

# “Of Gothic Extraction”:

## Appleton’s Preservation Campaign and the French Gothic Revival

*Influenced both by the English concern with a building’s “visible skin” and by the French interest in a structure’s skeleton, William Sumner Appleton wove both cultures’ appreciation for the Gothic Revival into his preservation philosophy at SPNEA.*

**O**n the eve of the First World War Bostonians equated first-period houses in New England with European buildings of the Middle Ages. Although architectural historians today would certainly accept, along with Henry Adams, the cathedral at Chartres as quintessentially Gothic, they would be disinclined to use the same term to describe the “Old Bakery” in Salem (fig. 1). Yet William Sumner Appleton did. “The whole work is essentially medieval,” wrote Appleton in 1911 of the timber frame of the Old Bakery, or Hooper-Hathaway House (ca. 1682), as it is now known, adding that “the decorative motives are of Gothic extraction.”<sup>1</sup>

For Appleton and his collaborators in the early twentieth century the term “Gothic” was flexible. It embraced both English and French understandings of Gothic architecture, which were in turn central to each country’s practice of architectural restoration. In England, where the movement on behalf of the monuments of the Middle Ages was first generated by a Romantic appreciation for the picturesque outlines of the buildings, influential private groups campaigned for a kind of preservation that sought only to arrest decay. By way of contrast, in France the government took the lead in restoring monuments and was heavily influenced by the rationalist interpretation of medieval architecture that construed each element of a building as a response to a



Fig. 1. "Old Bakery" (Hooper-Hathaway House), about 1682, before restoration, Salem, Massachusetts, photographed by Wilfred A. French. Courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.

structural requirement. In the nineteenth century the French took pride in improving their decayed or incomplete historic monuments through restoration.

Because Appleton explicitly compared his private Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) to the English Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and tended to follow the English model in his interest in documentation and preservation over restoration, historians have underestimated the importance for Appleton of the French Gothic Revival and related restoration movement, largely directed and funded by the national government in Paris. The model of the French restoration cam-

paign, closely tied to the articulation of a rationalist view of Gothic architecture, also informed Appleton's regional preservation organization. The French concern to make clear, at times even to exaggerate, through restoration the structural role played by each part of a building informed Appleton's characterization of certain New England houses as "Gothic" and his subsequent treatment of them. Although he never advocated a strong governmental role in preservation and never entirely relinquished his belief in careful documentation, Appleton was swayed by French analyses of Gothic structure and by the restored monuments that impressed him in France.

At the time that Appleton founded the SPNEA, it was possible to construe New England's seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century architecture as Gothic because it predated the widespread use here of a more classical and Renaissance-inspired architectural idiom. Moreover, timber buildings like the Old Bakery were considered to be "medieval" or more specifically "Gothic" because they were thought to share with European Gothic architecture an important emphasis on structure. Just as the medieval masons of France had explored the technical and aesthetic potential of vaulted stone construction, so early American builders had exploited the possibilities inherent in the timber frame.

This interpretation of the Gothic enabled Appleton and like-minded architects and antiquarians to overcome two difficulties that the Gothic Revival had encountered in the United States since the early nineteenth century. First, it made less problematic the fact that there were not any "real" Gothic buildings in the United States to inspire new construction. Second, it became far easier to revive the Gothic if the historic style were identified not with features innately connected with a masonry system of construction but instead with a broader mentality that could be applied to architecture constructed out of any material. As the architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler commented in 1906, "Although we no longer build groined vaults, Gothic vaulting shows us principles which may be applied to any possible construction."<sup>2</sup>

It would prove easier to reproduce a

timber-framed, domestic-scaled "Gothic" architecture of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries than to revive here the monumental masonry Gothic architecture of Europe. In the first Gothic Revival, from the end of the eighteenth century through the middle of the following one, many small-scale masonry or wood-frame churches with Gothic details were constructed. These churches, along with the "Carpenter Gothic" cottages popularized by Alexander Jackson Davis, Andrew Jackson Downing, and others, constitute the architectural Gothic Revival with which Americans are most familiar. The designers of these monuments drew upon the rediscovery of Gothic architecture that took place in Europe from the middle of the eighteenth century and that is often considered part of the broader cultural movement of Romanticism. Much has been written of the attraction that Gothic cathedrals and churches held for the Romantics, who emphasized the subjective personal experience of architecture over its rational and intellectual analysis. As Horace Walpole, the eighteenth-century builder of the fabulous Gothic Revival Strawberry Hill (Twickenham, ca. 1760; fig. 2), stated, "One must have taste to be sensible of the beauties of Grecian architecture, one only wants passions to feel Gothic."<sup>3</sup>

Alongside this Romantic appreciation of the Gothic there emerged another contrasting understanding of medieval architecture, a sensibility that undergirded Appleton's Gothic Revival. From the mid-eighteenth century on, French writers in particular developed a structurally rational-

ist interpretation of the Gothic to counter the classicist charge that medieval architecture was irrational. Some Gothic buildings, they argued, expressed the relationship between load and support just as clearly as did the more evidently “rational” monuments of the classical tradition. This rationalist view of the Gothic was later developed and popularized throughout the Western world by the theorist and architect Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814–79).

Beyond this critical reassessment of the Gothic, Viollet-le-Duc also contributed to the Gothic Revival of the second half of the nineteenth century an instrumental role in the French national restora-

tion campaign. Although buildings from the Roman imperial period through the Renaissance were restored in France beginning about the time of the 1830 revolution, Gothic architecture particularly concerned the French. The monuments associated with that style were among the country’s most impressive, but because they were considered to be the material evidence of the abolished monarchy and Catholic church they had been deliberately destroyed following the Revolution of 1789. Even after the reestablishment of the church under Napoleon, many Gothic buildings continued to be plagued by structural problems brought on by the years of neglect.

