



MEAD

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Drew University

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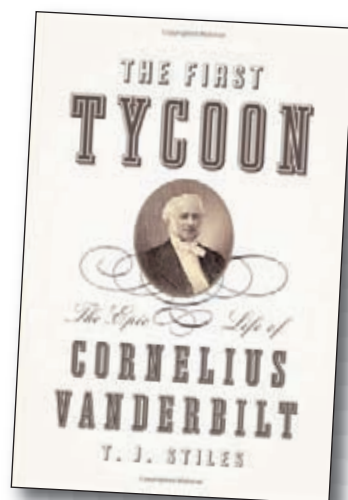
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March 7 Benefit Lecture Preview: *Meet Thomas and William Gibbons and Daniel Drew in the life of Cornelius Vanderbilt.*

by Alice Glock

A new masterful biography of Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794–1877), *The First Tycoon* by T.J. Stiles, richly illuminates not only the man himself, but the 19th-century world he inhabited. Playing significant supporting roles at different times in his life are three contemporaries most closely associated with historic Mead Hall: the Georgia-born Gibbonses—father Thomas and son William, who built Mead Hall as a family home from 1833 to 1836—and Daniel Drew, the devout Methodist who donated funds to purchase Mead Hall for the founding of the Drew Theological Seminary in 1867.

The Gibbonses, father and son, were southern aristocrats, already wealthy owners of vast Georgia plantations when they settled in Elizabeth(town), New Jersey, at the beginning of the 19th century. Thomas Gibbons hired the 23-year-old Vanderbilt in 1817 as a steamboat captain. This association with Gibbons provided Vanderbilt with a foundation in steamboat operations, building and business until the senior Gibbons' death in



The First Tycoon, The Epic Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt, by T.J. Stiles (Alfred A. Knopf, 2009) is the winner of the National Book Award for non-fiction.

1826. However, William Gibbons, who inherited his father's steamboats, abandoned the steamboat enterprise—and any possible rivalry—altogether in 1829.

At this juncture, William Gibbons and Vanderbilt, who happened to be the same age, took divergent paths in life. In the 1830s Gibbons built a country home for his young family that is now Mead Hall and lived the remainder of his relatively short

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Message from the Advisory Board Chair

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Friends of Mead Hall newsletter. The newsletter is the voice of the Friends, a support group established in 1999 by the Drew University Board of Trustees to ensure the continuing preservation of Mead Hall after a fire in 1989. That devastating fire nearly destroyed the building, which is listed in the New Jersey and national registers of historic places.

Construction of Mead Hall began in 1833 and was completed in 1836. Its Greek revival style of architecture was very popular in the south at that time. On their way from Elizabeth(town) to a rural retreat at Schooley's Mountain, William Gibbons, a successful rice planter in Savannah, Georgia, and his wife, Abigail, would pass a forest, where they would eventually build the house. "The Forest," as they called it, was to become their home for about 30 years.

In 1867 Daniel Drew, a self-made capitalist and a devout Methodist, bought the estate and turned it over to his friend and minister, the Reverend John McClintock, for use as a Methodist seminary. The main building was called Mead Hall, named after Drew's wife, Roxanna Mead, and today it is the centerpiece of the Drew campus. The first floor is used for special events, seminars and classes, and the second floor houses administration offices. In 1992, after the fire, the building was rededicated to its original beauty, having been restored and rehabilitated.

As a result of the Mead Hall restoration, Drew University's unique Certificate in Historic Preservation program was born under the partnership in preservation. We encourage the participation and resources of this historic preservation community. Their workshops and courses are open to



Courtesy of Alice Glock

Maestro Robert Butts, conductor of the Baroque Orchestra of New Jersey and the New Jersey Concert Opera, presented the program, "Nineteenth-Century Music for the Country Home," on January 25, 2009. Among the Gibbons Papers in the University Archives are bound music books inscribed "Caroline Gibbons." Their contents, including ethnic songs from Canada and Celtic songs from Europe, suggest an eclectic variety of music was enjoyed. Records reveal that the Gibbons home had a piano and harp for the daughters who grew up there. Education programs are held in the Founder's Room, restored to the 1840s period when it was William Gibbons dining room.



the public for enrollment (visit drew.edu/cue/preservation.aspx, or call 973/408-3185).

Through educational programs, the Friends' mission is to encourage greater awareness and support for this building and its history. We sponsor lectures, tours and events to enhance the knowledge and importance of this historical gem.

This year we would specially like to acknowledge the invaluable resources of the Drew University Archives. Research supported by the Friends of Mead Hall and shared in special programs and our newsletters would not be possible without the special care of the Gibbons Papers collection. The brilliant work of historians such as T.J. Stiles would have been more difficult without an organized and accessible collection (see cover story). Improving

and maintaining this collection, including the managing of art work and preservation records of Mead Hall, is necessary and important. These collections continue to yield treasures (see "A Rage for Roses," page 4).

