

Introduction

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Thomas Kelah Wharton transcribed his journals from his original notes into clean notebooks beginning in June 1854, when he was living in New Orleans overseeing the construction of the New Customs House for the Treasury Department. He lived at the time on Camp Street at the corner of Robin (now Euterpe Street), across from Coliseum Place Gardens in the Lower Garden District, and had just returned from a half-year's journey to Boston, "for his health." We believe that Wharton began his project as a memorial to his young son, Thomas Prescott, and went back to his original journals and started his story with his emigration from England in 1830 and first five years in America—two in Ohio and three in New York. From there he added his recent 1853 journey to Boston—unfortunately silently passing over nearly a decade—and from there his journals continued to grow over time, because we assume he did not keep a journal during those years.

The sections of the journal on his journeys in Ohio and New York are neatly transcribed, with redrawn copies of earlier illustrations from sketchbooks that do not survive. It is possible that parts of his story were re-created from memory, though enough direct quotations and names appear to indicate that there was clearly a now-lost master journal in which he kept notes. In 1833, while teaching at the Flushing Institute on Long Island, his life got busier and perhaps more mundane, and he stopped keeping detailed records except for his summer excursions on the Hudson. The death of his mother in 1834 put an end to his regular journaling, as the interlude and autobiography (see chapter 2) seem to have been added from memory to bridge the gap between when he reliably kept journals in 1830–1834 and 1853 onwards.

As an artist, educator, and architect born in England but who lived all his adult life in America, Thomas Kelah Wharton's life does not fit one simple narrative. His eye for photographic detail as an illustrator places him squarely in the ranks of talented antebellum artists, yet he never managed to directly make a career with that skill. His autobiographical text reveals a young man with strong religious interests

who initially trained to be an architect. An offer of a job teaching drawing at an Episcopal boarding school pulled him away from architecture for a decade, though he returned to it when he finally settled in New Orleans. Even as a teenager, he was ever the Enlightenment gentleman, conversant in botanical taxonomy and the classics, fluent in French and German, as well as deeply influenced by the Romantics. It seems likely that his education was limited to that of English grammar school to age sixteen, and even that basic schooling is inferred from circumstantial evidence. Knowing he was the son of an immigrant merchant in Ohio does not prepare the reader to watch him mingle freely within the ranks of the Hudson River gentry by the age of eighteen. In his forties, his ability to travel the country in some considerable style characterizes the striving American bourgeoisie, and the networks of his interactions reveal a fascinating picture of social and intellectual life in antebellum America. What Wharton recorded in the Hudson River region in the 1830s and then on a trip from New Orleans to Boston in the summer of 1853 offers glimpses of America as a young nation just starting to grow out of its republican conservatism in New York and the Hudson valley, and then as a country whose democratic wealth and power were beginning to manifest themselves in Boston as it modernized out of its colonial roots.

When Wharton returned to his home in New Orleans in the fall of 1853, he concluded his observations on the family's summer trip to Boston by noting that the East teemed with "wealth, refinement, and intellectual culture," and that the Midwest and Mississippi valley had "teeming plenty and boundless resources." Still, there was "something about the genial 'South'" that he loved, despite "all its faults of climate, and . . . physical danger." Against this love, he characterized the "opulence, and majestic [*sic*] 'nature' of the more rugged and inflexible North."¹ And it was that northern nature that he sat down to document by transcribing his personal diaries into what is now volume one of an eight-volume journal. Now preserved in the New York Public Library, the journal records his travels from England to America as a teenager, initially settling in Ohio with his parents,² and then his adventures in trying to build a career in New York City in the early 1830s. Then, despite a gap in the journal of nearly twenty years—he seems to have stopped diarizing after the death of his mother in 1834, or at least when he sat down to recopy the diaries in the 1850s, he chose not to include that period of his life that included nearly another decade in New York, a move to Mississippi and his first marriage, and his eventual relocation to New Orleans—he chronicles his trip by steamboat, railroad, and omnibus in 1853 to visit his wife's family in Boston. The later six volumes then chronicle on a near daily basis his life in New Orleans from 1853 until his death in 1862.³

Written in clear, crisp penmanship and precisely illustrated, the first volume of Wharton's journal is clearly a recopying of his original diaries. In the entry for April 30, 1832, he notes that he was copying, "from the original manuscript" written in "fady ink on such paper as the Western towns then afforded, . . . which at this distance of time no body but myself could decipher." He excused himself for

having chosen not to recopy some poetry he had composed: "it appears that at this point I was guilty of the enormity of 'several verses' which my maturer judgment suggests had better be omitted."⁴ And although he is otherwise silent about what might have been omitted or rewritten for either clarity or propriety, this should remind us that this is not an unfiltered composition. That people could go out and buy commercially printed annual pocket diaries from their local stationer tells you that there was both a market to be met and a market to be made for this sort of behavior. The market was originally targeted at men's business lives, but soon evolved to cater to both sexes' private lives, and by just after the Civil War, diaries were a standard Christmastime gift to both parties. Many of the diaries that survive today, and certainly many of those deemed worthy of printing, demonstrate authors' consciousness of their place in an American diary tradition. Wharton was engaging in a middle-class ritual pastime,⁵ and the recopying of the earlier portions of his life returned him to a more religious devotion to making nearly daily entries from the fall of 1853 until the end of his life, even including the daily temperatures at morning, noon, and evening.