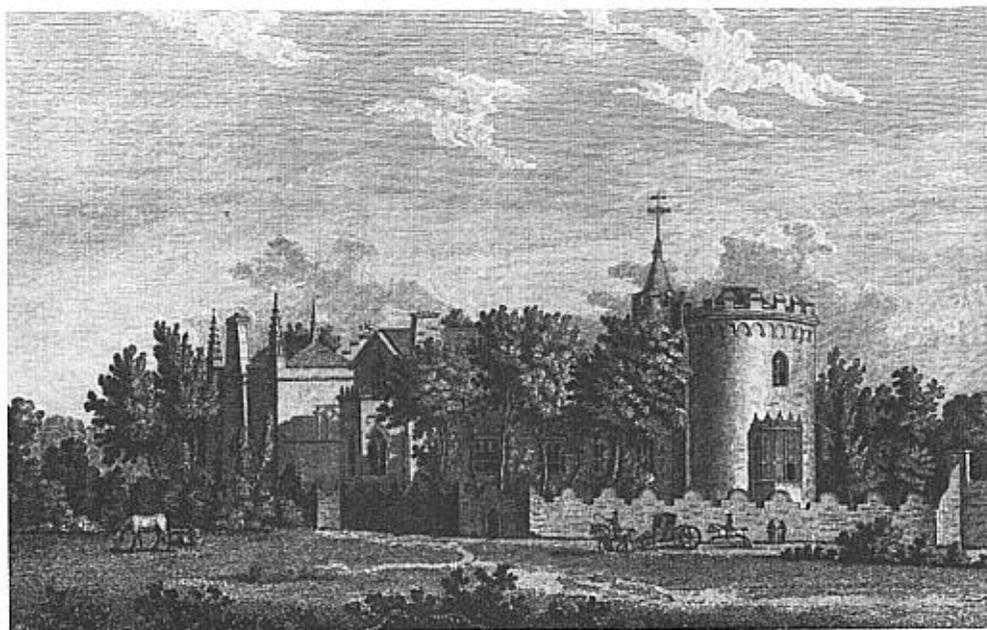


Fig. 2. Horace Walpole’s *Strawberry Hill* exemplifies the Romantic appreciation of the Gothic style. Engraving from *A Description of Strawberry Hill* (1774), courtesy Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Redressing this official disregard for the Gothic, Viollet-le-Duc and his collaborators forged a cultural identity for the French nation based on a tradition of structural achievement that could be traced back to the medieval period and that could offer a model for the development of a modern architecture based on the constructive potential of such new materials as iron.

#### STRUCTURE AND CRAFTSMANSHIP

As an early proponent of architectural preservation in the United States, William Sumner Appleton was well aware of the degree to which he was inventing the American equivalent of the European restoration movement. In his view England and France, and the concepts of architectural preservation or restoration articulated by John Ruskin and William Morris in England and Viollet-le-Duc in France, offered particularly salient examples to follow. Works by these three men were widely read in the United States at different points in the nineteenth century, and together they had forged two different interpretations of Gothic architecture. Nikolaus Pevsner related these interpretations to particularly "English" and "French" ways of thinking. In the eighteenth century, Gothic architecture had been incorporated into the British picturesque aesthetic. In the nineteenth century, to be concerned with the imprint on the buildings of the craftsman was uniquely "English," Pevsner has argued; to be fascinated above all with the structural aspects of the Gothic was "French."<sup>4</sup> In restoring medieval buildings French

architects, especially Viollet-le-Duc, tended to make more prominent the critical structural elements, such as flying buttresses, while paying little attention to whether original fabric was maintained. The English regularly criticized French restoration practices for resulting in buildings that appeared new because of their solidified structural elements.

Bertram K. Little has maintained that Appleton introduced three essentially English "standards" into the practice of preservation through the SPNEA. According to Little, Appleton insisted on the "painstaking exploration of existing evidence and conditions," the documentation of the process of restoration, and, most importantly, "the abstention from conjectural restoration if later changes were interesting in themselves and earlier features could be interpreted through them." After a decade or so of work at SPNEA, Appleton asked rhetorically, "What is the object of a restoration: There can be but one answer. It is to restore a given object to the appearance it had at the beginning or at some other selected time or times of its existence. To ignore the evidence and make what may be more beautiful in the eyes of those having the work in charge is not to restore but to build anew, falsifying the old and telling an archaeological falsehood. Such a society as ours can, of course, under no circumstances be knowingly guilty of such an act."<sup>5</sup>

Appleton adopted the English respect for historic building fabric that was absent in nineteenth-century French restoration projects, which often sought to

improve upon the structural systems employed in earlier buildings. Further, Appleton explicitly rejected the French administrative organization of preservation. In his lengthy 1919 article on preservation in New England Appleton described how in "Continental Europe" preservation "has generally been undertaken by the government or under public auspices, with varying degrees of success." Appleton was skeptical of the degree to which this approach could be used in the United States, where "the part of the public capable of appreciating a handsome building for the sake of its artistic merit, is small indeed, and the chance of obtaining support from the public treasury is too negligible to notice, except in the case of public buildings of historic interest, like Faneuil Hall in Boston, and Independence Hall, Philadelphia." Moreover, Appleton had no faith whatsoever in the ability of the American political system to carry out such work given "its almost total lack of responsibility, as well as its widespread tendency to the spoils system." Instead he advocated action by private individuals allied through organizations patterned after the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) in England, the institution to which he explicitly compared the SPNEA.<sup>6</sup> Appleton's political and social conservatism did not permit him to entrust preservation to government institutions that might be influenced by segments of the population with whom he had little sympathy. Believing that the descendants of colonial New England's Anglo-Saxon elite were best able to appreciate the historic and aesthetic value of the

region's early architecture, Appleton argued that Brahmins like himself should control preservation.

Appleton's objectives in restoration were close to the English view stressing preservation over restoration. Ruskin and Morris had defined restoration in ways that distinguished their practice from that of the French. Ruskin, for instance, considered restoration "the most total destruction which a building can suffer . . . it is impossible, as impossible as to raise the dead."<sup>7</sup> Morris's SPAB, or "Anti-Scrape Society," opposed restoration that attempted to efface signs of age and wear from the facade of a building and thus gave it an unnatural appearance of newness. With some justification, the English criticized the French for having engaged in this kind of restoration since the early nineteenth century. "It is to the French, more than to any other people, that we must turn if we wish to give examples of wholesale destruction, effected under pretence of restoration," the British architect George Edmund Street remarked in *The Ecclesiologist* in 1857, "and it is to France, more than to any other country, that people in England are fond of appealing." In an attempt to dampen English enthusiasm for French restoration, Street pointed out "how [in France] west fronts of cathedrals always seem to be bristling with scaffolding; and how, when workmen are gone, there remains—not the glorious old work grim with ages, weather-beaten, and here and there damaged and broken,—but a clean, smart copy of the old work, with all kinds of minor improvements, which just destroy nine-tenths of the whole

interest attaching to it." For Street, the facades of both Reims and Laon cathedrals exemplified this unfortunately popular French approach.<sup>8</sup>