The Friends work together to connect with the community, cultivate memberships and develop partnerships with other history and preservation groups. Support from the public is necessary so that many preservation needs are met. We invite you to become a member and experience the opportunity to grow from the past and be enriched by the present. If you would like to become more involved, please contact us using the form on the back or our Web site, www.friendsofmeadhall.org.

Nancy Priest
Advisory Board Chair



**The Friends of Mead Hall at Drew University
Invite you to our Spring Benefit Program**

**Vanderbilt, Gibbons, Drew:
*The Intersecting Lives of Three Tycoons
Who Remade America***

Sunday, March 7, 2010, at 4 p.m.

Lecture presented by T.J. Stiles, author of the 2009 National Book Award-winning biography of Cornelius Vanderbilt, *The First Tycoon*.

Wine Reception following Books and autograph signing will be available

Exhibit of Gibbons-Vanderbilt historical documents, in recognition of the Drew University Archives. The Gibbons Papers collection, a treasure trove of 19th-century documents in their care, makes new and vital historical research possible for history scholars, as well as for our programs and newsletters.

Tickets are \$35

For RSVP and reservations, please call 973/805-8855 or e-mail FoMH@drew.edu. For more information and reservation form, please visit www.friendsofmeadhall.org events page. The enclosed envelope may also be used.



A Rage for Roses

by Marta McDowell

A letter containing an 1848 order for roses adds colorful details and historic knowledge to the gardens and greenhouse known to have existed around the 1840s Gibbons family home, today known as Mead Hall (see Winter 2007 issue). The letter, found in the Gibbons Papers collection in the Drew University Archives, contains a long list of roses available and an order for Sarah Gibbons. She is William Gibbons' eldest child, described in the letter as having "quite a passion for flora." In 1848, she is 19 years old and lady of the house. Her mother died four years earlier.

Evidently, Miss Gibbons decided to spend a goodly sum on a rose garden, no doubt through a generous paternal allowance. It must have been a garden of some size, as her list includes 60 different varieties. As is the danger of catalog shopping then and now, her order seemed to grow in fits and starts. She writes the two dozen or so names in alphabetical order, then restarts, and, running out of ink and



Mike Shoup/Antique Rose Emporium

Souvenir de la Malmaison (1843), a highly fragrant Bourbon rose that appealed to Sarah Gibbons.

paper, squeezes the last few must-have roses up the side of the paper, perpendicular to the rest. With a final change of heart, she crosses out her first choice, sadly illegible, and substitutes with a fresh pen, "2 *Souvenir Malmaison* good strong plants."

In *Restoring American Gardens* (Timber Press, 2008), Denise Wiles Adams describes *Souvenir de la Malmaison* and several others on Miss Gibbons' list. The parenthetical information in the following list is the type of rose, flower color, and the earliest date that the rose was offered by American nurserymen.



A request for available roses and checked lists constitute an order for roses on behalf of Caroline Gibbons. A transcription of the letter to a "seed establishment in New York," a complete list of roses that follow, as well as photos of the original document, can be viewed at www.friendsofmeadhall.org.



- Lady Banks *Rosa banksiae alba* and *lutea* (Species, white and yellow, 1796)
- Caroline (Tea, pink, 1829)
- Chromatella or Cloth of Gold (Noisette, deep yellow, 1843)
- Crested Moss (Moss, deep pink, 1827)
- *Rosa x harisonii* (Hybrid species, yellow, 1830)
- La Reine (Hybrid perpetual, rosy lilac, 1842)
- Luxembourg (Moss, crimson purple, 1840)
- Ophirie (Noisette, salmon, 1841)
- Princesse Adelaide (Moss, light blush, 1845)
- Solfaterre (Noisette, pale yellow, 1843)
- Souvenir de la Malmaison (Bourbon rose, pale pink, 1843)



Many of these roses would have bloomed once a year in Miss Gibbons' garden in May and June. Unlike many modern hybrids, they would have been wonderfully fragrant. Inhale and imagine the heady scent. Many of Sarah's requests were the latest "fashion," introduced in the 1840s.

An interesting part of the order is the sidebar: "50 *crocus* roots=sorted, 12 *gladiolus*

lily, 6 *lily* roots of different kinds." It is as if, pump primed with so many roses, why not add some bulbs too? These early (crocuses) and late (gladiolus) blooming flowers would round out the season.

For more on heirloom roses consult the Antique Rose Emporium antiqueroseemporium.com and the Guide to American Roses roseinfo.com.

Courtesy of Alice Glock



Leading a tour of the historic Gibbons barn on August 8, 2009, Alice Glock explains the common bond brick pattern used in its construction in 1847. Documents in the Gibbons Papers collection give fascinating details such as the laying of 133,665 bricks by Silas Corey.



