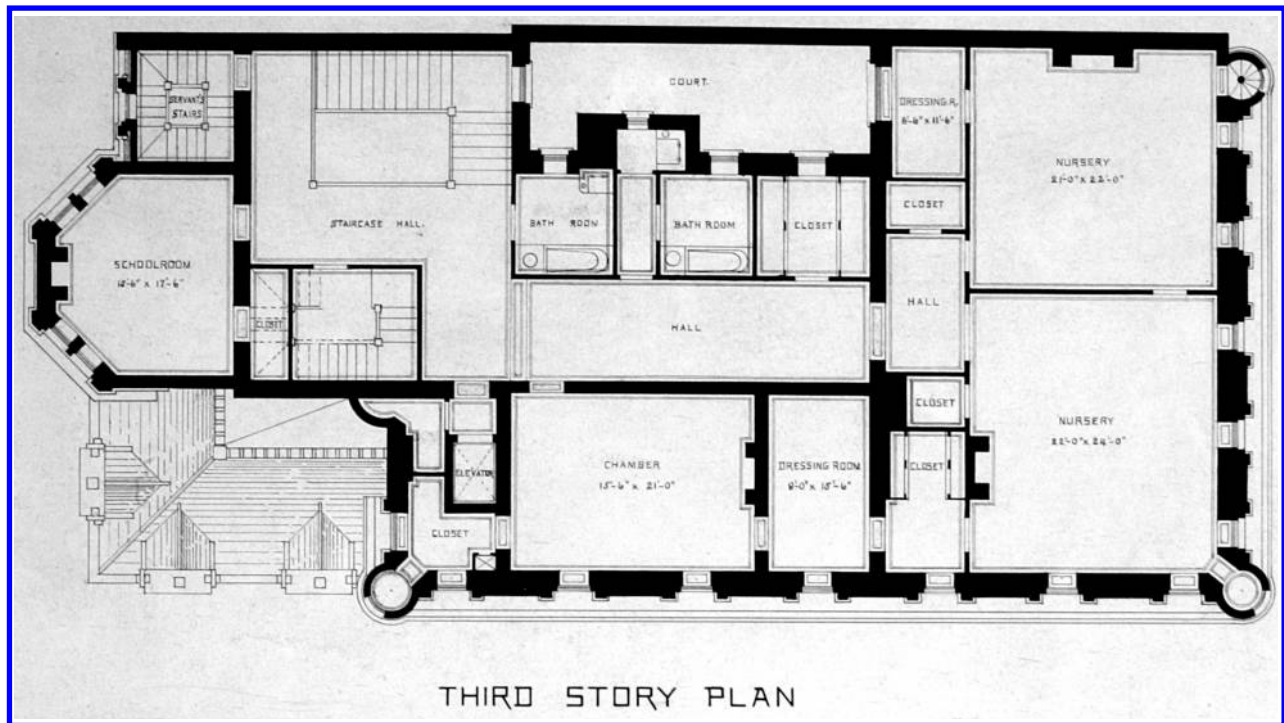


Figure 8 Post, Cornelius Vanderbilt II house, third-floor plan, before 1894 expansion (collection of The New-York Historical Society)

greater scope for independent action, while keeping them out of ear-shot. In both realms—and in contrast to middle-class practice—the eldest son and elder daughter were provided with rooms that helped each of them prepare for the adult activities they would soon be expected to perform. Gertrude, for instance, who was quickly approaching her coming out in society, was provided with accommodation on the second floor that paralleled her mother's: a chamber, a connecting boudoir, and a private bath (Figure 9).⁴⁵

On the third floor, her brother Neily was provided with a private chamber, albeit sans private bath (Figure 10).⁴⁶ Although Neily's chamber was only the size of Gertrude's boudoir (located directly below it), he and his brothers also enjoyed the use of a new room type: the "boys' room." A very large room with a canted ceiling that rose higher than those of other rooms on this level, the boys' room was dominated by a massive fireplace whose over-life-size caryatids (designed by Augustus Saint-Gaudens and representing Pax and Amor) supported a mosaic overmantel by John La Farge (Figure 11).⁴⁷ The entire ensemble had graced the original entrance hall of the house, while the room's carved ceiling panels of mythological figures (also by Saint-Gaudens) were recycled from the older dining room. Furnished as it was with a pool table, sofas, and chairs, the boys' room accommodated at least some of the activities that older men pursued in the Moorish billiard and smoking room on the first floor. That it shared the scale and finish of first-floor gala

rooms suggests that the boys' room was intended as a place where Vanderbilt sons could entertain their friends while practicing elite modes of male sociability they would soon encounter in the world of adults.⁴⁸

These new mansions of the Gilded Age were much more than a constellation of gala rooms for new modes of entertaining. Equally important were a wide variety of family spaces, many of them devoted to the use of children. In addition to preserving the gala rooms for adult sociability, the children's spaces helped youngsters—especially those approaching adulthood—practice and perfect the performance of elite identity.

Children's Spaces at the First Breakers

The importance of children's spaces to the effective operation of an elite household is particularly clear in the changes Cornelius II and Alice Vanderbilt made at the Breakers. Commanding a dramatic ocean-front site on Ochre Point, the main house was something of a hybrid. On the exterior, its Queen Anne details, irregular footprint, and lively silhouette gave the Breakers the appearance of a middle-class house built on a grand scale (see Figure 2). The plan, however, boasted many of the room types and spatial arrangements familiar from British country houses and necessary to sustain the house parties and lavish balls at the center of the Newport summer social season (Figure 12). Like the houses

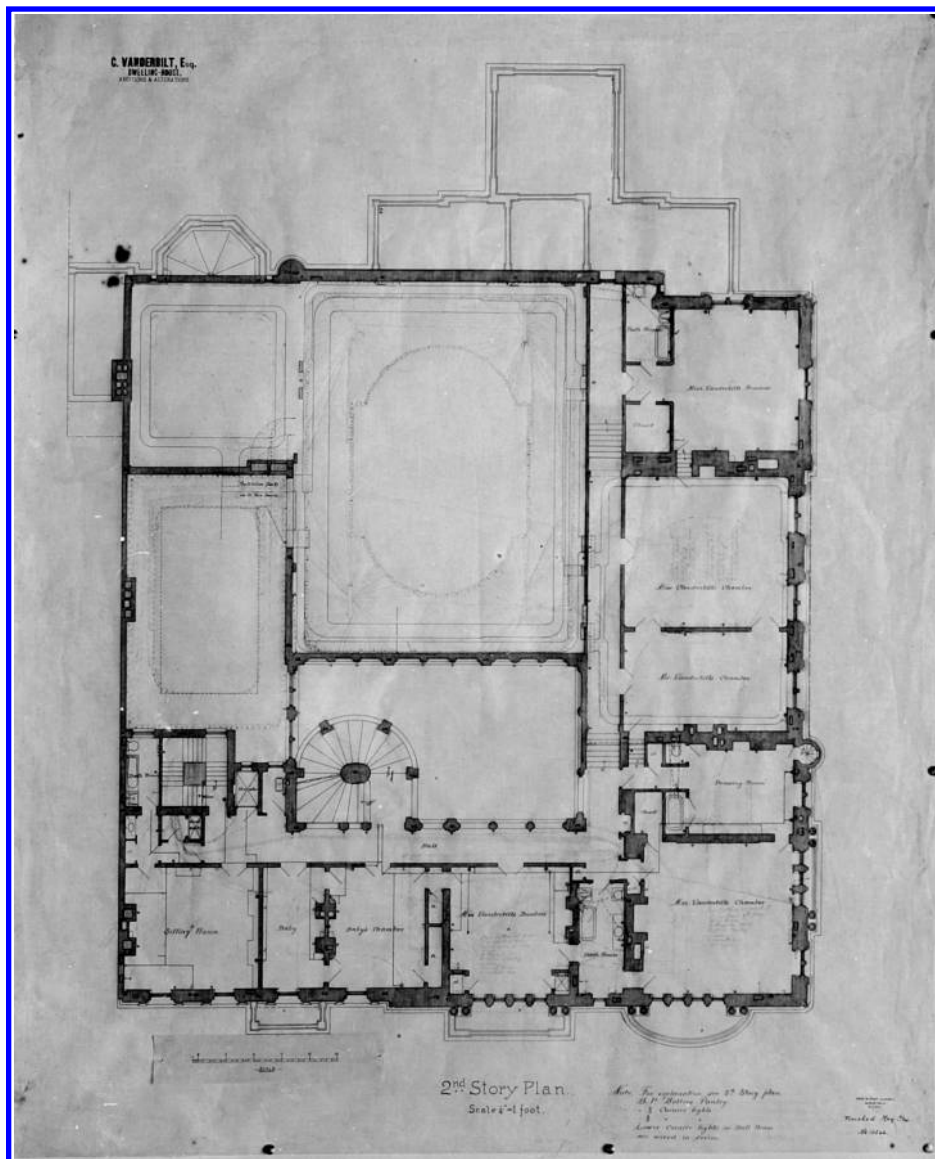


Figure 9 Post, Cornelius Vanderbilt II house, as expanded in 1894, second-floor plan; in upper-right corner: Gertrude's boudoir and chamber face Fifth Avenue; in lower-right corner: Mrs. Vanderbilt's chamber, bath, and boudoir are close to two rooms for "the baby," six-year-old Gladys (collection of The New-York Historical Society)

on Vanderbilt Row in New York, the first Breakers lacked a parlor, the symbolic and physical core of any middle-class domicile. A prominent fireplace—the other symbol of family togetherness—was located in the capacious entrance hall near the stairs, an arrangement also apparent in other Newport cottages of the 1870s and 1880s, notably the William Watts Sherman house (designed by H. H. Richardson and completed in 1875) and the Isaac Bell house (designed in 1881–83 by McKim, Mead, and White). At the Breakers, however, this stair hall was an immense space that did double duty as a ballroom. On one side of the hall were a morning room, drawing room, and library—essentially the distaff side of the house. On the other side were rooms associated with men: the billiard room and the dining room (the site for the male ritual of after-dinner port and cigars). The first

Breakers also provided essential service spaces, including a spacious butler's pantry fitted out with cabinets (for the storage of china, crystal, and silver in vast quantities) and countertops (for the transformation of dishes prepared in the enormous kitchen into elaborate sculptural concoctions deemed appropriate for the dining room).