Appleton combined the English (Romantic) and French (Structuralist) attitudes in unequal measures to the treatment of old buildings to formulate his own preservation ethic. Each approach had their counterparts in the prevailing views of earlier American buildings. Although he advocated careful documentation, Appleton was also among the group of antiquarians and architects who advanced a structuralist appreciation of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century buildings over the earlier Romantic interest. That he was aware of this distinction is clear from his comments in 1919 on the Fairbanks House in Dedham, which he dated to as early as 1638 (fig. 3). Appleton writes of the house, "Scattered through it are reminders of the very oldest 18th century work," including "the method of filling the walls with 'wattle and daub' and the manner of hewing the garret tie-beams." But he allowed that "these details alone would not account for the popularity of the house. In this case much is due to the successive additions to the old structure. East, west and north it has been enlarged time and again, until now the whole is perhaps the quaintest jumble of lines and chimneys to be found in the whole country."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the Fairbanks House had been visited, sketched, and photographed continually since the "discovery" of early American architecture during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. If Appleton seemed doubtful of

the ability of structural characteristics to arouse public enthusiasm for the house, he nonetheless penetrated beyond the contours of the picturesque pile in order to highlight its significance as an example of older methods of construction.

This emphasis on the building's skeleton over its visible skin was the direct product of Appleton's contact with the theories of Viollet-le-Duc and with the French Gothic Revival. His knowledge of Viollet-le-Duc likely came through Norman Isham, one of the architects with whom he worked closely from the time of SPNEA's founding.<sup>10</sup> In 1935 Isham recalled for the Walpole Society, the organization of antique collectors founded in 1910, that "the work of 'collecting' the old houses had to be done from the ground up, for we were working on the lines of structure, not merely on those of form, and there was almost nothing in America in the way of books which would help. We learned a great deal from Viollet-le-Duc and his fascinating drawings of old French framing—indeed I cannot exaggerate our debt to him."<sup>11</sup>

Isham's and Appleton's reliance on Viollet-le-Duc is evident first in the distinction drawn here between "structure" and "form," or outward appearance, and second in the graphic techniques that Isham used to represent earlier American architecture. Just as Viollet-le-Duc combined many different kinds of views of a Gothic building in order to reveal the interrelation of its parts, so Isham employed a variety of images to describe the workings of a timber frame (figs. 4 and 5). Isham shared with Appleton a fascina-



Fig. 3. *The Fairbanks House, about 1637, Dedham, Massachusetts, photographed by The Halliday Historic Photograph Company, before 1916. Courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.*

tion with the second-story overhangs they discovered on some early houses, among them the Ward House and the so-called “House of the Seven Gables” in Salem. Both possessed, according to Appleton, “structural” as opposed to hewn overhangs, that is, overhangs that were created by extending the horizontal framing members beyond the facade of the building as opposed to similar effects produced by carving back a wooden beam between the first and second stories. In the case of the House of the Seven Gables, where in the way of restoration “practically nothing was done without antiquarian warrant,” or without justification from a preservation perspective, Appleton wrote that “[the] structural overhang at the south end was

restored to view after having been long concealed beneath a later false exterior wall” (figs. 6 and 7).<sup>12</sup>

Such attempts to reveal the all-important timber frame (though in the case of the House of the Seven Gables the work was not Appleton’s own) point up an essential difficulty faced in translating the French structural approach to New England buildings. In the Gothic cathedral the structure was immediately evident to the viewer. The system of vaulting was visible on the interior, while the buttresses protruded from the exterior walls. In a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century New England house, on the other hand, the structure was largely encased within the interior and exterior walls. This invis-

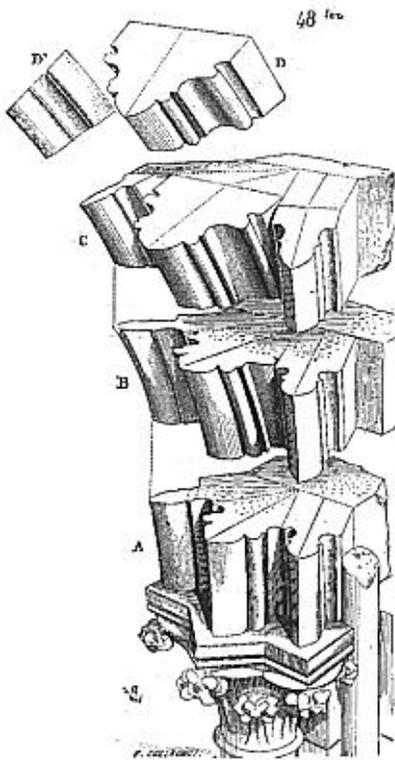


Fig. 4. Drawing by Viollet-le-Duc illustrating his use of novel graphic techniques to analyze Gothic structures, taken from vol. 4 of *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle* (1859). Courtesy Fiske Kimball Fine Arts Library, University of Virginia.

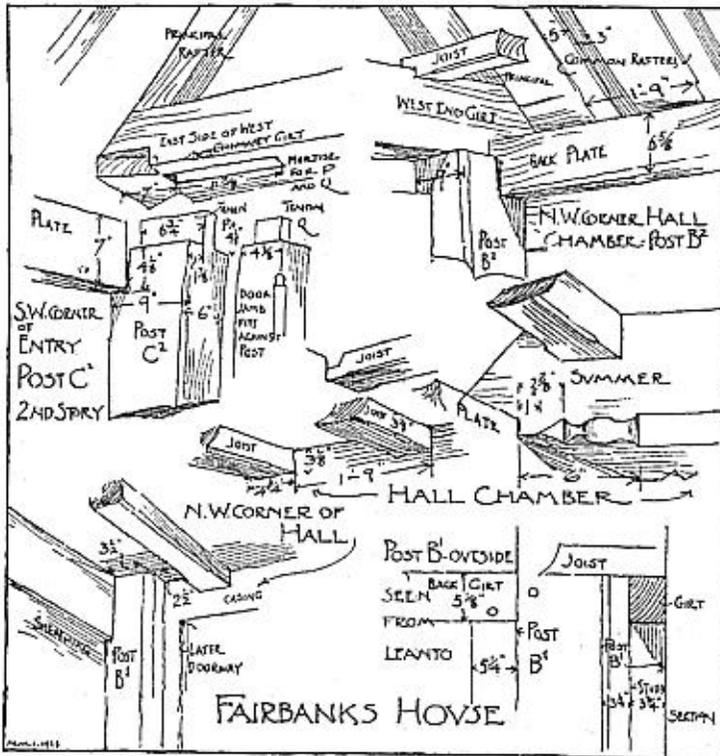


Fig. 5. "Framing Details. Fairbanks House, Dedham, Mass," fig. 21 in Norman Isham's *Early American Houses* (1928), demonstrates Isham's reliance on Viollet-le-Duc's drawing style as well as the more structural concern with early American architecture that Appleton and Isham introduced. Courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.