All the more poignantly, we may realize that Wharton began this task of self-memorialization soon after his only child, Thomas Prescott Wharton, was born, and this work may well be his insurance letter to his son, as the Wharton men generally had weak constitutions. All three of his brothers died in their mid- to late thirties, and that, coupled with the high infant mortality of his siblings' children, may well help explain why he was so concerned with getting his memories down on paper. Wharton's health was also frail at times, which may also have given some impetus to his writing. He was more affected when he was living near the marshes of Long Island and New Orleans, and his symptoms do roughly track with ongoing bouts of weakness, chills, and fevers, suggesting a potential diagnosis of recurrent malaria, which at one point he was treated for while staying at West Point.⁶ Although he was described as "tall & well proportioned," when he and his family weighed themselves for fun on the shopkeeper's scales in 1853 in Framingham, MA, we learn that he weighed only 132 pounds, suggesting a very tall, slender, and possibly frail man.⁷

Diarizing for his son turned out to be prescient, as Thomas Kelah Wharton died when his son, Thomas Prescott Wharton, was only ten years old, and even he was outlived by his mother by twenty-two years. Wharton's journal, then, offers the appropriately filtered vision that he wanted his son and the family to understand about his early life and the family's beginnings.

In the journal we learn of a man who is devout and socially skilled, yet we learn little of his direct economic status. Although he was not a man of leisure, there is never a mention of costs or cash flow. Always on the edge of the world of the artist and the literati in his younger years, we get no sense that he ran with the libertines (though his recopied diary would probably have omitted that had it been the case), and by his mature years he seems to have belonged to all the right clubs, although without explicit conceits. His words seem to avoid most notice of the fairer sex, except while he was in residence at a country estate or where he occasionally

noted a female member of a larger group; later he records himself as a family man and new father, devoted to his wife and son.⁸ Though apparently not a *bon vivant*, Wharton certainly attended to the notion that proper introductions mattered in a world of “fluid strangers,” and he seems to have thrived in the “unexpectedness of discovering an intimate relationship in the anonymous city.”⁹ Although it would appear his life was full of them, servants barely register at all and laborers and mechanics make no appearance. Instead, in his earlier life, Wharton orbits as a minor satellite of the owners and engineers of the factories, of important clergymen and educators, and like so many antebellum artists, of patrons in the Hudson River valley. Later in life he takes his place among the arrived bourgeoisie who have the leisure to be tourists on the national Grand Tour. Many of the great issues of the time, such as politics and abolitionism, go virtually unmentioned, while some of the other forces then shaping America, like industrialization, get passing mention but without a clear appreciation that something profound was happening. And unlike the myriad nineteenth-century travelers to America—de Tocqueville, Dickens, Trollope, Fanny Kemble, and so on—who took it upon themselves to observe and report critically on what was developing here, Wharton seems to have taken most of the manners of his adopted country in stride. On the positive side, he is at least unlike American diarists like George Templeton Strong, a “misanthropic spokesman for the prejudices of the affluent,” constantly complaining about the changes around him.¹⁰ Ultimately, we see in Thomas Kelah Wharton’s journal a man who exuded good character and talent, a man for whom social networks were key, one who grew over the course of two decades from boundlessness to impressive cosmopolitanism in mid-nineteenth-century America.¹¹

The Life of Thomas Kelah Wharton

A few pages added at the beginning of the first volume of the journal records how Wharton was recalled in the early twentieth century:

Thomas Kelah Wharton was a man of culture, refinement and polished address – a fine conversationalist – a dear lover of Nature – a Christian gentleman of the highest type. A member of the Church of England later of the American Protestant Episcopal Church. A devoted husband and father – a loyal friend – a man of rare ability & virtues – fine fair & figure tall & well proportioned. The direct heir of the Barony of Wharton dating from 1147 – An Architect by profession – planned many public & private buildings in New Orleans, La. Previous to locating in N.O. he was professor of ‘The Arts of Design’ and descriptive geometry in St. Paul’s College (Rev^d Dr. Muhlenberg) at College Point L.I. (about 1832). Gifted as an Artist, in early life he painted in oils (landscapes) & also made many drawings & sketches in India, Sepia & pencil & Water Colours – all of which were highly appreciated by competent judges – A large number of the pencil sketches & drawings were sold by his widow

in 1914 to the New York Public Library 5th Ave 41st & 42nd Sts. where they are now on view. Among them, 12 'Views in Ohio,' taken when he was about 18 years old, are remarkable for delicacy of touch, finish, & fidelity to Nature.

Wharton provides a thumbnail autobiography later in his journal—which is included here as chapter 2—but more is now known of his life than he was willing to record there.