The elite character of the first Breakers was also evident on the second floor, notably in the provision of five spacious sleeping chambers, all of a similar size, two of which were linked by a communicating dressing room—an arrangement that provided separate bedrooms for husband and wife (Figure 13). The second floor also provided a nursery, located (as Kerr recommended) well out of sight of ground-floor rooms devoted to entertaining and in a liminal space closer to the back hall and servants' rooms than to the parents' chambers. Yet,

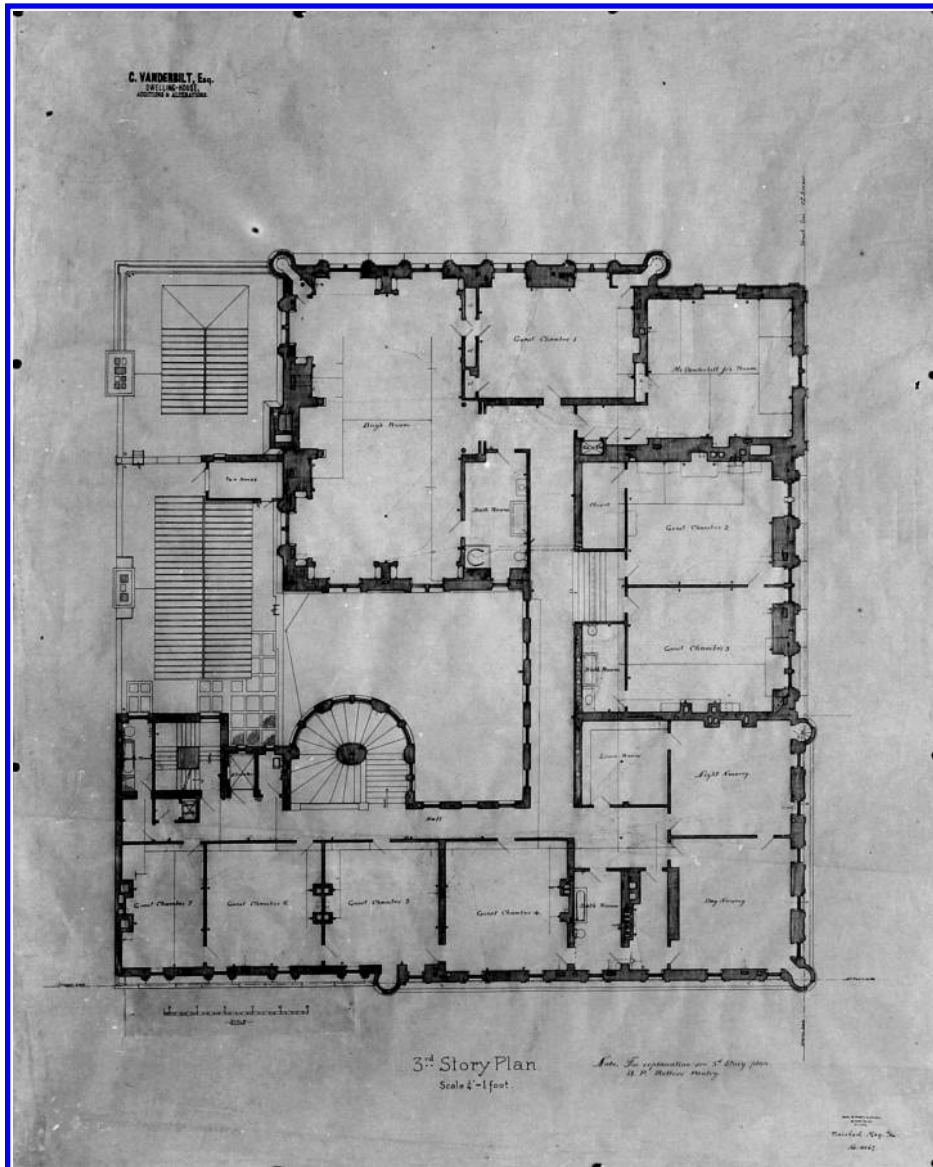


Figure 10 Post, Cornelius Vanderbilt II house, as expanded in 1894, third-floor plan; in upper-left corner: the large boys' room stands at the end of a corridor that also serves Neily's room (upper-right corner); the day and night nurseries (lower-right corner); and guest rooms (collection of The New-York Historical Society)

Lorillard's Breakers did not include the full range of children's spaces enumerated by Kerr and in evidence in the first iteration of the Vanderbilts' New York house, despite the fact that in 1878 Pierre and Emily Lorillard had four children ranging in age from five to twenty.⁴⁹ Perhaps because it was built for use during a few months each summer, the original Breakers included no school room—the room type that served as a catch-all space for children who had outgrown the nursery.

To correct this deficiency, even before the Vanderbilts set out to expand the gala rooms of their Newport estate, they added the children's cottage. While no extant written documents record the Vanderbilts' decision to undertake this project, an analysis of the building's siting, exterior design, interior arrangements, and social use reveals that the cottage

was an integral component of the larger estate—part of the complex spatial system that Cornelius II and Alice Vanderbilt created to provide a stage on which to perform their own sense of themselves as American aristocrats, to prepare their children to maneuver successfully in this exclusive social milieu, and to manage parent-child relationships complicated by great wealth.

Locating the Children's Cottage

One of the first steps in the process of constructing the cottage was to identify a site for it on the grounds of the estate, a picturesque garden originally designed for Lorillard in 1877 by Ernest Bowditch, a Boston-based landscape architect. Bowditch maintained an active interest in the site into



Figure 11 Post, Cornelius Vanderbilt II house, as expanded in 1894, boys' room (collection of The New-York Historical Society)

the 1880s; in the years bracketing the construction of the cottage, he designed landscapes for Vinland—the adjacent estate owned by Lorillard's cousin, Catherine Lorillard Wolfe—and Wakehurst, which stood across Ochre Point Avenue from Vinland. Bowditch envisioned the Breakers and Vinland as “foils for each other”—conceptually, at least, one contiguous landscape whose serpentine paths were intended to enhance the natural appearance of what was in fact a highly contrived layout.⁵⁰

Circulation was considered with care and helped orchestrate cross-class interactions between the Vanderbilts and their guests on one hand, and the men and women who

lived and worked at the Breakers as servants on the other (Figure 14). A gatehouse at the center of the Ochre Point Avenue side of the property marked the main entrance where an oval driveway led to the main house before continuing on to the carriage-house and stable (marked in plan with an X). Narrower drives and footpaths formed two secondary, and sometimes overlapping, circulation systems. One connected the oval drive with service outbuildings concentrated in the northwest corner of the site.⁵¹ The other system—for use by family and guests—emanated from the main house and made a leisurely circuit around the balance of estate. Plantings reinforced the different characters of the two systems. Lush

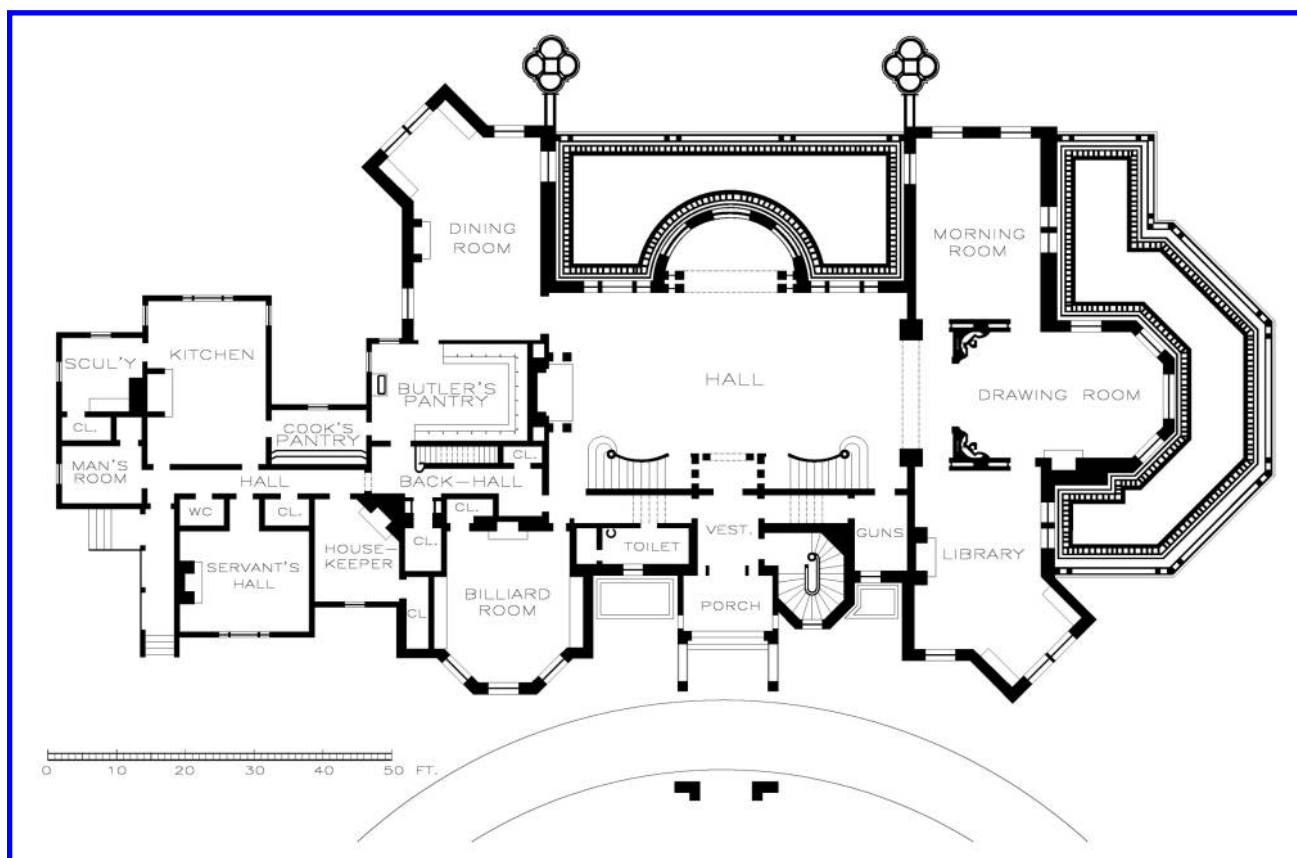


Figure 12 Peabody and Stearns, the first Breakers, first-floor plan (from *American Architect and Building News* 132 [6 July 1878], redrawn by Erin Okabe-Jawdat)

