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### **COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY RESEARCH AWARD**

During the two weeks I spent on the campus and within the libraries of Columbia University, I conducted a great deal of research that is proving critical to the completion of my dissertation. My study, which comprises my doctoral dissertation, examines the architecture of James Renwick, Jr., who is among the most prolific, yet sadly understudied architects in the history of nineteenth-century American architecture. Renwick (1818-1895) was based in New York, where a majority of projects were built, including Grace Church, St. Patrick's Cathedral, and various other smaller churches throughout the boroughs (also among his notable designs is the Smithsonian Castle in Washington, D.C.); unfortunately, a majority of his buildings are no longer standing.

I utilized the collections of two individual departments of the library system of Columbia University—Rare Books and Manuscript Library and the Drawings and Archives Division at Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library. The following will briefly summarize how these collections contributed to my research.

#### ***Rare Books and Manuscripts, Columbia Library***

In the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library there exists the "Renwick Family Collection," which contains an assortment of materials related to Renwick, Jr. and his father, who was among Columbia's most famous professors. The most informative feature of this collection is Renwick, Sr.'s sketchbook completed during his trip abroad with his good friend, Washington Irving. This bound sketchbook contains 18 watercolors executed by Renwick, Sr. (plus 2 by Irving) of various castles, monasteries, and churches throughout England. The scenes are in an excellent state of preservation and are of exceptional artistic merit. The importance of this sketchbook cannot be underestimated as it undoubtedly represents the first exposure the younger Renwick would have had to Gothic architecture, a mode that would inform his early career as architect. As these images have never been published, my experience with them is critical in laying out the architectural education and development of Renwick, Jr., especially considering his formal training lay in engineering at Columbia, rather than in the art of design.

#### ***Drawings and Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library***

The majority of my time at Columbia was spent in the Drawings and Archives Division of Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library. My previous understanding of this library as the preeminent repository of architectural archival material in America was confirmed by my visit. Unfortunately, time only permitted a selective survey of relevant materials; I look forward to conducting future research at Avery. Nonetheless, the short time I spent with this collection proved absolutely vital in the early stages of my work on Renwick, Jr.

The primary goal of my visit to Avery was to consult the Selma Rattner Research Papers, which included 38 boxes of notes, reproductions, and other material collected by

Ms. Rattner while researching her intended monograph of Renwick (this project only resulted in a few minor journal and encyclopedic publications, thus necessitating my present study). These papers provided a myriad of useful avenues for future research and offered insight into Renwick's life and career, which hitherto has been neglected in architectural scholarship.

First, and most importantly, these research papers provided significant primary source material, either through reproduction or bibliography, thereby informing a complete understanding of Renwick's architecture, especially in New York City. Ms. Rattner also collected archival material from various reports and board minutes pertaining to buildings on which my study focuses. Many of these materials, such as the minutes from Department of Public Charities and Correction, which oversaw Renwick's hospital designs on Blackwell's Island, are relatively inaccessible. Thus, immediate access to these materials was a welcomed advantage in consulting these papers.

Secondly, as noted above, Ms. Rattner's papers introduced me to her own thoughts on Renwick and his architecture, thereby offering potential topics of consideration. That Ms. Rattner made her insights available to current researchers will certainly enhance future research on Renwick, including my current dissertation. And since scholarship on Renwick is surprisingly and regrettably scarce, such "collaboration" is greatly needed in order to rehabilitate the career of one of the most prolific architects of nineteenth-century America.

In addition to consulting the Selma Rattner Research Papers, I also looked at the collection of drawings by Renwick and his office in the Drawings and Archives Division at Avery Library. While few original drawings of Renwick's buildings survive (a fire in the architect's office destroyed much of this material in the late-nineteenth century), Avery holds a good majority of drawings, mostly pertaining to the design for St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. Also in this collection are Renwick's father's sketches for a proposed building for Columbia College, which comprises one of the first examples of Gothic Revival design in the United States. Of course, since the most important evidence for an architectural historian are original architectural drawings, my consultation of this collection provided me an intimate glimpse into Renwick's creative genius and his thought processes, especially concerning the monumental cathedral (to which I devote an entire chapter of my dissertation).

It is impossible to understate how insightful and enjoyable my two-week research period at Columbia University was for my dissertation and knowledge as a fledgling scholar of art and architecture. It was an honor to be able to conduct research at one of America's most prestigious and historical universities (a privilege I often take for granted at UVA as well) and to immerse myself in the rich library collections of the university. Indeed, research at Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library is a professional rite of passage for any historian of art and architecture, especially one working on a New York City architect. The staff at Columbia Libraries, especially Ms. Janet Parks (curator of Drawings and Archives at Avery) and her assistants, made my trip most productive and pleasant, particularly since researching any major topic at Avery can become a herculean task itself. I look forward to continuing my research on Renwick, which I am certain will result in an informative and welcomed dissertation and, hopefully, future publications, as well as the prospect of working again at Columbia and with the staff of the university. I am highly grateful for the opportunity provided by the Columbia University Library Research Grant and its fellows. Thank you.