Wharton was born April 17, 1814 to Thomas Wharton Sr. and his second wife, Anne (née Barkin), in Kingston-upon-Hull, the main city on the north shore of the Humber Estuary in the East Riding of Yorkshire, England. Thomas Sr.'s first wife died young, "in the prime of life," in 1810 and as far as is known they had no children.¹² Anne was the stepdaughter of Capt. Robert Kelah of Hull, retaining her father's surname, Barkin, when her mother remarried the captain.¹³ The relationship must have been a good one, as this explains how Thomas Sr. and Anne gave their first son Thomas the middle name of his maternal step-grandfather, despite it appearing nowhere else in the family tree. Thomas Sr. and Capt. Kelah had had a business relation since at least 1822, when the latter converted the 350-ton barque *Shannon*, which he had run as a whaler off Greenland in the 1810s, into a first-class passenger ship with cabins both between decks and in steerage, and retained Wharton Sr. as a ticketing agent.¹⁴ Anne's death on September 10, 1834 made the newspapers back in Hull, clarifying the younger Wharton's own vaguely dated journal entry, where her passing "after a long protracted illness" was lamented: "Her Christian-like virtues will be long cherished by an extensive circle of friends [and] she has left a large family to deplore their sad bereavement."¹⁵

Wharton's younger brothers, Robert John and Charles Frederick, were christened in Cottingham, just northwest of Hull, and he and his brother Henry and sisters Marianne and Emily in Sculcoates, a northern suburb. Interestingly, Wharton was initially christened on April 19, 1814, but then there is another christening record for him at Cottingham, at age four on October 25, 1818. The family could trace its lineage back to Humphrey Wharton of Whartons, a Norman lord in the early twelfth century, and to the ancestral seat at Wharton Hall (castle) near Kirkby Stephen, Cumberland (Cumbria).¹⁶ The line included various Lords Wharton in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including some notoriously foppish ones during the Restoration, though Thomas's line diverged from a second son a generation or two after Sir Thomas Wharton (1495–1568; a follower of King Henry VIII who was best known for his victory over the Scots at the Battle of Solway Moss on November 24, 1542) was created First Baron Wharton. Thomas Kelah's immediate family had its roots in Sculcoates, and when he was born they were living on Mason Street on the northeastern edge of the city. They soon had a townhome on the developing northern edge of the city at 4 Pryme Street, a street of ship owners, clergymen, commodities merchants, and at least one lawyer and one "gentleman." This street was off the main thoroughfare of Prospect Street and less than half a mile north and west of the Humber and Old Docks (now the Princes

and Queens Docks, respectively) in the harbor, convenient for Thomas Sr.'s work in the shipping and mercantile trade. At the end of the 1820s, they lived in Wyton, a rural crossing "favored for country residence by the well-to-do of Hull," about six miles northeast of Hull, apparently in charge of the toll house of the turnpike (see Wharton's *Sketchbook*, p. 65).¹⁷

Wharton's father immigrated to Ohio in 1829 with Wharton's younger brother, Robert John, aged eleven. Thomas Kelah left Hull in May the following year with his mother and four other siblings, arriving at New York on June 3. The *New York Spectator* noted the arrival of the barque *Diana* from Hull, and other than two named single male travelers (Wharton in his journal notes that "We had but one fellow passenger in the cabin, a Mr. Stanley from the West Riding, but were in a few days joined by a Mr. Boyd"),¹⁸ the Mrs. Wharton and the five children are the only other names specified: "Mrs. Wharton, Thomas K., H[enry], and C[harles] F., Emily and Mary Ann." Given that another seventy-four arrived in steerage but the Whartons were listed by name down to the youngest child, it is clear that the family was of some considerable standing at the time. Indeed, the fact that Wharton and his mother were personally taken into New York City to their lodgings by the ship's captain and that they stayed in a rooming house right in the center of the city by City Hall points to the same conclusion.

Ship owner, shipping insurance broker, and commission agent (and sometimes banker) in Exchange Alley in Hull, Thomas Wharton Sr. had made a considerable fortune in transatlantic shipping, importing everything from French burr stones to German bark and hemp to African teak and Jamaica rum, while exporting woolen goods and earthenware to places as far flung as Rio de Janeiro.¹⁹ By 1815, he was in partnership with the Newbald family of merchants, running the brig *Gambier*, which plied the trade routes to southern Italy. In 1816 he and his partners, E. and I. Thompson, owned the three-hundred-ton copper-bottomed packet ship *Comet* under the command of Capt. John Sugden (who also incidentally captained the *Diana* that took the Whartons to New York, suggesting the possibility that Wharton's father still had a business connection to her in 1830), which they advertised as a fast-sailing ship for New York, offering superior accommodations, "fast Between-Decks, and excellent Cabins." Seven years later Thomas Sr. held part interest in at least two other ships of about 340-ton burthen, and owned the three-hundred-ton *General Phipps* by himself, and plied the packet routes between the United Kingdom and Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires.²⁰ Unfortunately, in the autumn of 1828, Wharton and two brothers named Johnston speculated on the import of Baltic wheat from Lübeck, each paying one-third of the costs of the grain and its shipping. Wharton and at least one of the brothers signed over bills to creditors in full faith and received the cargoes and sold them, but both men went bankrupt in 1829 and the creditors were left hanging for over £3,800 (equivalent to something like £265,000 today). Ordered by the courts to surrender himself to the commissioners by April 30, 1829 to "make full discovery and disclosure of his Estate and Effects" before his creditors on the following day was too much, and he left for Ohio—although

not before shipping “diverse Goods and Merchandises” to the US to be beyond the reach of his creditors. Court cases lingered into the 1830s and though creditors could claim some of their losses by 1832 and he was declared insolvent in 1833—four years after leaving for America—his bankruptcy was not finalized in England until 1841. As one lawsuit against him noted, Wharton “absconded to America” where creditors could not fully claim their debts against him, and the Wharton family began anew in Ohio.²¹