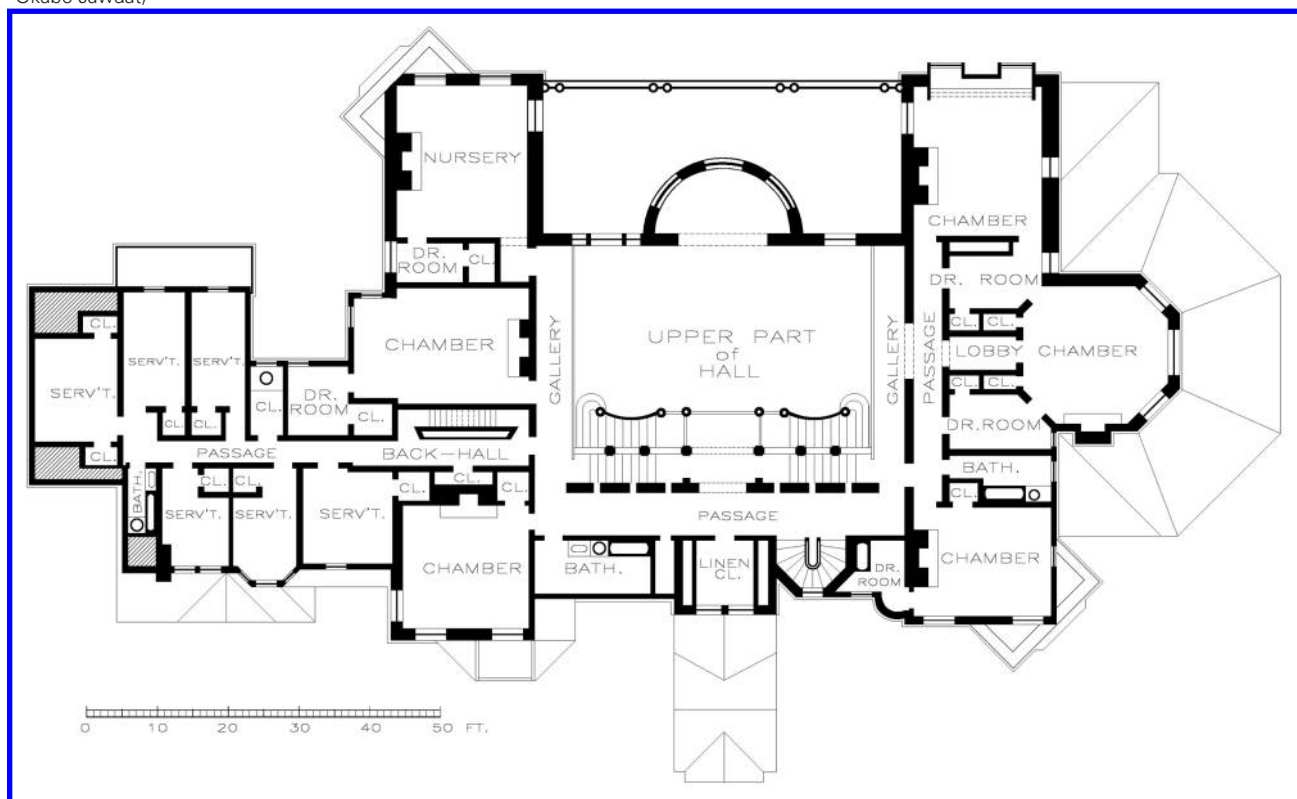


Figure 13 Peabody and Stearns, the first Breakers, second-floor plan (from *American Architect and Building News* 132 [6 July 1878]; redrawn by Erin Okabe-Jawdat)

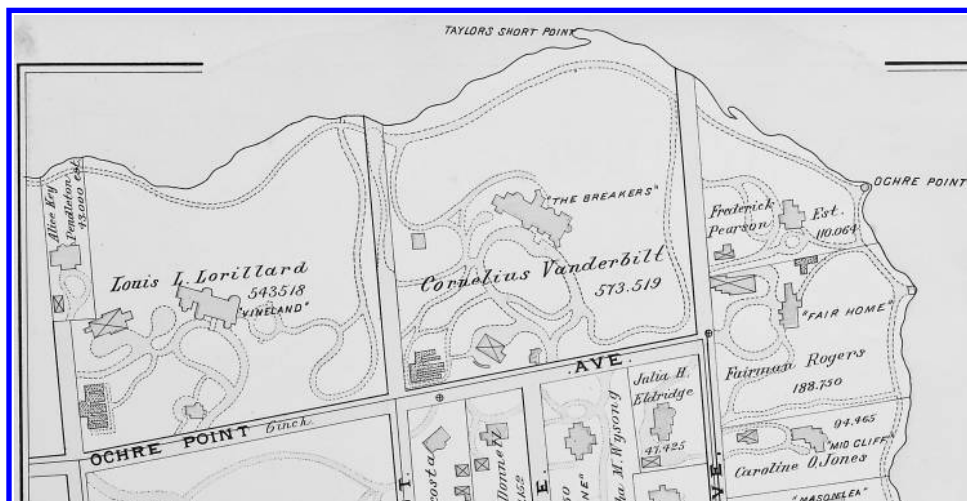


Figure 14 Peabody and Stearns, the first Breakers, site plan, with a simple rectangle as a place-marker for the irregularly shaped children's cottage (from *Atlas of the City of Newport, Rhode Island* [Newport: L. J. Richards & Co., 1893], plate B; Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, Rhode Island)

vegetation along the service paths and drives shielded the house from public view and helped disguise the existence of outbuildings (Figure 15), while low floral borders and a broad expanse of lawn provided the family and their guests with an unimpeded view of the ocean.

The children's cottage was situated between these two circulation systems. Sitting on the edge of the property's service-oriented quadrant, it was similar to the stable and greenhouses in that it was not accessed directly from the oval drive and remained only partially visible from the drive and from the ocean. Yet, its porch and main door faced away from the service buildings, addressing a family footpath that connected the house to the sea. In many ways, the situation of the cottage on the estate grounds was akin to the location of the nursery inside the house. Plantings reinforced the distinct character of the cottage zone. Hollyhocks—associated

with “old-fashioned” cottage gardens—dominated the rear planting beds, while a garden of individual plants on the south side of the house (perhaps a kitchen garden) contrasted sharply with the dense flower beds that lined walks and surrounded the main house.

After the first Breakers burned in 1892, the cottage remained unchanged (Figure 16). The landscape, however, underwent a dramatic transformation, as Ernest Bowditch (now working with his brother James) reworked the site to parallel Hunt's radical changes to the architectural character of the house. The new design highlighted the differences between the formal drive—now broad, straight, and arranged to make two crisp turns in front of the house before continuing out to the side street—and the secondary circulation system, which retained its narrow, curving paths. Significantly, the stables and greenhouses were removed entirely from the environs of the house; their replacements were built some four blocks away.⁵² Also gone were the close web of curving paths and dense plantings that had once characterized the northwest quadrant of the property. The gently curving footpath that connected the house to the ocean was extended to circumscribe the entire site, thus vastly expanding the amount of outdoor space devoted to the family's leisure, which included lavish garden parties.

The new Breakers was predicated on a different attitude toward the visibility of the house. Rather than shielding it from public view on the Ochre Point Avenue side, the landscape plan and entrance gates designed by Hunt offered passers-by a carefully framed view of the house's main façade and its porte-cochère. Standing just off the driveway that extended from the house to Sheppard Avenue, the rear elevation of the cottage became newly visible from the public street; eventually, this view was also framed by an elaborate



Figure 15 Peabody and Stearns, the first Breakers, seen from Ochre Point Avenue (Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, Rhode Island)

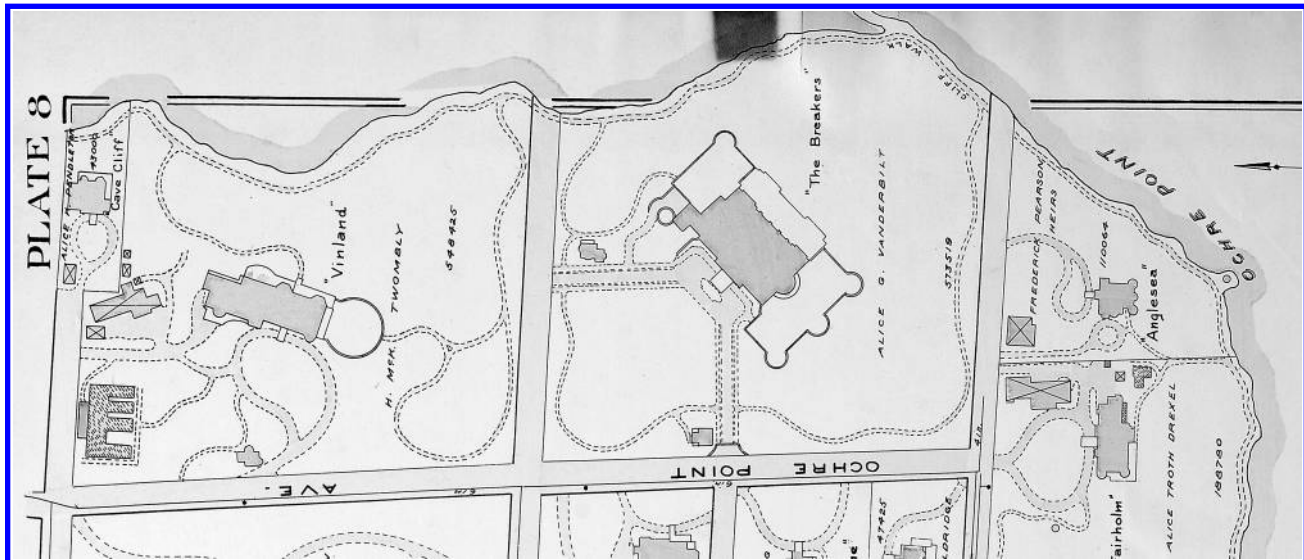


Figure 16 Hunt, the second Breakers, site plan, after fire of 1892 (from *Atlas of the City of Newport, Rhode Island and the Towns of Middletown and Portsmouth, Rhode Island* [Newport: L. J. Richards & Co., 1907], plate 8; Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, Rhode Island)

gate (see Figure 3). At a time when play had become culturally valuable as evidence of a good and happy childhood, this new configuration served as proof that Vanderbilt children played. Given the avalanche of negative public commentary directed toward another branch of the Vanderbilt family at the time of Consuelo's marriage in 1895, Cornelius II and Alice may have been particularly eager to make a public demonstration that they were caring parents.⁵³ Simultaneously, the cottage also came to serve—at least visually—as a pendant to the gate house, a foreground feature whose small size, modest scale, and dark colors offered a sharp contrast with the monumental limestone palazzo and thus enhanced its grandeur. In short, the children's cottage played multiple roles at the Breakers, only one of which was accommodating the needs and desires of children.

Designing the Children's Cottage

Even before these changes of the 1890s, the cottage was not simply a miniature version of the main house, although the same architects designed both buildings in the Queen Anne style. In both, front-facing gables identified the location of rooms devoted to socializing, while the service spaces were housed in side wings distinguished by lower roofs and simpler silhouettes. Yet, the architectural vocabulary of the cottage differed in important ways from that used at the main house. Designed just after the United States celebrated its centenary in 1876—an event that fueled the fire of the emerging Colonial Revival in art and architecture—the main house reveals Robert Swain Peabody's interest in

the architectural forms of Colonial America and particularly the classical details of stately Georgian houses.⁵⁴

In contrast, the children's cottage, as initially built, was untouched by Colonial Revival sensibilities, something that is difficult to perceive today in the presence of so much white paint, applied indiscriminately sometime after 1933.⁵⁵ Instead of elements drawn from the American past, the cottage features an eclectic mix of motifs—a blind-arched chimney, half-timbered gables, both bow and bay windows, and a squatly proportioned front door—popular in British versions of the Queen Anne style. In fact, the exterior details of the cottage were inspired by a group of almshouses designed by British architects Ernest George and Harold Peto (Figure 17).⁵⁶ Built in 1879 in Guildford, England, on land given by William Hillier, fourth Earl of Onslow, the Hillier Charities provided housing for twelve poor widows. A plan, elevation, and perspective view had been published in *The Building News* in 1879, but it seems more likely that Peabody became familiar with the almshouses via *The British Architect*, which published perspective views and details of five porch figures in December 1885, just as he and his firm were beginning their second phase of work at the Breakers.⁵⁷

Cryptic notes in Peabody's travel diaries provide glimpses of the interaction between the architect and his clients in the initial stages of the project. Cornelius II and Alice Vanderbilt met with Peabody on 7 January 1886, when the architect traveled to Newport with his initial designs for what he called the "tea house" and secured his clients' approval. By the end of the month, the architect traveled to New York to bring Mr. Vanderbilt construction estimates.