ibility hampered Isham's and Appleton's investigation, at least at the beginning. "Our greatest help at first was the ruined house," Isham reported to the Walpole Society, "but even here one could not hasten the downfall—well, too much."<sup>13</sup>

Taking up the structural interpretation of historic architecture and downplaying its Romantic appreciation, Appleton and Isham participated in a broader historiographical trend that began during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Michael Brooks has argued that in the United States the reputation of John Ruskin began to fade in those years. While

he had been widely read and appreciated following the publication of his influential *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and other works, Ruskin's call for a return to medieval craftsmanship, guild organizations, and morality in architecture eventually ceased to be compelling. Brooks has attributed Ruskin's declining reputation in the United States to his rejection of modern materials, especially iron, and his apparent lack of interest in structural questions. The influential American critic Russell Sturgis, for example, who was initially enamored of Ruskin's thinking, wrote in 1906 that although Ruskin was "a

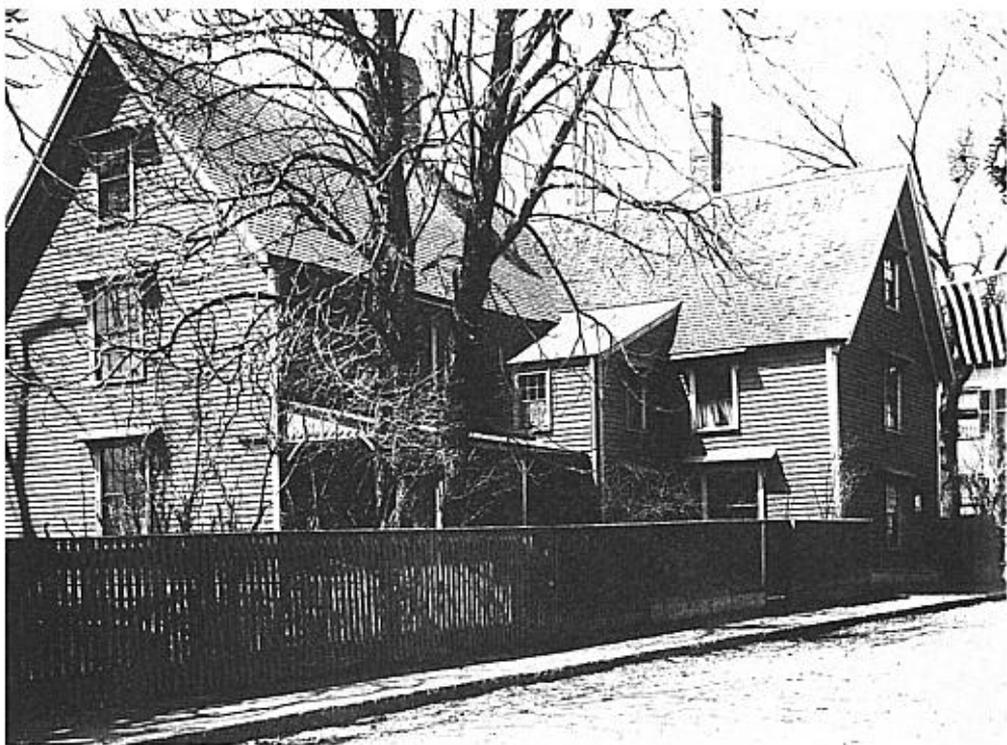


Fig. 6. "House of the Seven Gables" (Turner House), Salem, Massachusetts, about 1668, prior to restoration, photograph by The Halliday Historic Photograph Company. Courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.



Fig. 7. *The Turner House after its restoration and the exposure of the original overhang; photograph from the Mary H. Northend Collection, 1910-20. Courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.*

practical draughtsman at the details of form," he "had no notion whatever of the constructor's art."<sup>14</sup>

Conversely, in his *Entretiens sur l'architecture* (originally published in 1863 and 1872 and in an English translation by Henry Van Brunt in Boston soon after) Viollet-le-Duc argued for a use of iron in modern architecture that was ultimately based on what he perceived to be the rationalist example of the Gothic cathedrals.<sup>15</sup> Brooks has shown how the appreciation of Viollet-le-Duc's rationalism and functionalism appealed to Americans, who were keenly interested in new building materi-

als, and has made it possible for scholars to reconstruct the process by which Appleton would have come into contact with this school of thought. Among those who began to appreciate Viollet-le-Duc more around the turn of the century was Charles Eliot Norton, a former "friend" and "disciple" of Ruskin who was appointed Harvard's first professor of fine arts in 1874. Despite his association with Ruskin, Norton faulted the British theorist for not adequately emphasizing structural considerations in Gothic architecture. Norton attempted to redress this oversight in his teaching at Harvard, as Brooks has shown.<sup>16</sup>

Among Norton's students at Harvard was William Sumner Appleton, who was enrolled at the university between 1892 and 1896. In his well-received lectures, Norton emphasized both Ruskinian and Viollet-le-Ducian themes. On the one hand, medieval cathedrals and churches were evidence of a morally superior time; on the other, they embodied various vaulting systems and typologies of Gothic buildings.<sup>17</sup> Importantly for Appleton's later work at SPNEA, Norton also established a conceptual equivalence between the restored medieval buildings of Europe and the historic houses of the United States. In his 1889 article, "The Lack of Old Homes in America," Norton championed the "hereditary residence of a family" as an endangered but critical conveyor of historical memory. "In our country," he wrote, "barren as it is of historic objects that appeal to the imagination and arouse the poetic associations that give depth and charm to life, such a home is even more precious than in lands where works abound that recall the past by transmitting its image to our eyes."<sup>18</sup> In other words, historic houses were not necessary in countries where religious buildings and other monuments served as reminders of the past. In the United States, however, houses had to perform this function. Appleton's preservation efforts must certainly have owed something to Norton's restoration ethic. More subtle, but equally important to Appleton, however, was Norton's incorporation of the French structural approach into his architectural history. Appleton eventually wove the two

strands of Norton's teaching together in the work of the SPNEA.