After a month-long pause in New York City, Mrs. Wharton and the children traveled via the Erie Canal and Lake Erie to Sandusky, OH, where they joined Thomas Sr. for the last leg of the trip to a farm in Piqua, OH, eighty miles due north of Cincinnati near the Indiana border. The Wharton farm, purchased in June 1829 for \$2,000, consisted of 182 acres just south of present Piqua and about four or five blocks west of what is now US Route 25. It had belonged to Matthew Caldwell, who platted the town in 1807. The initial farming venture in the hinterland was not much of a success and, as Wharton put it, the entire family was “all ill-fitted for the deprivations of the backwoods,” so they sold the farm in 1831 for \$3,500 (making a profit) and moved to a second home in Zanesville, OH, midway between Columbus and Wheeling. There, Wharton Sr. purchased a warehousing business for \$1,700 in the newly booming river town that was shortly to be connected by the National Road. The portion of Thomas Kelah’s journal covering the transatlantic voyage, arrival in New York, and travel to Ohio has been previously published, so we pick up his story as he arrives in New York City in May 1832.²²

At the age of eighteen, Wharton left the family in Ohio to New York City to take up an apprenticeship in architecture. The architect Martin E. Thompson had somehow become immediately impressed with young Wharton’s drawing abilities, and had offered the young man an apprenticeship. Thompson is today best remembered for the Merchant’s Exchange Building in New York (1827; burned in the Great Fire of 1835) and the Second Branch Bank of the United States (1824; its facade is now preserved at the Metropolitan Museum of Art). At the time he took on young Wharton, he was at the height of his career. How exactly Thompson knew of the young man remains something of a mystery. Wharton records in his journal that in the spring of 1832 Thompson, who had designed the Episcopal Church in Columbus, OH, “has made offers to me, thro’ our friend Mr. Earl, which my Father is now considering.”²³ (Mr. Earl remains an enigma, though we find out later in Wharton’s journal that he lived on Beekman Street in New York City and that Wharton delivered a number of watercolors to him, perhaps as a sort of repayment for connecting him with Thompson.²⁴) Thompson repeated the offer to apprentice Wharton a month later, but the Whartons were at that moment moving from Piqua to Zanesville and young Thomas claims to have left the decision to his father (and to providence). His father seems to have preferred to get young Wharton into the mercantile trades, for he proposed sending him to Philadelphia with an introduction from a Mr. Turner, and only if that did not secure him a position, then let him “go on to New York and avail [him]self of Mr. Thompson’s kind offers.”²⁵

Despite setting up as farmers in Ohio, the Whartons enjoyed considerable financial and social capital at the time. They were clearly a family of some leisure when they arrived, as they awaited travel details from the father in Ohio, lodging at the upscale (though not palatial) boardinghouse of Thomas Slocum. They spent the month of June 1830 taking in all manner of tourist sites: “Week after week passed away like hours in the charming city, and we saw everything that was worth seeing in New York and its immediate neighbourhood.”²⁶ This impression is further reinforced in that they were immediately befriended by a number of prominent New Yorkers and visitors to the city, notably Russell Coggeshall, a whaling magnate from Newport, Rhode Island, who also lodged at Slocum’s and accompanied the family in their tourist outings. It is entirely possible that it was during their month-long respite in New York that they met Martin Thompson through Thomas Sr.’s business connections.

Thus, Wharton clearly possessed a certain social and economic cushion in his foray into the urban metropolises of Philadelphia and New York. From Wharton’s later journal entries, we know that when he traveled in the 1840s and ’50s, he stayed at finer hotels in cities across the country. We cannot, therefore, see him as a stereotypical farm boy coming to the city for a clerkship, with all the anxiety, class concern, and social difficulties that that entailed.²⁷

When Wharton did accept Thompson’s offer of employment in April 1832 and began on May 10, he had to leave the city after just a few weeks to escape a cholera epidemic.²⁸ In view of the fact that Wharton left Thompson’s office after only a few weeks and seems not to have had a chance to produce any work for him, it is interesting to note that a friendly relationship between the two lasted through the years. Wharton often stayed with the Thompson family in the city during the years he was teaching at the Flushing Institute on Long Island, and several times Thompson offered him opportunities both to teach and to resume his work in architecture in his office.