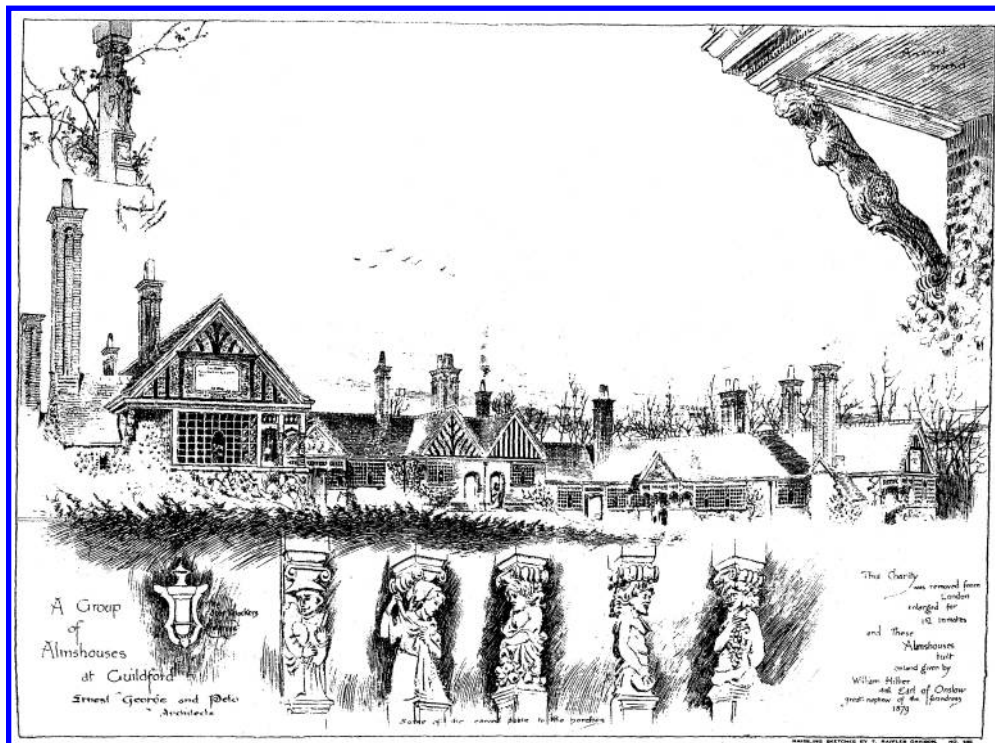


Figure 17 Ernest George and Peto, Hillier's almshouses, Guildford, England, 1879 (from *The British Architect* 24 [18 Dec. 1885])

Peabody noted that these estimates were “too high,” the one indication that Vanderbilt did set limits on the amount he would spend on his children. Including the notation to “arrange to have tea house smaller or wood,” Peabody’s diaries also reveal that the initial scheme did not call for the wooden building ultimately constructed, suggesting that he may have originally envisioned something even closer to the brick almshouses in Guildford.⁵⁸

No other correspondence between the architect and his clients survives to illuminate the choice of almshouses as a model for a cottage for the children of the richest man in America.⁵⁹ As an architecture of caring, the almshouses may have seemed appropriate for a building to be used by dependent offspring. Peabody may also have been attracted to these almshouses precisely because they were humble cottages of English origin. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, architectural theorists (among them Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc) had idealized the cottage—the rural dwelling of the peasantry—as an appropriate model for small houses in many settings.⁶⁰ To the extent that European and American architects also associated the cottage with England (something that Amy Ogata has demonstrated was the case by the 1890s), they turned for inspiration to British architectural publications and particularly to the domestic projects of Richard Norman Shaw, Ernest George and Harold Peto, and, somewhat later, C. R. Ashbee, among others.⁶¹ A set of connected cottages arranged around three

sides of a rectangular lawn, the Hillier almshouses displayed in happy combination many of the type’s key visual tropes: small size, modest scale, sheltering roofs with eaves that extend below eye level, half timbering, prominent chimneys, deep porches, bay windows, and materials left in their natural state (or stained to suggest that state).⁶²

Peabody was also evidently attracted to the almshouses’ iconographic program—or what he may have imagined that program to be, as the meaning of the buildings’ porch figures was explained neither in *The British Architect* nor in *The Building News*.⁶³ Of the four figures supporting the porch roof, the two male figures are directly based on sketches from *The British Architect* (Figures 18, 19). In Newport, they stand on either side of the porch steps and are understood to represent Music and Gluttony. While Music is paired with a female figure identified as Drama, Gluttony’s female partner is Vanity.⁶⁴ All four figures are more charming than grotesque; in comparison to their British counterparts, Music and Gluttony are shorter, squatter, clean-shaven, and perhaps intentionally more childlike. They nonetheless seem to offer the young Vanderbilts a stern admonition about the fine line between cultural pursuits and self-indulgence.

The decorative panel in the main gable of the cottage is an even more direct exhortation to clean living. In it, two pastoral youths torment the tongue of a horned satyr, either to banish obscene speech from the cottage or to punish him



Figure 18 Peabody and Stearns, children's cottage, porch figure said to represent Music (author's photo)



Figure 19 Ernest George and Peto, Hillier's almshouses, porch figure (author's photo)

for violating the decorum of the place (Figure 20). Given that Commodore Vanderbilt was widely known for his profanity, this may have been a way for his refined and upright grandson and namesake to distinguish himself from the coarse man who founded the family fortune.⁶⁵ These details are akin to the iconography of Italian Renaissance villas whose owners—perhaps like the Vanderbilts—worried about their propensity for hedonism and disguised it with allegories of restraint and sin punished.⁶⁶ The architectural form of the new Breakers would soon confirm that the Vanderbilts came to see their Newport house as a site comparable to an Italian Renaissance villa.

The interior of the cottage was hardly a setting designed for hedonistic pleasures. The main room was dominated by a broad fireplace with a built-in stone bench similar to the cozy hearths that graced the pages of picture books by Walter Crane, Kate Greenaway, and others.⁶⁷ This fireplace and the room's irregular footprint suggest the architect conceived of this space as a parlor (Figures 21, 22). Fitted out with a circular table, it conjures up the parlor that was notably absent from the main house at the Breakers,

but that continued to be celebrated in sentimental prints, like *Family Devotion*, as the architectural manifestation of the intimate family circle. Toward the back of the room, two columns and a change in flooring pattern helped distinguish the parlor proper from the alcove beyond. Flanked with storage cupboards and offering discrete access to the kitchen, the alcove seems to have been designed to play the role of the dining room.

The kitchen was fully functional. Sharing the chimney stack that served the parlor fireplace was a working range—not a toy, but a modest-sized fixture manufactured by Richardson & Boynton Company of New York (Figure 23). Called the Provident, the model was advertised in the company's 1886 catalog as “first-class in all respects” and touted as “the best and cheapest range sold.” Although the stove in the cottage was built in, the Provident also came in a portable model, which the catalog recommended “for French flats, apartment houses, or for use by small families.”⁶⁸ On the opposite wall, overlooking the garden, was a bow window, flanked on one side by built-in cabinetry and on the other by a fully plumbed sink.



Figure 20 Peabody and Stearns, children's cottage, gable panel
(author's photo)

The cottage's external characteristics suggest some of the internal conflicts with which the senior Vanderbilts grappled when creating suitable spaces for their children. They were certainly aware of the sentimental view of childhood embraced with fervor by their middle-class contemporaries. Having themselves served as Sunday school teachers in young adulthood, they may well have also been familiar with the temperance literature in which innocent children were depicted as powerful moral agents. To the extent that the domestic hearth was the *mis-en-scène* for the moral triumphs of these fictional children, a cottage that evoked middle-class domesticity in its exterior forms, interior arrangements, and full-size fittings may have seemed the ideal setting for the full flowering of the moral compass within each of their flesh-and-blood offspring. Yet, their drive for social status also prompted Cornelius II and Alice to reject the parlor as the physical and emotional center of their own daily routines. Thus, the location of the cottage—at some

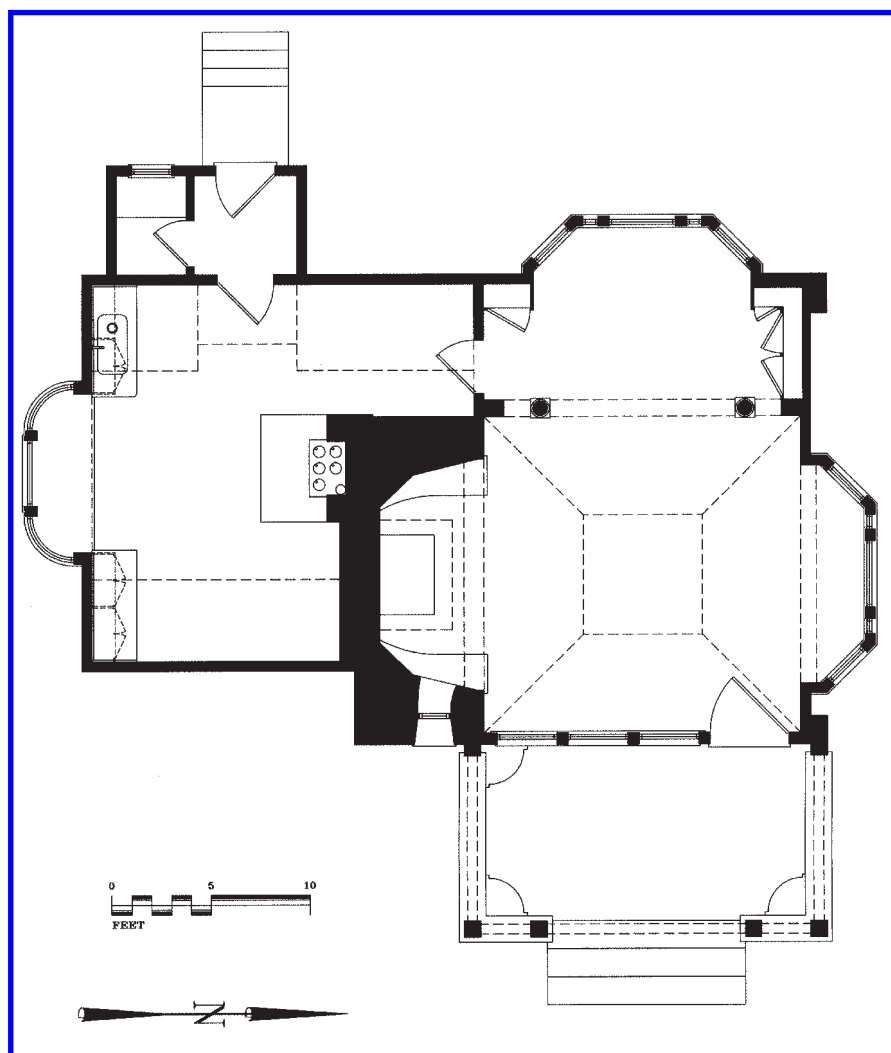


Figure 21 Peabody and Stearns, children's cottage, plan (measured and drawn by Daniel De Sousa)



Figure 22 Peabody and Stearns, children's cottage, parlor (author's photo). See *JSAH* online for panoramic photo

remove from the main house—allowed them to choose when (and if) to cross its threshold and thus to distance themselves from its middle-class connotations.