For Appleton, Norton was one important conduit to French architectural ideas. Direct experience was another. Appleton was well prepared by Norton's teaching to appreciate the architectural wonders of western Europe when he left for his grand tour following his Harvard graduation. This was not his first European experience, for he had lived abroad with his family for more than a year around 1887. Nevertheless, as the map on which he traced his route in dark pen shows (fig. 8), Appleton covered a great deal of terrain from England through northern Europe. Appleton's scrapbook from the trip also preserves ticket stubs, brochures, press clippings, and other ephemera that attest to his presence at many canonical French monuments of the Middle Ages, including quite a few of Viollet-le-Duc's most famous restorations. On the itinerary were the abbey church of St. Denis (acknowledged as the first Gothic building and the subject of a series of controversial restorations in the nineteenth century), Mont-Saint-Michel, Amiens, Rouen, Pierrefonds (the subject of a notoriously inventive restoration by Viollet-le-Duc), and others (fig. 9).<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately no diary from this period of travel exists to reveal Appleton in the process of assimilating his own observations of French Gothic buildings with the concepts that he had already learned from Norton. However, his diaries covering his next trip to Europe, in 1909, preserve his impressions of some major restorations that date from the

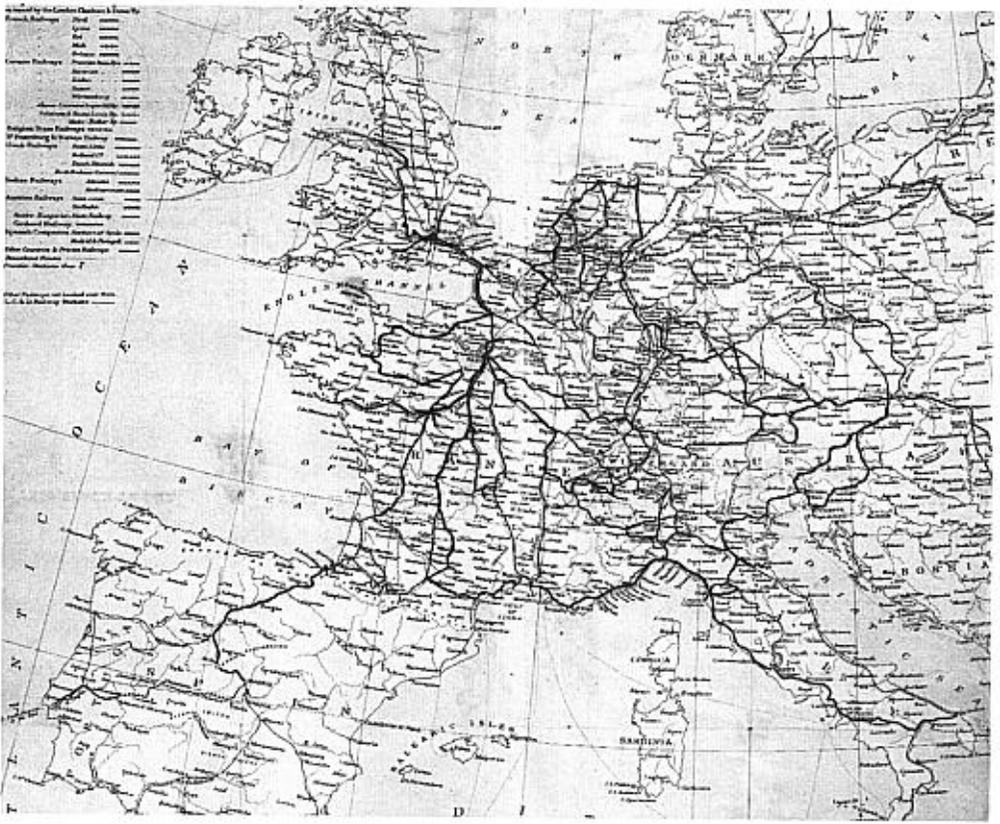


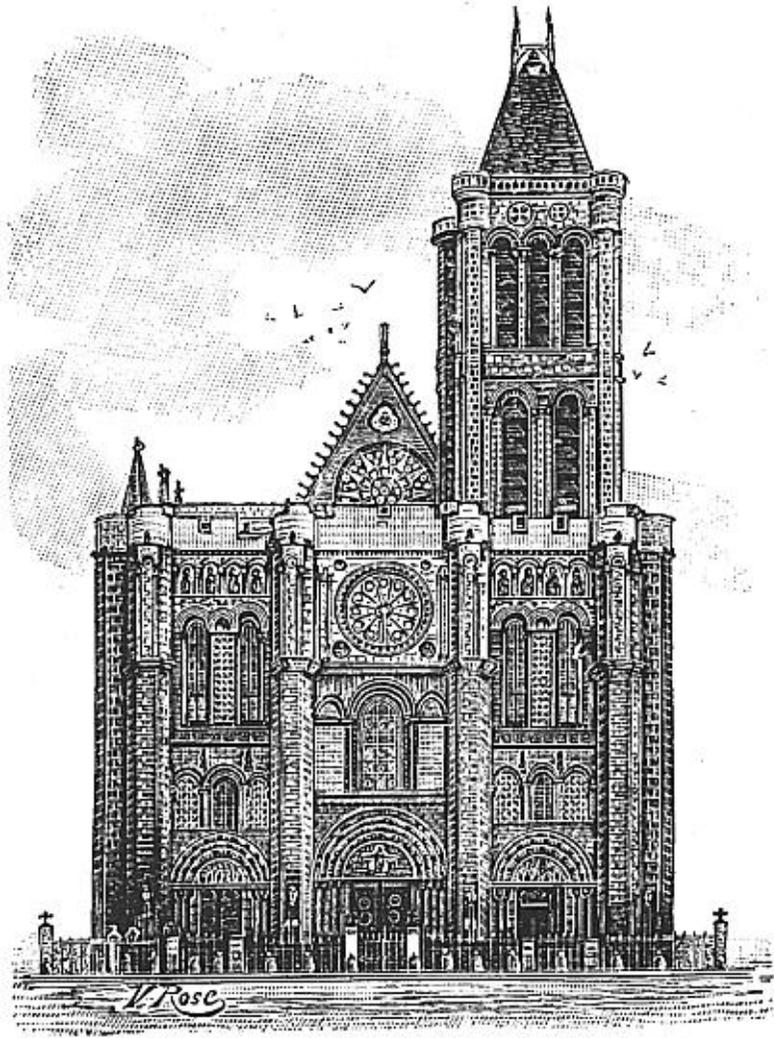
Fig. 8. This map from Appleton's 1896–97 scrapbook shows the route of his grand tour of that period. Courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.