2009 Events Photos courtesy of Alice Glock



On November 15, 2009, David Cowell, professor emeritus of political science at Drew, with many years' experience in the antique business, presented "Achieving Artificial Light: Technological Change, Lighting Devices and the Civil War." Illuminating the talk were lighting devices from his extensive collection.



Jennifer Scanlan (left), Drew Historic Preservation Certificate program instructor and associate curator at New York's Museum of Arts and Design, NY, gave the talk "In High Spirits: Drinking Wine and Liquor in the 1830s," in March 2009. A wine tasting following included examples of drinks William Gibbons was known to have consumed. A copy of "William Gibbons and American Viniculture in the Early 19th Century, Tasting Notes" can be viewed at the newsletter page at www.friendsofmeadhall.org.

A fall flower arrangement, including roses and mums, by Marjorie Hulstrunk, adorns Mead Hall's Wendel Room, which served as the Gibbons parlor in Mead Hall. Refreshments, conversation and informal tours are enjoyed after lectures.





Benefit Lecture Preview

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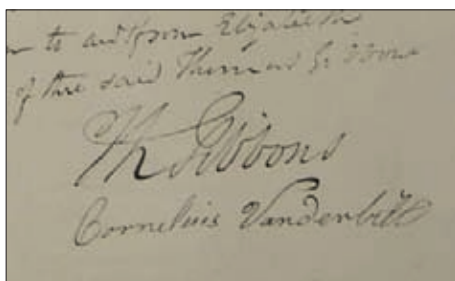
and quiet life as a gentleman farmer, horse racer and breeder in rural New Jersey.

Vanderbilt, in contrast, continued his ascendancy to the pinnacle of power in America's center of business and commerce, New York City. In this world, among the new rivals in the early 1830s was Daniel Drew. The two recognized their competing ambitions; but, equally smart, shrewd and cunning, they successfully neutralized their rivalry with partnerships that were often secret.

T.J. Stiles, the author of the new Vanderbilt biography, *The First Tycoon*, spent weeks in the Drew University Archives studying a rich collection of Gibbons-Vanderbilt papers. Rebecca Rego Barry, former Drew archivist, organized these documents, making them more fully accessible to scholars. Stiles' comprehensive and skillful use of primary source materials, such as the Gibbons Papers, no doubt contributes to the value of this book. As recipient of the 2009 National Book Award, the book's value has been recognized.

In addition, supporting characters in Vanderbilt's life story, such as Thomas and William Gibbons and Daniel Drew, come alive as Stiles reveals their characters and relationships in direct quotes from primary sources. The portrait, not only of the man but of the historical period, is detailed and nuanced. The picture is colorful and shaded with complexity. Stiles can challenge later historical assumptions, for instance what is deliberate and what is happenstance (or merely coincidental), such as the collaborative relationship between Gibbons and Vanderbilt.

A more nuanced historical view from a deeper understanding of characters and motivations adds new insight into the landmark Supreme Court case *Gibbons v. Ogden*.



Signatures of Thomas Gibbons and Cornelius Vanderbilt on employment contract, 1818.

Its historical significance in charting a more united country is long recognized. It is also clear that, for Vanderbilt, witnessing and being involved with Gibbons during this challenge of steamboat monopolies had a profound effect on his life. But certainly neither Gibbons nor Vanderbilt on the winning side realized or understood its impact in their lifetime the way we do today. Instead, at that time, the challenge was about personal honor and ambition, a historical theme that Stiles covers well. It is fascinating to discover through documents that Gibbons was largely motivated by personal revenge towards Aaron Ogden, who apparently meddled in affairs involving his wife whom he left in Georgia. The brittle pages of faded brown ink that convey those attitudes reside here in the Drew University Archives.

The thorough research and extensive use of primary sources—an intricate weaving of contemporary accounts in newspapers, reports and personal observations and thoughts in letters as well as financial and legal documents—makes Stiles' Vanderbilt biography a valuable history book. Stiles used these historical sources to craft not only spell-binding narratives about Vanderbilt the man and his many important relationships, but also to present an understanding of important issues in American history of the 19th century. For the Drew University community, *The First Tycoon* makes a significant contribution in bringing the Gibbonses and Daniel Drew to life.

Drew University Archives





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Friends of Mead Hall Web site: www.friendsofmeadhall.org

Please visit our website for the most current news and information about program events and tours. Historical information and previous newsletters are also posted. Membership registration and other contributions can be handled online. If you would like to volunteer with guided tours, program planning or writing for our newsletter, please contact us.

Questions and comment, feedback and suggestions are welcome. Write FoMH@drew.edu or call 973/805-8855. Thank you for your interest and support!

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