Using the Children's Cottage

If the cottage served as visible evidence that the Vanderbilt children played, it also suggested the content of that play, which often centered on domestic labor. In a diary she kept in the summer of 1890, fifteen-year-old Gertrude mentioned the cottage as the locus of sewing lessons. She also recorded the events of one August day when rain prevented her (and perhaps her siblings) from visiting the family's nearby farm.⁶⁹ "Instead," she wrote, "we cooked our own dinner in the cottage. I had sent word to Sybil [her friend Sybil Sherman] to come, but did not mention that we were going to cook, so she appeared in a silk dress. I immediately marched her over to the house and made her put on one of my white dresses. It was very amusing and with a good deal of Martha's help [Martha was a servant] we cooked a most delicious lunch."⁷⁰

This episode speaks to the range of roles the cottage played in the lives of the Vanderbilt children. At one level, it was a seasonal variation of the school room in the family's New York house—a place where the Vanderbilt children could spend their days (always accompanied by a governess and often in the company of friends) well away from the

rooms devoted to adult sociability. As the later expansion of the New York house suggests, creating physical distance was an important—even essential—consideration when the senior Vanderbilts commissioned entertaining rooms; indeed, as these rooms became increasingly elaborate, the children's spaces became increasingly distant. In Newport, the sequencing of the projects undertaken by Cornelius II and Alice suggests that they saw the construction of a free-standing children's cottage as a necessary prelude to the changes they envisioned for the ground-floor entertaining rooms in the main house—renovations they undertook only after the cottage was under way. These entertaining rooms were already very large, but the Vanderbilts felt compelled to enlarge the dining room to an enormous size; at 40 by 70 feet, it was reportedly the largest dining room in Newport. Their renovations also changed the relationships among ground-floor rooms, organizing the drawing room, hall, and dining room along a single axis and aligning the doors of these rooms, so the Vanderbilts and their guests could take in the entire space from a single vantage point. Children, it seems, would have marred this carefully arranged vista.

Other aspects of the Vanderbilt renovations confirm the extent to which the main house was designed primarily for adult use. In addition to adding the dining room, they also called upon Peabody and Stearns to update the interior decoration in several other ground-floor rooms. This work was carefully documented in a series of professionally



Figure 23 Peabody and Stearns, children's cottage, kitchen (author's photo). See *JSAH* online for panoramic photo

produced photographs.⁷¹ The images reveal furnishings and fittings inspired by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French designs, not just in their stylistic vocabulary, but also in their arrangement (Figure 24). Large pieces of furniture lined the perimeter of the room, echoing its materials and forms, while smaller, lighter furnishings could be rearranged for a variety of social activities. As furniture historian Mimi Hellman has argued about eighteenth-century France, these objects were integral to “the apparently effortless fabrication of elite identity itself” in that they served both as backdrop and stage props for public performances in which “the cultivated body . . . produced the appearance of leisured, sociable ease.” From Hellman’s point of view, this mode of civilized leisure was work, a form of labor in which it was essential to disguise the effort involved.⁷² To join the ranks of the civilized, elite children needed to learn how to perform in such settings, but until they did, this stage was no place for them.

Why encourage young Vanderbilts to play at domestic labor? In some ways, their activities were akin to the play of middle-class children whose pretend work was often enhanced by toys that were miniature versions of tools their parents used. At the children’s cottage, however, Gertrude did not pretend with the aid of toys. She and Sybil actually cooked an edible meal on a real range, albeit with

the help of Martha, who may have provided the expertise and muscle involved in starting and maintaining the fire. In short, the content of their play might have been familiar to their middle-class contemporaries, but their mode of play was quite different.

It may be that this participation in domestic labor was intended to train Gertrude and her siblings for a future in which they would be called upon to direct servants in households of their own. Yet, working in the trenches to prepare a simple luncheon had little to do with the labor actually undertaken by a society hostess, who typically functioned more like a military general. Her command center was her exquisitely decorated boudoir, where she constructed guest lists, determined menus, and issued orders to a chef and other high-ranking functionaries, who communicated those orders down the chain of command to an army of servants, also hierarchically organized and laboring out of sight in an extensive suite of work spaces. Indeed, at the Breakers the cottage’s small kitchen—with its apartment-sized range—bore no relationship to the bustling, technologically advanced facility in the main house, which was equipped like a hotel kitchen.⁷³

In this case, playing at domestic labor may have had less to do with preparing the Vanderbilt children for their future roles than with insulating their present selves from

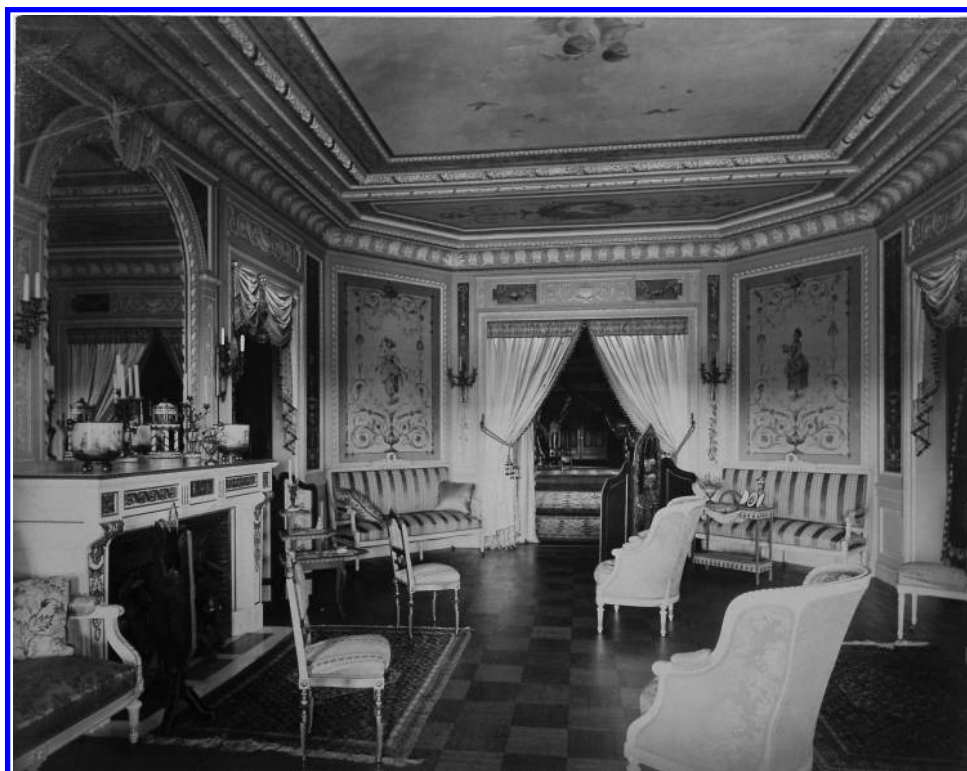


Figure 24 Peabody and Stearns, the first Breakers, drawing room, ca. 1887 (Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, Rhode Island)

the refinements of society. By the 1880s, Anglo-American culture had embraced the idea that children were closer to nature and more attuned to the simplicity of peasant life than their parents. Such conceptions had started during the Enlightenment, prompting eighteenth-century British painters such as Joshua Reynolds and Johann Zoffany to depict aristocratic children playacting at rural labor.⁷⁴ In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, these ideas were particularly valued, given the widespread glorification of the rustic that nurtured the Colonial Revival and Arts and Crafts movements. Both peasants and children were understood to be dependent, humble, innocent, somewhat simple-minded, eager to work with their hands, and happily ignorant of the ways of the modern world. From this derived the wide popularity of Greenaway's books, the first of which, *Under the Window*, was published in 1879; in them, children—in distinctive dress based on early-nineteenth-century fashions—inhabited a pastoral world in which adults play only a minimal role.⁷⁵ Thus, well before psychologist G. Stanley Hall had posited that child development was a literal recapitulation of human evolution and that young children should not be forced to adopt the trappings of civilization before their time, middle- and upper-middle-class parents sought to provide their children with settings where they could dig in the garden and make simple meals.⁷⁶

Such a site was the 1854 Swiss Cottage at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. There Queen Victoria's children maintained their own gardens, learned to cook (if female) and dabbled in carpentry (if male).⁷⁷ By 1908, British landscape gardener Gertrude Jekyll elaborated on a middle-class version of this idyll in her book *Children and Gardens*. Ostensibly addressed to boys and girls, the text provided parents with ample advice on establishing a children's garden along with "a real, well-built little house."⁷⁸ Although strictly symmetrical, this "play-house" (as Jekyll called it) shared many other features with the Breakers cottage (Figure 25): a substantial roof with low-hanging eaves; a prominent chimney; a porch (although Jekyll's was enclosed); a square parlor (also called a sitting-room in the text) fitted out with a fireplace and bay window and furnished with a large round table; a kitchen with a working cook stove; and a sink with its own water supply. Including as it does a photograph of "a German princess" sitting in the doorway of her "old play-house . . . remembering all the happy hours she spent here a few years ago," Jekyll hints at the roots of this playhouse practice among elite families in the nineteenth century.⁷⁹

Jekyll provided one of the most detailed explanations of how such playhouses were to be used. In the kitchen, she explained, "the children make and bake little scones and

cakes, and serve them at the tea that is laid in the adjoining sitting-room, and learn the elements of even more serious cookery, such as jam-making and simple ways of cooking eggs.”⁸⁰ In Jekyll’s view, these delicacies would be served to the children’s friends, but also at the “occasional luncheon party on birthdays or other great occasions.” Equally important, “the elders would often be invited to tea, and it would probably help matters if a specially praiseworthy culinary effort or other evidence of housewifeliness suggested a little gift of money, to be expended on the perfecting of the play-house’s equipment.”⁸¹

While there is no evidence that young Gertrude cultivated vegetables or received payment for her domestic exertions, her luncheon party with Sybil Sherman falls squarely within in the range of uses familiar to Jekyll. The same can be said of the activities Gertrude’s first cousins pursued around 1890 in their playhouse on the grounds of

Idlehour on Long Island. In her published memoirs, Consuelo Vanderbilt recalled that she and her brother Willie “would cook our meal, wash the dishes and then stroll home by the river in the cool of the evening.”⁸² Other reports note that Consuelo made preserves and cooked, while Willie did carpentry and waited at table. Their mother recalled that she and her friends “often went there for afternoon tea. It was prepared by the children and was most excellent.”⁸³

Referred to as a “tea house” in Peabody’s early notes and on a photograph preserved in the collections of the Newport Historical Society, the Breakers cottage many have served as a setting for comparable events. Certainly, its situation—facing the path that linked the main house to the ocean—is suggestive. The senior Vanderbilts and their guests were bound to stroll right past the front steps of the cottage and could easily venture in. The expense lavished on the cottage and the level of detail that resulted from this expenditure suggest that the senior Vanderbilts anticipated displaying the cottage to their guests. Adults were an important audience, both for the admonitions of the iconographic program on the building’s exterior and for the performances of domesticity that took place inside.

When Gertrude’s mother (and perhaps her friends) took tea with the children in the cottage, the building became the symbolic parlor of the Breakers, a space not solely for the use of youngsters, but where adults and their children could reenact the bonds of intimacy that seemed out of place in the main house. In this sense, the cottage accommodated play in two distinct senses of the word. For Gertrude and her siblings, it was a place to play—in the sense of taking part in a light-hearted game; they *played* at the domestic skills that would have only a small place in their future lives. For Gertrude’s mother, it was a place to play in a different sense; she *played* the part of a doting mother in a sentimental performance of family-togetherness that had only a small place in her existence as “Alice of the Breakers.”