nineteenth-century Gothic Revival. In Appleton's generally terse diary, covering from January 1, 1906, to December 31, 1910, the references to his visits to French medieval monuments are among the most developed and enthusiastic. Arriving in Paris on March 11, 1909, Appleton went the next day to the Louvre whose picture galleries he described as "awful." When he reached Bourges on March 16, however, he began to wax poetic: "[The cathedral] surely is grand and we were all taken by the town. There are many old timbered houses." Appleton and his traveling com-

panions Hattie and Bella Curtis had tea at the "splendid" Palais Jacques Coeur. In Toulouse, whose church of Saint-Sernin was restored by Viollet-le-Duc, Appleton wrote, "The girls got shampoos while I saw the town," including six figures from the church housed in the local museum.<sup>20</sup>

Appleton heaped his most fulsome praise by far on the medieval city of Carcassonne, restored by Viollet-le-Duc between about 1850 and his death in 1879 (fig. 10). "All morning on the walls, and glorious they are," Appleton wrote in a comparatively extensive entry. "Much

## Conserver la Vue de la Basilique.



VUE DE LA BASILIQUE DE SAINT-DENIS

**Voir au dos.**

Fig. 9.  
*Appleton*  
*affixed, among*  
*other things, a*  
*picture of the*  
*facade of the*  
*abbey church*  
*of Saint-Denis*  
*in his 1896-97*  
*scrapbook.*  
*Courtesy*  
*SPNEA*  
*Library and*  
*Archives.*

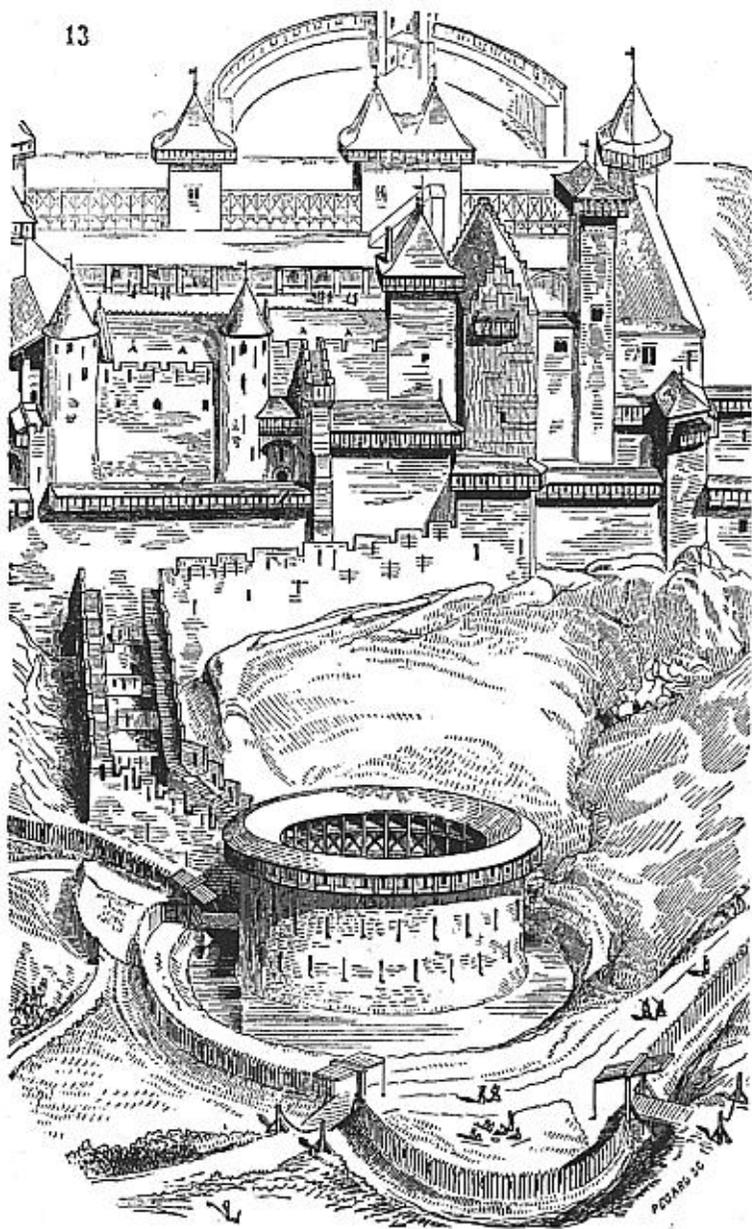
improved since my 1896 visit.<sup>21</sup> Significant here is that Appleton was most impressed by a restoration that exemplified the greater degree of liberty taken by the French in comparison to the more conservative English preservationists. The extent to which Appleton recognized the scope of restoration at Carcassonne is

unclear. Although much of the fortified walls survived, Viollet-le-Duc enhanced their crenellations to produce his ideal city of the Middle Ages. Interestingly, in January 1909, between his two visits to Carcassonne, Appleton had begun to discuss with associates founding the SPNEA.<sup>22</sup> The SPNEA was thus in the

forefront of Appleton's mind as he climbed around on the walls of Carcassonne two months later. The French model was not Appleton's only point of departure, but his positive response to the restored monuments of France, combined with the knowledge he

had acquired of Viollet-le-Duc's structural approach to medieval architecture through Eliot Norton and Isham, suggest that the French Gothic Revival was a significant ingredient in the formulation of the SPNEA. In one sense, this claim seems paradoxical, for the French archi-

Fig. 10. *Drawing by Viollet-le-Duc of Carcassonne from vol. 1 of Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle (1854). Courtesy Fiske Kimball Fine Arts Library, University of Virginia.*



tektural patrimony was of an entirely different order than the American. Of greatest interest to the French themselves and to tourists were the churches and cathedrals of the Middle Ages, as well as such secular buildings as royal palaces and such medieval fortified cities as Carcassonne. From these monuments Appleton and Isham gleaned a method for analyzing a building's structure. Further, the boldness of Viollet-le-Duc's restorations of monuments like Carcassonne inspired Appleton. He knew of the British approach and could certainly have adhered to a strictly preservationist method of treating the old buildings in his care. However, he had learned in France the rhetorical potential of an historic monument. Viollet-le-Duc may have sometimes been reckless in turning buildings into representations of stylistic ideals, but the buildings he restored had no doubt gained in impressiveness as a consequence of his work. Appleton seems to have appreciated this fact at Carcassonne.

His response to Carcassonne (fig. 11) was similar to that of Edith Wharton who wrote of it in her *A Motor-Flight through France*, published the year before Appleton's grand tour. She observed of the medieval city that "he who has gone there with wrath in his heart against Viollet-le-Duc may even, under these mitigating conditions, go so far as to think that the universal restorer has for once been justified by his results—that, granting in advance the possibility of innumerable errors of detail, his brilliant hypothesis still produces a total impression of reality."<sup>23</sup> Appleton's understand-

ing of Carcassonne was undoubtedly similar to Wharton's: on the one hand, he saw that part of the appearance could represent the restorer's invention, on the other, he was caught up in the evocation of the medieval period.