In order to escape the cholera outbreak, in July 1832 Wharton went up the Hudson to stay on the estate of one of Thompson’s clients, Dr. David Hosack, who owned what later became the Vanderbilt estate in Hyde Park. The land had been the estate of his old teacher and medical partner, Dr. Samuel Bard, and Hosack had Thompson design a mansion and other buildings on the grounds in the 1820s. Hosack was one of the leading gentlemen in New York and as Hudson gentry, his home, “the nearest thing to a salon” in the area, was filled with “books, paintings, portrait busts of his friends, and a well-stocked larder and wine cellar.”²⁹ He welcomed all manner of notables including state and federal politicians, authors like Frances Trollope and Washington Irving, and visiting diplomats. As a strong supporter of the American Academy of Fine Arts and of young artists of talent, it is not hard to see why Hosack would be happy to have young Wharton there. At Hosack’s, he met Sylvanus Thayer, superintendent of the US Military Academy at West Point, where he would continue his geometry and drawing studies and integrate himself into the lower Hudson society of the day. The “salon culture” in that stretch

of the Hudson was headed by yet another man Wharton met at Hosack's that summer, Gouverneur Kemble, the proprietor of the West Point Foundry in Cold Spring. Kemble tied together artists, writers, businessmen, military officers, and all manner of men of "good taste" that bridged the Knickerbocker literary set and the Hudson River School of painting. Washington Irving and James Kirke Paulding (Kemble's brother-in-law) were also frequent guests at Kemble's with Wharton and he became known to the rising artists Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, William Sidney Mount, and other of the school's founders.

Wharton's career took yet another sudden turn by the fall of 1832, when he was offered and accepted a job as a teacher of art and descriptive geometry at the Flushing Institute by William Augustus Muhlenberg, a pioneer in the Episcopalian Church Schooling Movement.³⁰ Wharton tells us in his journal that Muhlenberg visited West Point while he was staying there with Thayer, though the connection might also have been through the Rev. Samuel Roosevelt Johnson, the pastor of St. James in Hyde Park, who Wharton met while staying with Dr. Hosack earlier that summer. On August 11, 1827, Muhlenberg had begun a grand neoclassical building that was to be called the "Flushing Institute," and the school began its first session in the spring of the following year.³¹ Flushing itself was a prosperous town and wealthy agrarian enclave slightly removed from the more energetic cities of New York and Brooklyn. An English traveler in 1830 noted that Long Island's land prices made it "a situation [more] for an opulent farmer than one of limited means," describing Flushing in particular as "a neat lively village . . . [with] some excellent hotels" that had become "quite a place of resort for the butterflies of fashion."³² Muhlenberg may well have seen this sort of location as more conducive to his vision of a conservative and upper-class Episcopal school. It may also be that this distance from Manhattan served as a slight buffer between the High Church Episcopalianism of Bishop Henry Onderdonk (whom Wharton praised as a great man in his journal on May 11, 1833 and with whom Muhlenberg was friendly) and the more formally scholastic and tepidly evangelical nature of Muhlenberg's school. In ways, it was the Flushing Institute that was "fixing the type" of church schools just as Wharton joined the school.³³

Muhlenberg was no revivalist. He was certain that salvation came through study and introspection, somewhat at odds with the "formalist" position of the High Church that elevated liturgy and ritual as key components of faith known through the relationships of the clergy to the congregants, but even further away from the more emotive understandings of the Methodists and Baptists. At the very least, Muhlenberg was reacting against existing preparatory schools, which only gave intellectual and physical instruction; he argued that the schools needed moral instruction based in Christianity as well: "their tendency being not to 'the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' but the nurture and admonition of the world." He saw the idea of moral discipline and admonition as a "preventative," with the proper physical education "a powerful auxiliary to moral discipline"; corrective discipline, punishments, and rewards should all be based on principles and be "mild and affectionate, yet

steady and uniform.” As far as the intellectual education of the school went, here he did not propose anything too radical for the day:

The ancient languages are the best ground work of liberal learning: the study of the Greek language [in English] is deemed particularly proper, because it is the depository of our faith; The art of study should be taught, the pupil being led to *think*, and acquire knowledge for himself. . . . Education should also follow the leadings of genius: Boys should be allowed to pursue those studies for which they are adapted, and not waste their time and toil in proceeds for which they are not qualified.³⁴

This seemingly modern approach should not eclipse the fundamentally religious spirit of the Flushing Institute. Muhlenberg expected that the large majority of his students (and the tutors) would enter the ministry, and the school was explicitly marketed to Episcopalians *against* other colleges that were deemed a danger to their children as a result of the Second Great Awakening that made them too generally secular or shot through with excesses of the wrong strand(s) of Christianity—where “infidelity is disguising itself with the mask of rational Christianity [and] the rankest weeds of heresy are covering the soil where trees once flourished.”³⁵ This, he thought, would create an educated class of boys who could go forth to address the social problems of the day.³⁶

The institute was a success from the start and saw class after class of boys living in twelve-student sections, each under a prefect. The boys ranged in age from twelve to nineteen, and the typical graduate often went on to enter universities like Columbia, Penn, or Harvard as juniors. The school operated as a kind of extended family structure, and Muhlenberg pursued the policy of trusting the boys and placing them on their honor. A later alumnus described Muhlenberg’s schools as “a family of boys, of which [Muhlenberg] was ‘school-father,’ the spiritual guide, friend, and father-confessor of his school-sons, not merely a schoolmaster.”³⁷ This also seems to have been Muhlenberg’s antidote to the “tent revival,” itinerant free-for-all sweeping the nation at the time, and Wharton seems to have been happy in his teaching and management of pupils. The school, however, was not the college that Muhlenberg had dreamed of.