These activities, however, did nothing to threaten Alice’s privileged status. In contrast to a real middle-class house where the acquisition of domestic skills was a sign of a girl’s maturity, the cottage framed domestic labor as a sign of dependency, the purview of children and servants. By providing a space where she could watch her dependents practice homely skills without exposing her to the heavy labor taking place a few hundred yards away in the main house, the cottage allowed Alice to enjoy the fiction that her leisured state was effortless. At the same time, the mother’s presence in the cottage could reassure the daughter that she—Gertrude—would outgrow her dependent status, even if Martha would not.

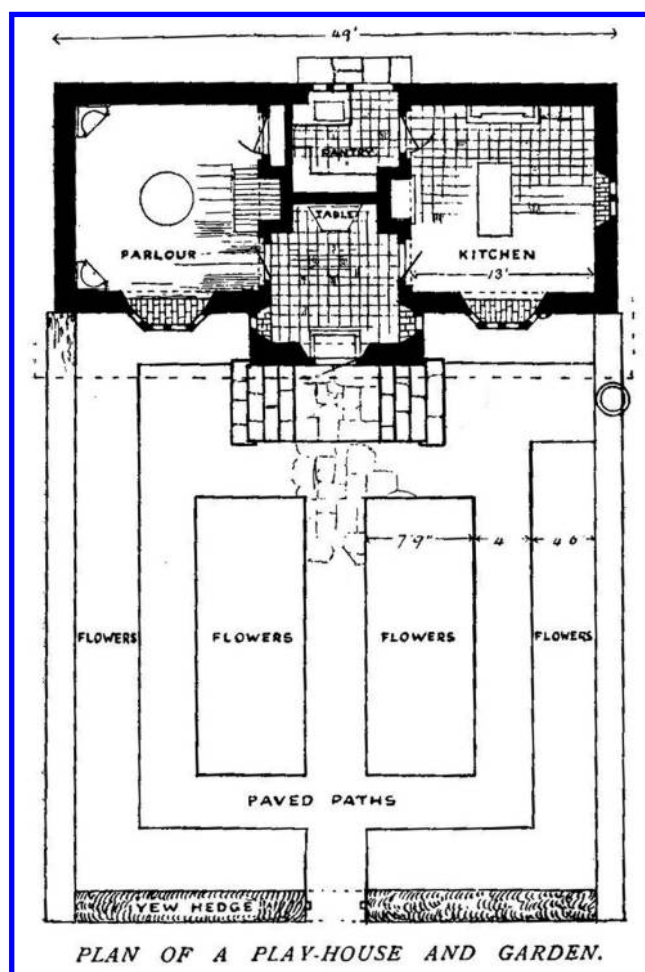


Figure 25 Gertrude Jekyll, “Plan of a playhouse and garden” (from Jekyll, *Children and Gardens* [1908; Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors’ Club, 1982])

If the Vanderbilt children were only playing at domestic labor in the cottage, they were in fact performing work in a different sense—as potential conduits of social capital. The fact that memoirs mention few children other than Vanderbilts using the cottage suggests that one important function of this little building was to give Vanderbilt adults some measure of control over their children's friendships.⁸⁴ Given that the younger generation's ill-chosen alliances could make the entire family vulnerable, this was no small matter, and Vanderbilt family lore is filled with conflict between parents and children over the appropriateness of the youngsters' friends. Gertrude's mother protested her friendship with Esther Hunt, daughter of the family architect, and both Gertrude's parents broke with her brother Neily when he married Grace Graham Wilson.⁸⁵

Wealthy parents might feel that their offspring required even greater management during their adolescence than when they were small children. This was especially true of daughters, for whom the transition to adulthood—at least socially speaking—took place in a single evening when they “came out” in society. For Gertrude this took place in 1895, when she was twenty. Before that time, it was hard to know exactly where she belonged during the balls her parents hosted. During one such event in August 1890, she was relegated to the gallery above the entrance in the first Breakers. There, seated with “Fräulein” (her governess) and Elsa (the nurse for her younger siblings), she was well removed from the event and encountered only five people who came up to the gallery to speak with her briefly. Nonetheless, she had an excellent view of the courting rituals being played out below her and later recorded in her diary her fascination with “who the men talked most to, and whether the girls liked some better than others, if they showed it.”⁸⁶ In short, the gallery was not altogether successful in keeping Gertrude insulated from society. While nurseries might keep younger middle-class children out of sight until they were old enough to join adult sociability in the parlor, families of great wealth required a wider range of spaces in which to manage the social interactions of older adolescents.

The cottage also shaped the interaction between the Vanderbilt children and the class of users represented at Gertrude's luncheon party by Martha: the servants who were integral to the smooth operation of high society.⁸⁷ At a basic level, the cottage provided a venue in which Gertrude and her siblings interacted directly with servants over domestic matters—something Leonore Davidoff and her coauthors have argued was essential in helping middle- and upper-class children learn about their own place in the world. In their speech, dress, carriage, and behavior, servants were Others against whom elites defined themselves.⁸⁸

Even more significant were the spatial practices embedded in the cottage and in the cultural landscape of the Breakers, practices that helped to naturalize patterns of deference that characterized the interactions between adult servants and their young mistresses and masters. For Gertrude and her siblings, the cottage was a site for the exercise of authority. Ironically, perhaps this included the prerogative *not* to use the cottage on a given day, if they decided instead to undertake an outing to the farm. If they opted to use the cottage, they determined not only the agenda for the day (like cooking lunch), but also who else would be involved and even what they would wear. For Gertrude and her friend Sybil Sherman (who had the authority to decline Gertrude's invitation and even her loan of a white dress), playing at cooking tasks in the cottage was a lark, something they found “very amusing.”

For the adult servants who worked alongside the children at these domestic chores, the cottage was a site that required both heavier labor and deference to a child. Unlike Sybil Sherman, Martha could not decline to participate in Gertrude's luncheon. Indeed, she and other uniformed servants could be summoned to the cottage at any moment via call buttons located in the dining alcove and in the kitchen. (In each location, one button was labeled “Butler” and another “2nd story.”) Once beckoned by their young masters, servants presumably entered the cottage through the back door, which led past a water closet and into the kitchen through a disguised door that matched the kitchen paneling. The spatial system of the Breakers limited the movement of servants by setting them on predetermined paths as they passed from the kitchen door of the main house to the rear door of the children's cottage. The physical arrangement of the cottage—especially its rear entrance—effaced the presence of servants and denied their centrality to the activities that took place there. In contrast, when Gertrude played at domestic tasks, the cottage guaranteed her greater freedom of movement than these adults, who were employed to perform household labor.

The cottage stood at the intersection of two distinct but mutually defining spatial practices in which gender and generation played key roles. Tightly choreographed and carefully costumed, the spatial practices of deference required self-conscious action on the part of servants. In contrast, the spatial practices of privilege allowed elites—including elite children—much greater scope for individual action. Not only did they exercise greater choice in their attire, but they were free to follow a greater variety of paths through their immediate environment. The choreography suggested by the material world was less insistent and thus less evident—even to those who performed it.

While servants would have been acutely aware of the spatial practices of deference they were required to perform, Gertrude and her siblings may have taken for granted the spatial practices of privilege they enacted. The cultural landscape they inhabited was arranged to support and sustain their performances of self, making those performances look and feel entirely natural.

Rethinking the Children's Cottage

It is impossible to dismiss the Breakers' cottage as an architectural confection, a site for the supposedly carefree activities associated with children's play. The physical qualities of the cottage were the result of calculated choices by adults engaged in the serious work of enhancing and maintaining their social status. New kinds of domestic space were integral to this process, but so was the process of carefully managing their offspring. Standing at the nexus of these concerns, the cottage played several roles: helping to keep children at some distance from a house devoted almost entirely to formal entertaining; prolonging childhood for these youngsters who would not join the world of adult sociability until they were almost twenty; insulating adolescents from problematic social connections; and maintaining spatial arrangements that reinforced class privilege.

This last feature is particularly important for the larger project of understanding the relationship between architecture and power. The cottage accustomed Gertrude and her siblings to the privileges of their class. It was not simply that adults employed as servants were required to respond when summoned, no matter the youthfulness of the finger pressing the call button. The built environment was also arranged to channel their movements to paths that minimized their visibility, cloaking their role in ensuring the success of the Vanderbilts' social endeavors—whether lavish entertainments in the main house or simple lunches prepared and consumed in the cottage. This built environment also granted Vanderbilts and their guests—young and old—a freedom of movement that was denied to the adults employed as their servants. Curving paths encouraged them to meander through the site, allowing them to develop a kind of muscle-memory of leisured existence. They did not need to think self-consciously about exercising their social privileges; they would simply act naturally—that is, in the way their environment suggested—and they would find that others naturally treated them with deference.

If the children's cottage played an important role in this process, it did not do so in isolation. The same can be said of the main house. The large pile with its lavish gala rooms and the small cottage with its homely touches were both

components in a network of spaces that supported the family's performance of elite social status. The meaning of each depended on the presence of the other. The children's cottage is thus essential to an understanding of the Breakers. At the same time, it is also a potent reminder that architectural history more generally can benefit from sustained attention to children and their spaces.

Notes

1. I am grateful to the many people who have contributed to the research process behind this paper: Flora Biddle and Pam Le Boutillier, who gave me access to their mother's girlhood diaries and shared their memories of the Breakers cottage; John Tschirch and Janice Wiseman, who (along with other members of the Newport Preservation Society staff) gave me unfettered access to cottage itself and the society's files; Daniel De Sousa, who helped measure the building and produced the plan; Lisa Long at the Redwood Library; Kimberly Tomey at the Newport Historical Society; John Freas of Tamerlane Books; Susan Kriete at the New-York Historical Society; Janice Chadbourne and Ceil Gardner at the Boston Public Library; Susan Lewis at the Boston Architectural College; and Emily Guthrie at the Winterthur Library. Thanks, too, to Annmarie Adams for her comments on an earlier iteration of this project, and to Keith Morgan and especially Marta Gutman for their close reading of the final version of this article.

"Building Notes," (*Newport Mercury* 129 (3 July 1886), 1. A native of Nova Scotia, McNeil was a prolific builder in the Boston area, who worked on a wide variety of projects, from triple-deckers to Commonwealth Avenue mansions. Keith Morgan, personal communication, 9 June 2010.

2. Public fascination with the Vanderbilts has been fueled and slaked by popular books published for more than a century. Among the earliest is W. A. Croffut's *The Vanderbilts and the Story of Their Fortune* (Chicago and New York: Belford, Clarke and Co., 1886); others include Wayne Andrews, *The Vanderbilt Legend: The Story of the Vanderbilt Family, 1794–1940* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1941); B. F. Friedman, *Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney* (New York: Doubleday, 1978); Barbara Goldsmith, *Little Gloria . . . Happy at Last* (New York: Dell, 1980); and Jerry E. Patterson, *The Vanderbilts* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989). The Vanderbilts themselves have participated in this process, authoring a number of books that are part memoir, part biography: Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan, *The Glitter and the Gold* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952); Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., *Queen of the Golden Age: The Fabulous Grace Wilson Vanderbilt* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956); Arthur T. Vanderbilt II, *Fortune's Children: The Fall of the House of Vanderbilt* (New York: William Morrow, 1989); Flora Biddle Miller, *The Whitney Women and the Museum They Made: A Family Memoir* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999). A granddaughter of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Flora Biddle Miller also collaborated on the research for Friedman's biography of her grandmother.