Of the many preservation projects in which Appleton was involved, two exemplify the impact of the French model on his work with New England houses. In the course of restoring the 1796 Harrison Gray Otis House, Appleton returned the entrance portico to the dimensions indicated by traces found on the brick facade once the later nineteenth-century porch had been removed. Some critics apparently thought the restored porch too meager in proportion to the scale of the house. His stolid respect for the physical evidence proved, in Appleton's mind, that his work was similar to the careful preservation carried out by the SPAB. Nonetheless, Appleton operated according to certain preconceived notions of what constituted a perfect early American building. At times his work approached Viollet-le-Duc's definition of restoration, which aimed at returning a building to "an imagined state of completeness that may never have existed at a given moment." In the case of the Otis House restoration, Appleton was not above replacing the "ugly modern bay which disfigured the front of the house" with a duplicate of the Palladian window on the rear "made somewhat more elaborate in exterior detail on the supposition that the front of the house would naturally have been more pretentious than the back."<sup>24</sup> The restoration thus created a hierarchy of

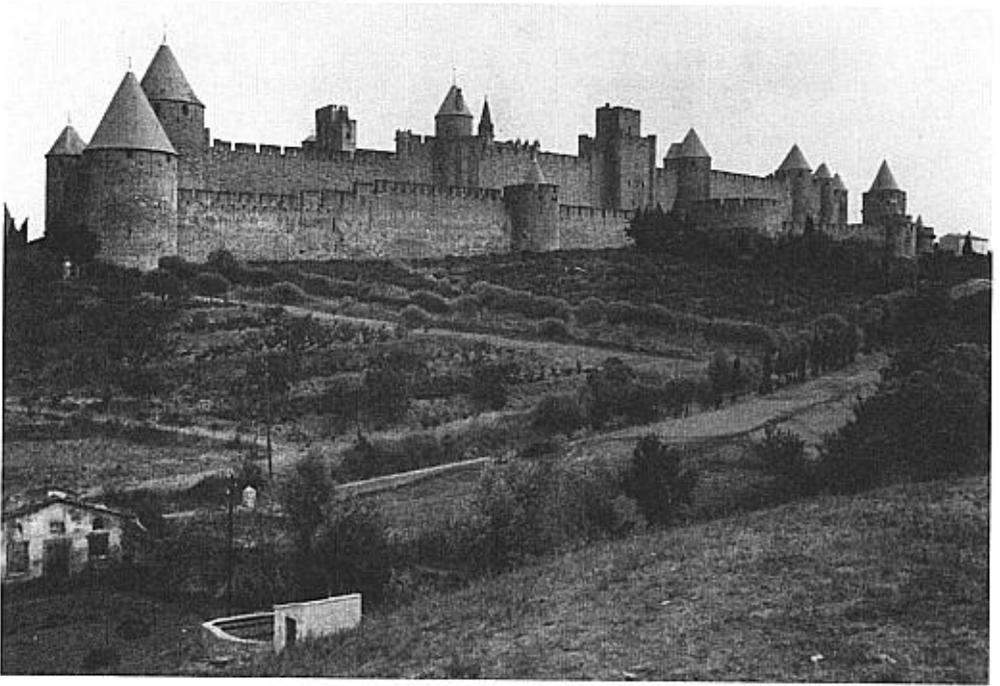


Fig. 11. *Carcassonne, about 1930. Courtesy the Boston Public Library, Print Department.*

decorative elaboration among the facades of the house that was not documented but that Appleton deemed suitable.

The impact on Appleton of the French concern with structure is also evidenced by his work on a first-period house. Inspired by what he believed to be the seventeenth-century frame of the Abraham Browne House (1694–1701) in Watertown, Appleton personally purchased and restored the building between 1919 and 1920 (figs. 12 and 13). On the advice of Isham and Joseph Everett Chandler, the architect of the restoration of the House of the Seven Gables, Appleton kept the house on its original location rather than dismantling the frame and moving it to Saugus as he had originally planned. As James Lindgren has

pointed out, Appleton's approach here was "scientific" to the extent that he photographically recorded his restoration work.<sup>25</sup> However, Appleton's work on the Browne house also suggests Viollet-le-Duc's restoration practice, first in the primacy that Appleton accorded the building's frame and second in the degree to which his restoration clarified the chronological relationship between the two sections of the house so that even an amateur can effortlessly identify the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century parts of the building. As a consequence of the restoration, the Browne House came to have two obviously distinct sections, one with a projecting gable and leaded-glass casement windows, the other made symmetrical and featuring a triangular pediment



Fig. 12. Photographed before its restoration, the Abraham Browne House (1694–1701) in Watertown illustrates how the seventeenth-century character of the building had been obscured by later alterations. Photograph by The Halliday Historic Photograph Company; courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.

above the door. The Browne House had become a textbook lesson in the transition from a “medieval” to a “post-medieval” architectural idiom.

The restoration of the Browne House, in which Appleton had a large financial and emotional investment, points to some of the ways in which his work perpetuated aspects of the French approach to their medieval monuments. In addition to their restoration work, Appleton’s and Isham’s awareness of the French Gothic Revival is evident in their analyses of historic buildings. That Appleton relied on the French model of

restoration offered by Viollet-le-Duc and his contemporaries had larger extra-architectural significance. From the middle of the nineteenth century, the nationally sponsored program of restoration in France established the Gothic church or cathedral as the nation’s principal architectural achievement. Moreover, the canon of restored medieval buildings attracted an international public of tourists in whose minds the nation’s identity was inseparable from that architecture. Appleton’s Harvard English professor Barrett Wendell spent the academic year 1904–5 in France and recorded his

impressions of the country in his fall 1906 Lowell Institute lectures, published the following year as *The France of Today*. Breathlessly, Wendell recounted the wonders of the French Gothic cathedrals. "You may well forget the details of structure and ornament, dear to the lovers of historical monuments. You may find the images even of the masterpieces fused or fusing in your fancy, till they grow flickering, phantasmagoric." But, Wendell reassured his audience, "they will never fade into lifelessness. Rather, you grow always more wonderingly aware of how measureless was the aspiration of medieval France."<sup>26</sup> This passionate tribute to the inviolable image of the Gothic building, hence of the French nation itself, was penned in the decade leading up to the First World War,

in a climate of growing French nationalism and escalating international tension.