By the mid-1830s, applications to the institute were straining resources, and at the same time, having received his degree in divinity, Muhlenberg contemplated visions of a more thoroughly equipped college.³⁸ To that end, he bought 175 acres of land at Strattonport just north of Flushing and, on October 15, 1836, he laid the cornerstone of what was designed to be an extensive structure that would cost about \$50,000. But the building never rose above the basement story as the Panic of 1837 forced his backers to abandon him. Temporary buildings were erected for the new college, and the Flushing Institute was moved to the newly renamed College Point. There St. Paul’s College opened in 1838 with a full staff of professors, including Wharton as professor of drawing. The goal of the college was again “the moral education of the students by means of a paternal and familiar

discipline—and a regulation of circumstances favorable to the cultivation of sentiment and character,” but the curriculum was a fusion of classical and modern subjects: seven of its twelve professors taught Latin, Greek, French, and rhetoric, but three taught mathematics, natural philosophy, and (separately) chemistry and mineralogy; courses also included Evidences of Christianity, History and Constitutional Law, and Antiquities and Geography.³⁹ By 1840 the college was teaching 105 students, had a seven-thousand-volume library, a property value estimated at \$70,000, and an annual cost of professors’ and instructors’ salaries of \$9,000 (a full professor of mathematics and natural philosophy was paid \$1,000 per year in 1833, teaching about five hours a day). Muhlenberg tried, unsuccessfully, to get the state to allow him to confer BA degrees and the college flourished until 1844, when he moved back to New York City and two years later became rector of the Church of the Holy Communion. It eventually failed in 1848.⁴⁰

When Muhlenberg had opened St. Paul’s, it retained a general classical curriculum, but the pedagogical framework became increasingly ecclesiastical, training students at the collegiate level for missionary work in the “Western lands,” and the best students for a life in the Episcopal ministry. Muhlenberg became even more set against rationalism (“a bulwark against,” as he saw it, “Germanism”—Lutheranism and the rising German educational system) and against the early-nineteenth-century trend toward a more ecumenical Unitarianism in higher education, which emanated from Harvard.⁴¹ Indeed, a number of very famous (conservative) Episcopalian churchmen and educators came up through the Flushing Institute and St. Paul’s while Wharton taught there: John Barrett Kerfoot, Libertus Van Bokkelen, and James Lloyd Breck, for example, all became important Episcopal educators or bishops.

In about 1840, Wharton accepted a position at St. Thomas’s Hall, a rival school back in Flushing that had been started by Rev. Francis Lister Hawks in 1839. Hawks, a North Carolinian and important theologian and church educator, had been recruited by Muhlenberg to teach rhetoric and oratory at St. Paul’s in 1838 (he had also given the oration at the laying of its cornerstone in 1836 and Wharton and Hawks may have known each other in Saugerties, NY, where Hawks had his first ministry, in the early 1830s), but he lasted at St. Thomas’s less than a year, choosing instead to set up his own school that charted a less strictly theological educational course. Perhaps it was Wharton’s technical skills and interest in the sciences and practical building that were not in sync with the more religious nature of St. Paul’s; maybe his faith had been slightly shaken by the death of his mother in 1834 or broadened the worldliness of his new stepmother, who came on the scene in 1835. His chapter and verse citations from the 1830s journal certainly give way to more curiosity about the practices of other denominations in the 1850s, though we cannot know about his faith in the later 1830s as he kept no journal at that time. He never showed any inclination toward ordination, or perhaps it was the tension felt by many in the antebellum world between the pursuit of individual success in the booming new country and the traditional social and religious ideas of society that pulled him toward Hawks’s vision of education.⁴²

The old Flushing Institute had become St. Ann's Hall school for girls in 1839 and Hawks built his new St. Thomas's Hall two block south. There, with fourteen instructors, the school grew to 120 students by 1841.⁴³ George Templeton Strong commented in his own diary that a friend had just "got back from Flushing and tells me that Hawks's school building is going up—a single Gothic quadrangle," and that the chapel was apparently "one of the most beautiful in the country."⁴⁴ By the spring of 1843, however, the finances of the school were in tatters. As Strong reported, "Hawks has exploded. St. Thomas' Hall has suspended payment." Although Hawks claimed no wrongdoing, St. Thomas's closed and Hawks left the Northeast. Wharton, clearly devoted to Hawks and the Episcopalian Church Schools Movement, followed Hawks to help found another school in Holly Springs, MS, and then eventually followed him again to New Orleans, though there they parted ways.⁴⁵

It is clear that Wharton found his years on Long Island enjoyable and profitable. Years later he noted in his journal that,

By the papers I see that a great "India Rubber Coat Factory" has been established on College Point Long Island, employing from 500 to 1000 hands. This was the "locus" of St. Paul's College, the darling project of Rev^d D^r Muhlenberg, who conducted it for seven years under very favorable auspices. Here, too, and at Flushing, but 3 miles distant, I passed some 8 years of my life in the pleasant seclusion of scholastic pursuits. What a change! The reverend Professors gone! The muses lament, The Marble porch where Wisdom went to talk with Socrates or Tully, hears no more, save the hoarse dissonance of jarring wheels.⁴⁶