3. The architectural partnership between Robert Swain Peabody (1845–1917) and John Goddard Stearns, Jr. (1843–1917) was established in 1870. Wheaton A. Holden, "The Peabody Touch: Peabody and Stearns of Boston, 1870–1917," *JSAH* 32, no. 2 (May 1973), 114.

4. Vanderbilt, *Fortune's Children*, 187.

5. Holden, "The Peabody Touch," 120–21; Arnold Lewis, *American Country Houses of the Gilded Age* (New York: Dover, 1982), plate 33; Annie Robinson, *Peabody and Stearns: Country Houses and Seaside Cottages* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 42–45.

6. Cornelius II and Alice Vanderbilt's first child, Alice, had died in 1874 at the age of 5. Brief biographies of the Vanderbilt offspring are included in Armin

Brand Allen, *The Cornelius Vanderbilts of the Breakers* (Newport: Preservation Society of Newport County, 1995; rev. 2005), 45, 47, 51, 63, 83, 95, 103.

7. By the time they began to renovate the Breakers, Peabody and Stearns were already responsible for the design of six such houses in Newport and would go on to design seven others there (including Rough Point for Frederick W. Vanderbilt, one of Cornelius II's younger brothers). Holden, "The Peabody Touch," 115–16, 128–29.

8. According to Gwendolyn Wright, Chicago developer Samuel Eberly Gross "built and sold over seven thousand houses, all between 1880 and 1892," including "\$3,000–\$4,000 houses for middle-class families." Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the American Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 100.

9. Queen Victoria's children, for instance, enjoyed the use of the two-story Swiss Cottage, built in 1854 on the grounds of Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. Earlier in the nineteenth century a pavilion "destined for the studies and recreation of the young princes and princesses during the summer" was one of the many structures erected in the Prince of Montebelliard's park in Alsace. J. Charles Krafft, *Plans of the Most Beautiful Picturesque Gardens in France, England, and Germany . . .* (Paris: Leveault, 1809). 23. See also, Tori V. Martinez, "Swiss Cottage: A Royal Playhouse," <http://www.timetravel-britain.com/articles/london/swiss.shtml> (accessed 21 May 2007.)

10. Hunt's other Vanderbilt houses include Biltmore in Asheville, North Carolina (1892–95) for George Vanderbilt and three houses for William K. Vanderbilt: Idlehour in Oakdale, Long Island (begun 1878), 660 Fifth Avenue (also known as the Petit Chateau) in New York City (1878–82), and Marble House in Newport (1888–95).

11. The transformation of the landscape is well documented in John R. Tschirch, "The Evolution of a Beaux-Arts Landscape: The Breakers in Newport, Rhode Island," *Journal of the New England Garden History Society* 7 (Fall 1999), 1–14.

12. Andrea Carneiro, personal correspondence with author, 21 May 2007.

13. Wayne Craven, *Gilded Mansions: Grand Architecture and High Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009), 170–83. See also Paul Baker, *Richard Morris Hunt* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980), 364–372; David Chase, "Superb Privacies: The Later Domestic Commissions of Richard Morris Hunt, 1878–1895," in *The Architecture of Richard Morris Hunt*, ed. Susan R. Stein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 151–71; and Robert B. King, *The Vanderbilt Homes* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 38–45.

14. Only two architectural historians have commented on the children's cottage in print. One was Wheaton A. Holden, whose interest in the structure was limited to the light it could shed on the design process of Robert Swain Peabody. In a paragraph devoted to the firm's Newport work, Holden included a period photograph of the Breakers' playhouse (as he called it) next to an image of the English almshouses he had identified as the model for its design. He ventured no explanation as to why an almshouse would have been an appropriate source of inspiration for a cottage designed for the children of a millionaire. Holden, "The Peabody Touch," 121. The other is Annie Robinson, who mentions it as the only extant building designed by Peabody and Stearns at the Breakers site. Robinson, *Peabody and Stearns*, 44.

15. Marta Gutman and Ning de Coninck-Smith, eds., *Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 2.

16. Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xviii.

17. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" (1983; trans. 1986), *The Routledge Falmer Reader in Sociology of Education*, ed. Stephan J. Ball (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2004), 21.

18. *Ibid.*, 22.

19. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), quoted in Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865–1905* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 97. Although Edwards uses the Vanderbilts (specifically, Cornelius's sister-in-law, Alva, and her daughter Consuelo) as examples of this kind of conspicuous consumption, she does not extend her analysis to younger children.

20. Consider the experience of Caroline Astor, the gatekeeper of American high society in this period. Mrs. Astor (as she was always called) had no intention of recognizing the notorious Alva Vanderbilt (wife of Cornelius II's brother William K.) until her youngest daughter set her heart on attending a particularly lavish costume ball to be held at the Vanderbilts' New York house in 1883. When Alva upheld the social convention that precluded her issuing an invitation to the daughter until the mothers were on calling terms, Mrs. Astor was forced to recognize Alva and thus admit her into the highest echelons of New York society. Vanderbilt II, *Fortune's Children*, 100–106.

21. Architectural historians—guided by the work of Mark Girouard and Dell Upton—have developed sophisticated means for interpreting buildings as mechanisms through which social identities and especially social hierarchies are communicated, naturalized, and reproduced. Yet, such work has tended to understand social identity as a fixed quality that exists prior to the building, which in turn is understood largely as an expression of the social order. Bringing Judith Butler's theories to bear upon their work, I adopt the language of performance to signal my understanding of social identity as a less stable quality that is always in the process of construction, performed every moment by each individual. Thus, social identity does not exist in any fixed way prior to the buildings designed to support and sustain those performances. Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (New York: Architectural History Foundation; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

22. Vanderbilt Row was a series of great houses started soon after the Commodore's death in 1877 and completed in 1882. At its southern end, at Fifty-first Street, William H. Vanderbilt (the father of Cornelius II) built a triple palace to provide substantial houses for himself and two of his married daughters. Just to the north, at Fifty-second Street, William K., a brother of Cornelius II, hired Richard Morris Hunt to design a house in the early French Renaissance style. Settling a few blocks north, at West Fifty-seventh Street, Cornelius II hired George B. Post to build—and later greatly expand—another house in the early French Renaissance style. In addition to the Breakers and Biltmore, the Vanderbilt country houses included a house in Hyde Park, New York, designed by McKim, Mead, and White for Frederick, another brother of Cornelius II; designed in 1896, the house was completed in 1899. Richard Morris Hunt was responsible for most of the others: Idlehour, on Long Island, begun in 1878 for William K. (when Idlehour burned in 1899, Hunt's son Richard Howland Hunt designed its replacement); and Marble House (1888–1892) in Newport, a house more closely associated with William K.'s socially ambitious wife, Alva.

For the development of Vanderbilt Row, see Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman, *New York 1880* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999), 578–601. For the Hyde Park house, see Peggy Albee, Molly Berger, H. Eliot Foulds, Nina Gray, and Pamela Herrick, *Vanderbilt Mansion: A Gilded-Age Country Place. A Historic Resources Study* (Boston: National Park Service Northeast Museum Services Center, 2008), 93–94. See also King, *The Vanderbilt Homes*.

23. As recently as 2009, Wayne Craven referred to the building campaign as a major component of "the social poker game" between Alice and Alva. Craven, *Gilded Mansions*, 133.

24. Richard Morris Hunt is perhaps the premier example of an architect who understood the extent to which American aristocrats were still in the process of defining their domestic requirements. While it is easy to assume that any architect would leap at the opportunity to design enormous, elaborate houses, Hunt seems to have been willing to engage with the requirements of the commissions at a different level. George Vanderbilt was so grateful for his efforts (and those of Frederick Law Olmsted) that he commissioned full-length portraits of the architect and landscape designer to hang at Biltmore.

25. The term *Knickerbocker* was in use by the 1870s to describe New York's social elites, many of whom were descendants of the city's original Dutch settlers. Craven implies that Knickerbockers disdained the tendency of new millionaires to flaunt their wealth in part because they themselves were not excessively wealthy. Craven, *Gilded Mansions*, 13.

26. In his well-documented history of Gilded Age mansions New York and Newport, Craven traces the rise of the grand gala and the emergence of new room types, but does not consider the disappearance of the parlor. Craven, *Gilded Mansions*, chap. 1.

27. King, *Vanderbilt Homes*, 11–13.

28. Stern et al., *New York 1880*, 578–89.

29. Annmarie Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses, and Women, 1870–1900* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 78–79.

30. According to Stephanie Coontz, American fertility rates dropped 40 percent between 1855 and 1915, a trend accompanied by other changes in family life: families that “revolved more tightly around the nuclear core” and parents who “became more emotionally involved in child-rearing.” Stephanie Coontz, *The Social Origins of Private Life: A History of American Families, 1600–1900* (London and New York: Verso, 1988), 259–60.

31. In Sánchez-Eppler's reading of these temperance stories, incest was always in the background, as the young child's erotic appeal heightened the efficacy of his or her redemptive power. Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States*, chap. 2.

32. Conseulo and the ninth Duke of Marlborough separated in 1906 and eventually divorced in 1921, just before her marriage to Louis Jacques Balsan. Vanderbilt, *Fortune's Children*, 285; Friedman, *Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney*, 444.

33. Vanderbilt, *Fortune's Children*, 152–75.

34. After eleven years, Alice eventually acknowledged her daughter-in-law, but the reconciliation came too late for her husband, who had died in 1899. Vanderbilt, *Fortune's Children*, 202–16, 303–4.

35. Rebecca Edwards noted that 115 heiresses married noblemen between 1874 and 1911, and quoted turn-of-the-century commentator May Lease, who decried the practice as “selling our children to titled debauchees.” Edwards, *New Spirits*, 101.

36. As Annmarie Adams notes, nurseries also separated middle-class and elite women from their children, freeing their time to pursue the charitable works that were a notable component of Victorian culture. Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way*, 140–45.

37. According to Mark Girouard, the book functioned primarily as “tempting bait to rich clients.” Kerr eventually published two expanded editions, one in 1865 and another in 1871. Mark Girouard, *The Victorian Country House* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 20, 121.

38. Robert Kerr, *The Gentleman's House; or, How to Plan English Residences, From the Parsonage to the Palace*, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray 1865), 144.

39. Kerr, *The Gentleman's House*, 144–45.

40. In contemporary critical theory, the concept of the abject explains the revulsion caused by dead bodies, excrement, rot, and decay—that which is neither subject nor object and so stands outside the symbolic order.

According to Julia Kristeva, the abject is especially associated with the maternal body. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). The plans depict Bear Wood (1865–74), the Berkshire house Kerr designed for John Walter, chief proprietor of *The Times*. Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, 121–24.

41. Kerr, *The Gentleman's House*, 147. Children were not the only members of the household to experience gender segregation. In Figure 7, note the stairway near the nurse's room; not accessible from this level, it connected bedrooms for male servants on the floor above to their work spaces on the floor below. Other stairs are identified as for the use of “women” (female servants), “young ladies,” and “bachelors,” and served to segregate the household by gender, as well as by class and marital status.