As the restoration of Gothic buildings served to secure French cultural and political identity from the 1830s onward, so too the creation of an equivalent architectural patrimony for the United States provided a set of images that visually asserted the industriousness, intelligence, and moral rectitude of the founding fathers and mothers. Where medieval masons had rationally pursued the potential of their materials and building technologies, the colonists had exquisitely worked the massive timbers at their disposal to produce houses that became lasting images of their fortitude. Appleton borrowed from the French a sensitivity to structure that helped him to promote



Fig. 13. *The Abraham Browne House after its restoration; photograph by George Brayton, 1924. Courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.*

these houses as strong, rational, and the rightful architectural patrimony of the United States. ✪

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#### NOTES

1. William Sumner Appleton, "The Old Bakery," *Bulletin of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities* 2, 2 (August 1911): 14–15.
2. Montgomery Schuyler, "Notes & Comments," *Architectural Record* 19 (January 1906): 66–67. Schuyler discussed here the importance of Viollet-le-Duc's "excellent literature" in formulating this point of view.
3. Horace Walpole, "Anecdotes of Painting," *Works* (1798), 3: 94; quoted in Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis, *Horace Walpole* (New York: Pantheon, 1961), 105.
4. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, "Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc: Englishness and Frenchness in the Appreciation of Gothic Architecture," in *Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, 1814–1879* (Architectural Design Profile) (London: Academy Editions, 1980), 48–53.
5. Bertram K. Little, "William Sumner Appleton," in *Keepers of the Past*, ed. Clifford L. Lord (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, [1965]), 219; William Sumner Appleton, "Annual Report," *SPNEA Bulletin* 11, 4 (April 1921): 166.
6. William Sumner Appleton, "Destruction and Preservation of Old Buildings in New England," *Art and Archaeology* 8, 3 (May–June 1910): 179. Discussing the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, Appleton wrote, "Still there can be no doubt that the spirit of the work of the two societies is almost identical." William Sumner Appleton, "Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings," *SPNEA Bulletin* 5, 2 (December 1914): 19.
7. Quoted in Stephan Tschudi Madsen, *Restoration and Anti-Restoration: A Study in English Restoration Philosophy* (Oslo, Norway: Universitets forlaget, 1976), 16.
8. George Edmund Street, "Destructive Restoration on the Continent," *The Ecclesiologist* 18 (1857): 342.
9. Appleton, "Destruction and Preservation," 148. In the same article Appleton wrote of the "Scotch"-Boardman House in Saugus that "the Saugus house, like most 17th century houses, is interesting structurally rather than architecturally and is not suitable for a museum [to purchase as period rooms]" (171).
10. In 1924 Isham was elected "consulting architect" to SPNEA along with Joseph E. Chandler, William W. Cordingley, and J. Frederick Kelly. This was an honorary position, although Appleton was in regular contact with Isham. William Sumner Appleton to Norman Isham, Apr. 3, 1924, SPNEA Library and Archives.
11. Norman Morrison Isham, "Certain Adventures and Problems," *Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Meeting of the Walpole Society* (n.p.: by the Society, 1935), 47.
12. Appleton, "Destruction and Preservation," 144–46. Abbott Lowell Cummings has explained the boxing in of the overhang at the Turner House as a structural necessity in *The Framed Houses of the Massachusetts Bay*,

- 1625–1725 (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1979), 72–74.
13. Isham, "Certain Adventures," 49.
  14. Russell Sturgis, *Ruskin on Architecture* (1906), quoted in Michael W. Brooks, *John Ruskin and Victorian Architecture* (New Brunswick, N. J., and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 285.
  15. Brooks, *Ruskin and Victorian Architecture*, 290.
  16. Michael W. Brooks, "New England Gothic: Charles Eliot Norton, Charles H. Moore, and Henry Adams," in *The Architectural Historian in America*, ed. Elisabeth Blair MacDougall, issue of *Studies in the History of Art* 35 (1990): 113–17.
  17. Brooks, "New England Gothic." See also James M. Lindgren, *Preserving Historic New England* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 19–22.
  18. Charles Eliot Norton, "The Lack of Old Homes in America," *Scribner's Magazine* 5, May 1889, 638.
  19. William Sumner Appleton, Scrapbook for 1896–97, SPNEA Library and Archives. In addition to the scrapbooks at SPNEA several others are in the collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. I would like to thank Lorna Condon for having made these known to me.
  20. The Toulouse entry is for Mar. 23, 1909. The diary is in the collection of the SPNEA. On the members of the Curtis family, with whom Appleton spent much time during the period covered by his diaries, see Isabella Halsted, *The Aunts* (Manchester, Mass.: Sharksmouth Press, 1992). I am grateful to Abbott Lowell Cummings for having shared with me his reminiscences of the Curtis family and for his encouragement.
  21. The Carcassonne entry is for Mar. 24, 1909. The most recent account of the restoration of Carcassonne is to be found in Jean-Pierre Panouillé, *Carcassonne, le temps des sièges* (Paris: Presses du CNRS and Caisse nationale des monuments historiques et des sites, 1992).
  22. In his diary Appleton noted having discussed the SPNEA with friends on Jan. 3 and Jan. 5, 1909. SPNEA Library and Archives. Among the projects ongoing at Carcassonne between 1896 and Appleton's second visit was the elimination of private residences from around the medieval remains. See Robert Debant, "L'Oeuvre de Viollet-le-Duc a Carcassonne," *Les Monuments historiques de la France*, nouv. ser. 11 (1965): 70.
  23. Edith Wharton, *A Motor-Flight through France* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 121–22. I would like to thank Colleen Ramsay for her assistance in locating period accounts of Carcassonne.
  24. Appleton, "Annual Report," 166. The restoration of the portico was planned without the knowledge of the original drawing for the facade by architect Charles Bulfinch (ca. 1796, Massachusetts Historical Society collection), which does not call for a portico. Recent research has shown that the portico was added about 1810. Evidence for the original existence of a Palladian window at the facade was found on the interior of the facade and a new one designed by the architectural firm of Little and Browne, who were also responsible for the design of the portico. The restoration of the Otis House is documented in SPNEA research reports on "Sash and Doors" and "Exterior Walls" (July 1996) by Anne Grady, which she kindly made available to me. These findings are to be incorporated into her forthcoming historic structures report on the Otis House.
  25. Lindgren, *Preserving Historic New England*, 147–49.
  26. Barrett Wendell, *The France of Today*, 2d ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 245.