That Wharton left New York with Hawks presents an interesting counterfactual: Hawks was by this time a figure of national importance and considered to be an orator of distinction. He was also already the author of many works on religious, historical, and legal subjects well before the period of the failure at Flushing. His next venture in the South might seem hardly promising after the failure of St. Thomas's, even if Hawks was exonerated for causing the first school's failure. Wharton chose to break his ties and uproot his sisters who were studying in Astoria, leave his influential friends and family, and abandon his connections to the artistic and—in view of his lasting friendship with Martin E. Thompson—architectural world of New York. By this time, however, Wharton had spent a full decade as an educator rather than as an artist, and there are very few known works from his pen or easel from the early 1840s. Likely his inability to enter the ranks of the art world in New York, whether due to his own abilities, inclinations, or actions—or the blocking actions of others—had convinced him that his calling lay elsewhere. Hawks was clearly a brilliant man, but Wharton tells us in his autobiographical synopsis that he was possibly unstable and subject to depression due to an "impulsive nature[,] chafed and fretted by his pecuniary difficulties at Flushing." He hardly seemed like a man satisfied to remain long at the head of his college at Holly Springs, as indeed turned out to be the case.

St. Thomas's Hall for Boys in Holly Springs was founded in 1844 with Dr. Hawks as first president, and officially incorporated by the Protestant Episcopal Church in October 1845. Wharton was listed as a "proprietor" along with Hawks in the college circular.⁴⁷ Hawks had chosen the small town in northwestern Mississippi, fifty miles southeast of Memphis, both to get away from the failure of St. Thomas's in Flushing and to recoup his debts in the matter (his daughter also resided there at the time, which seems to be why he chose it). Wharton refers to the venture as a "University," leading to some confusion with the University of Holly Springs chartered in 1838 that never came to fruition, though St. Thomas's in some sense filled that goal.

Hawkes took a cautious approach, "proceeding quietly, but surely and securely, . . . in laying the foundation of an institution and a system of education, to which . . . Episcopalians may point with gratification." It would be, he had proposed, "an institution of learning, for males, of the highest order, affording all benefits of collegiate education . . . which shall extend alike to all, whether they be the sons of Episcopalians or not."⁴⁸ The school opened in locally donated buildings in January 1844 with Hawks as president and professor of English literature, John Q. Bradford teaching Latin and Greek, Lt. Claudius W. Sears (a West Point graduate and later a Confederate brigadier general) teaching mathematics, and Wharton in charge of French, German, and drawing. Tuition was \$250 for the ten-month school year for boarders, \$50 for day students, and included everything except books and instrumental music lessons.⁴⁹

As soon as Hawks arrived in Mississippi, however, the state diocese offered him a bishopric—which was immediately contested at the national Episcopal convention by some who worried about his failure at St. Thomas's in New York—and he left Holly Springs that same year.⁵⁰ The school was reorganized as a military school (though it had already had "cadets" under Lieutenant Sears from the beginning), in which guise it survived until it was burned during the Civil War.⁵¹ Having ultimately declined the Episcopal bishopric, Hawks settled in New Orleans from 1844–49 to become the fourth rector of Christ's Church and was chosen first president of the University of Louisiana (now Tulane University). By this time, his preaching reputation international, as Sir Charles Lyell, the eminent British geologist, noted in February 1846 that, "During our stay in New Orleans . . . in the principal Episcopal Church, we were fortunate in hearing Dr. Hawkes [*sic*] preach, and thought the matter and manner of his discourse deserving of his high reputation for pulpit eloquence."⁵²

Wharton taught at Holly Springs for only a year before moving to New Orleans in 1845—at the same time as Hawks—with his new wife, Maria (née Huling), the daughter of a local Holly Springs judge and planter whose family also sold their plantation and bought another, fifty miles south of New Orleans.⁵³ It is interesting that there is no clear explanation of why Wharton only now shifted back to his initial calling in architecture when he had been an educator for a decade, or why he did not, for example, take up a position at the University of Louisiana under

Hawks. Lieutenant Sears also followed Hawks and did teach mathematics at the university from 1845 to 1859,⁵⁴ but why Wharton did not or could not avail himself of the same opportunity is unknown. Entries in his journal suggest that Wharton did stay connected with Hawks in New Orleans at first, but his autobiographical sketch merely offers that he “gradually reverted back to the occupation in which [he] commenced life, architecture.”

In a way, the position he ended up in in New Orleans partly re-created what he had gone to New York for nearly twenty years before. He had already made some preliminary architectural elevations and plans for Hawks’s Christ’s Church, though James Gallier Sr., the contractor for the church, does not deign to name him—“the doctor [Hawks] had with him at that time a gentleman who had been the drawing master at his school, and who made a sketch design for the new church; but I had to make so many alterations in the plan, before it could be made practically fit to build from, as to make it amount to a new design”—before seeing the project to completion at least visually as Wharton had designed it.⁵⁵ His architecture career did not immediately flourish and Maria died of pulmonary consumption early that summer, so Wharton spent some of the summer and fall grieving with the Hulings at their plantation.⁵⁶ In the fall of 1848 he was appointed a clerk (i.e., draftsman and building superintendent) for the construction of the new Customs House in New Orleans. As the antebellum architectural profession began to move from craft to profession, it is clear that Wharton found a convenient niche in a full-time job as a construction superintendent for the federal government while taking private commissions for houses for well-to-do residents of New Orleans.⁵⁷