42. While it was unheard of to have the children themselves at social events, the senior Vanderbilts were nonetheless keen to acknowledge the existence of the next generation, an important first step in the long process of identifying appropriate mates and continuing the family line. Thus, bronze silhouette portraits by Augustus Saint-Gaudens ensured that likenesses of Gertrude, Bill, and Neily were on view to the Vanderbilts' dinner guests in New York from 1882 on; a similar bronze portrait of Gladys, executed by H. LeGrand Cannon in 1890, may have also graced the Vanderbilts' New York City dining room. A plaster version of the double portrait of William and Neily is in the collection of the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site, as is a photograph of the bronze portrait of Gertrude. The location of the bronze originals is unknown. Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site, <http://www.sgnhs.org/Augustus%20SGaudens%20CD-HTML/Reliefs/VanderbiltG&W.htm> (accessed 10 Aug. 2009). The portrait of Gladys is reproduced in Allen, *Cornelius Vanderbilts*, 103.

43. The basement, ground-floor, and second-floor plans of the 1882 version of the house seem to have been lost, which explains to some extent why this iteration has received so little attention from architectural historians. Third- and fourth-floor plans preserved in the collections of the New-York Historical Society provide a rare view into the arrangement of spaces for elite children and their parents' house guests.

44. Craven, *Gilded Mansions*, 136–49.

45. Far from the setting for erotic encounters, the boudoir was, according to Kerr, “a Private Parlor for the mistress of the house,” akin to “the Lady's Bower of the olden times”—that is, a quiet retreat from the social activity that dominated the rest of the house. Kerr, *The Gentleman's House*, 114. On the fourth floor, the designation of two rooms as “Mrs. Vanderbilt's maid's room” and “Miss Vanderbilt's maid's room” confirm the architect's careful attention to providing parallel accommodation for mother and elder daughter.

46. The architect's notation on plans dated 1894 (“Mr. Vanderbilt, Jr.”) evidently refers to Neily, as Bill had contracted typhoid fever and died in May 1892, just after the remodeling project began.

47. According to Armin Allen, the mantelpiece is now in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Allen, *Cornelius Vanderbilts*, 31.

48. Perhaps because he is thinking of the house only in terms of its adult users, Wayne Craven does not recognize the existence of the third-floor boys' room. Instead, he says that the entrance hall fireplace was reinstalled in “the family sitting room on the second floor” (139) and misidentifies period photographs of the boys' room as “the billiard room on the second floor” (142–43). Craven, *Gilded Mansions*.

49. The Lorillards had two sons and two daughters: Emily (b. 1858), Pierre, Jr. (1860–1940), Griswold (1863–1888), and Maude Louise (1876–1922). *The World Almanac and Encyclopedia 1906* (New York: Press Publishing Company, 1905), 157.

50. The phrase is Bowditch's, quoted in Tschirch, "Evolution of a Beaux-Arts Landscape," 5.

51. In addition to the carriage house and stable, the service area included greenhouses, identifiable in Figure 14 by the "fingers" of their distinctive footprint.

52. *Ibid.*, 6.

53. Alva wrote in a draft of her memoirs that she felt herself "the most hated woman on earth," on Consuelo's wedding day. Vanderbilt, *Fortune's Children*, 176.

54. According to Holden, Peabody's published commentaries in professional journals confirm his role as "an early advocate of Colonial Revival forms." Holden, "Peabody Touch," 117.

55. A granddaughter of Cornelius II and Alice Vanderbilt recalls playing often in the cottage in the summers of 1931, 1932, and 1933, and notes "it was not painted white, as it is now." Nadine Eltz, personal correspondence author, 9 June 2007.

56. Holden, "The Peabody Touch," 120–21.

57. "A Group of Almshouses at Guildford," *The British Architect* 24 (18 Dec. 1885). Holden noted that a copy of the sketch published in *The British Architect* is among the papers of Julius A. Schweinfurth, who "at the time was a rising young architect on the [Peabody and Stearns] office staff." The Schweinfurth papers are preserved at Northeastern University. Wheaton Arnold Holden, "Robert Swain Peabody of Peabody and Stearns in Boston: The Early Years (1870–1886)," PhD diss., Boston University, 1969, 94.

58. Robert Peabody's travel diaries are preserved in the papers of Wheaton Holden in Special Collections of Brown University.

59. Irony seems the least likely explanation, as neither Cornelius II nor Alice Vanderbilt possessed a whimsical nature; one life-long acquaintance observed that he had never once seen Cornelius II smile. Vanderbilt, *Fortune's Children*, 177.

60. Even New York millionaires adopted the term "cottage" to refer to their massive Newport houses. Initially its use indicated that the city's summer residents relished Newport as an escape from the formality of New York's social scene. When the term continued to be applied to larger and more formal houses, it carried a hint of irony.

61. Ogata is primarily interested in the idea of the cottage as manifested in the work of Belgian architects associated with the Art Nouveau at the turn of the century. Nonetheless, she documents the longer development of an international fascination with the cottage, which she describes as "a culturally constructed idea that embodied an enduring, even prehistoric, tradition, intimately associated with the rural landscape, comfort, economy and rational planning" (66–67). She also discusses at length European and American admiration for the English cottage in particular, a phenomenon that was "pervasive during the second half of the nineteenth century" (79). Amy F. Ogata, *Art Nouveau and the Social Vision of Modern Living: Belgian Artists in a European Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

62. For the cottage's characteristic elements, see Ogata, *Art Nouveau and the Social Vision of Modern Living*, 71–72.

63. The British almshouses originally included approximately twenty-four figural porch posts, several of which were saved when the buildings were pulled down in the 1970s to make way for a modern facility that is still called Hillier House. Twelve of the porch figures were incorporated in a garden folly still standing on the grounds, while two others now grace a bus stop nearby. The symbolic meaning of these figures is not clear. Some are vaguely classical, including a male Dionysian figure holding grapes and two female figures holding a lyre and a cornucopia. Others are vaguely medieval, including a man—perhaps a pilgrim—carrying a lantern. Two other figures—a bare-breasted woman carrying a water jug on her shoulder and a bare-chested man wearing a necklace and earrings—seem to represent Africans,

or perhaps the African continent. It is not clear if Peabody was privy to the meaning Ernest George and Harold Peto attached to these figures; certainly no mention of their meaning was included in *The British Architect*.

64. It is not clear if these meanings were originally attached to the porch figures in Newport, as the building's symbolic content was not recorded in nineteenth-century documents. Given their link to the English almshouses, however, these attributions seem more likely than the explanation published by the Preservation Society of Newport County in 1952, namely that they are "figures from Dutch folklore." Holbert T. Smales, "The Breakers": *An Illustrated Handbook* (Newport: Preservation Society of Newport County, 1952; 33rd printing, 1975), 32.

65. According to Wayne Craven, as a young man, the first Cornelius Vanderbilt "scorched the New York waterfront with his fists and his foul language." Even as a mature man and a millionaire, the Commodore remained "famous for his profanity." Craven, *Gilded Mansions*, 82, 84.

66. I am grateful to my colleague Robert Baldwin, who used his knowledge of Italian Renaissance villa culture to suggest this reading of the gable panel.

67. Mark Girouard, *Sweetness and Light: The Queen Anne Movement, 1860–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 139–51.

68. Richard & Boynton catalog, 1886, n.p.

69. The farm, which Vanderbilt called "Oakland," supplied eggs, chickens, milk, and vegetables used at the Breakers. Yet, it also provided sites for leisure. According to *The Mercury*, "The lawn is well trimmed, the beeches are noble in proportion and ample in shade, forming a continuous bower suggestive of lunches all day long. Not far off is a twenty-acre grove of oaks that Mr. Vanderbilt intends to make a veritable pleasure park, with drives, and paths, and seats, and rustic houses, such a gem of forestry as the island cannot boast elsewhere." "Fashion and its Votaries at Newport," *The Mercury*, 6 September 1890, 4.

70. Gertrude Vanderbilt, diary entries, 20 July 1890 and 10 Aug. 1890, Whitney Museum of American Art, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney papers, gift of Flora Miller Irving.

71. Preserved in the collections of the Redwood Library, the photographs are unsigned.

72. Mimi Hellman, "Furniture, Sociability, and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century France," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32 (1999), particularly 415–16.

73. As a future hostess, Gertrude may have benefited from understanding the complex workings of the Breakers kitchen, but the spatial logic of the estate—which worked to maintain the invisibility of service spaces, at least to the family and their guests—precluded her from trespassing into that realm.

74. As James Steward points out, "this kind of playacting at being of a lower class was a complex commentary on class and social relationships." Yet, the effectiveness of such images depended on their use of conceptual connections (in this case between children and peasants) that viewers found appropriate. James Christen Steward, *The New Child: British Art and the Origins of Modern Childhood, 1730–1830* (Berkeley: University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 1995), 87–88.

75. Given Greenaway's influence on children's clothing—including the "Greenaway dress" sold at Liberty of London—the "white dress" Gertrude Vanderbilt lent to Sybil Sherman might well have been the kind of simple cotton or muslin dress donned during the day by many a young woman of fashion as a symbol of her innocence and simplicity. For Greenaway's impact on children's fashion, see *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*, 1st ed., s.v. "Greenaway, Kate (1846–1901)."

76. Hall is credited with coining the term *adolescence*, which is also the title of his best-known work, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiol-*

ogy, *Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* (New York, 1904), 2 vols. See also Dorothy Ross, *G. Stanley Hall: Psychologist as Prophet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), and Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), chap. 3.

77. Although it may seem strange for the Queen of England to commission a cottage based on Swiss vernacular traditions, the type may not have had nationalistic overtones for her. As Amy Ogata notes, British critic John Ruskin particularly admired the cottages of Switzerland, without associating them with a particular national character. In 1893, he wrote that the type “always suggests ideas of a gentle, pure and pastoral life.” John Ruskin, quoted in Ogata, *Art Nouveau and the Social Vision of Modern Living*, 68.

78. Gertrude Jekyll, *Children and Gardens* (London: Country Life, 1908; rpt. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors’ Club, 1982), 25.

79. *Ibid.*, 27.

80. *Ibid.*, 26.

81. *Ibid.*, 26–27.

82. Balsan, *The Glitter and the Gold*, 14.

83. Alva Vanderbilt Belmont memoirs, quoted in Vanderbilt, *Fortune’s Children*, 125.

84. In a recent interview, one of Gertrude Vanderbilt’s granddaughters recalled going to the cottage in the 1920s with a large number of young cousins. Interview with Pam Le Boutillier, 31 May 2007.

85. Friedman, *Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney*, 55–56; Vanderbilt, *Fortune’s Children*, 202–23.

86. Friedman, *Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney*, 26–27.

87. I have been unable to identify Martha and thus can determine neither her ethnicity nor her age at the time of the luncheon party. She may, of course, have been about Gertrude’s age. In the British context, Leonore Davidoff et al. have pointed out that “a caretaker was more likely to be a girl or young woman near in status to her young charges doing more than just childcare.” Leonore Davidoff, Megan Doolittle, Janet Fink, and Katherine Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830–1960* (London: Longman, 1999), 168.

88. Davidoff et al., *The Family Story*, 168–69.