By September 1849, Wharton became acting architect pro tem and superintendent pro tem, responsible for all building work on the Customs House project. This position lasted only two months, for in the middle of November he was upgraded to general superintendent of the building works until the spring of 1853, when ill health forced him to take a leave of absence for about eight months.⁵⁸ While the building still stands as an impressive structure at the heart of New Orleans, contemporary commentators were not always so kind about its style. Mark Twain wrote that there was no “architecture” on Canal Street:

[T]o speak in broad, general terms, there is no architecture in New Orleans, except in the cemeteries. It seems a strange thing to say of a wealthy, far-seeing, and energetic city of a quarter of a million inhabitants, but it is true. There is a huge granite U.S. Custom-house—costly enough, genuine enough, but as a decoration it is inferior to a gasometer. It looks like a state prison.⁵⁹

In 1851 at age thirty-seven, Wharton married his second wife, Emily Ladd Prescott, some twenty years his junior. They had a son, Thomas Prescott Wharton, the next fall, and in 1853 they took a long trip to Boston, fortuitously avoiding a serious outbreak of yellow fever in New Orleans that summer.⁶⁰ Not only does this section of the journal give a magnificent view of continental travel just as America

was becoming conveniently networked through river and rail, Wharton's descriptions show Boston at its boom period, growing at nearly 20 percent a year. With Back Bay being filled in and the city changing at a rapid pace, Wharton visited a city whose population had just crested 150,000 and whose industrial boom was becoming clearer and clearer.⁶¹ Upon his return to New Orleans that fall, he threw himself into the construction of the new Customs House and gradually became more Southern than Northern. A strong supporter of the Confederacy once the Civil War broke out, Wharton was appointed superintendent of the Customs House when his predecessor, P.G.T. Beauregard—the commander who fired the first shots on Fort Sumter—took command of Confederate units. Wharton died on May 24, 1862 at the age of forty-eight, a few weeks after the Union took New Orleans.

Antebellum Diarizing

The journals of Thomas Kelah Wharton are wonderful examples of a genre of self-reflective writing that was at once both private and yet public. For centuries authors have penned works purporting to be private but which it was entirely clear were meant for public circulation. Wharton's production is not so deliberately public as the Renaissance or Enlightenment letters that went to press before the ink was dry, nor the nineteenth-century staple of the travel journal that were kept specifically with an eye to later publication and fame. But neither is it a truly private journal under lock and key that tells all and expects to remain secret. The journal was written, at least initially, for his son, and therefore was intended at least for some private audience, but an audience beyond the author himself. It recorded Wharton's day-to-day activities, and includes some commentary on the world around him, though it tends strongly toward his personal experience rather than the affairs of the day or of the nation and offers valuable insight in terms of what he says and in what he omits.

Diaries are the private made public; they are "flesh made word,"⁶² in that one becomes acquainted with a diary writer in a way that one does not when reading that same person's novel, poem, or letters. As Arthur Ponsonby, the pioneer for diary studies in the 1920s, put it, "They are better than novels, more accurate than histories, and even at times more dramatic than plays."⁶³ Diaries are generally thought of giving a "rare [and] intimate view" at history, or the mind of a person, or of a movement.⁶⁴ They are also at once "tantalizing," for we don't know what we will find, and there is something scandalous or wicked in reading someone else's private thoughts. Yet they do reveal things that may not be revealed in published sources, if those sources even exist. They are our surrogates for a walk through the past, filled with the banal of the weather and the writer's fits of ague as well as brushes with celebrity or royalty. But the value in them lies not necessarily in the specifics of what they reveal or record—though there is great value in that as well—but in their recording of networks of people and places and things that we might not

otherwise see. Diaries can be thought of as the “ledgers of history,”⁶⁵ but they are also “kept” rather than “sent” (letters) or “shared” (stories):

The diary, as an uncertain genre uneasily balanced between literary and historical writing, between the spontaneity of reportage and reflectiveness of the crafted text, between selfhood and events, between subjectivity and objectivity, between the private and the public, constantly disturbs attempts to summarize its characteristics within formalized boundaries.”⁶⁶

As he was recopying his journal in the company of his new bride and infant son, perhaps we should not be surprised that Wharton might omit sections in which he fell in love for the first time and began to build a life with his first wife, as well as the anguish of her death. He might have included information on his youth in Hull, but given that nowhere in his journal do we learn that the family had shifted from merchant shipping to a toll-keeper’s cottage and then ran from bankruptcy in England, it makes sense that this chapter of his life, too, is elided. He was, after all, the eldest son of a prosperous shipping firm that he was no longer going to inherit, and they were now moving to, of all places, rural Ohio. The gap from 1834 to 1853 does seem to be genuine enough, but if Wharton got himself up to youthful hijinks in his days in New York, or had misadventures at or during his days off at the Flushing Institute, it is not surprising to find no mention of them in his journals. The first part of the journal from the early 1830s and from 1853 that we present in this volume, then, is an edited and occasionally editorialized reflection on his first forty years, while his later journal entries while living in New Orleans, which become more contemporary and critical of the society around him.⁶⁷

The young Wharton arrived in New York City in the midst of its boom after the opening of the Erie Canal, just as it began to overtake Philadelphia and Boston as America’s principle city. It was awash with new arrivals and quite literally bursting at its seams as it surged northward along Manhattan Island. Yet Wharton tells us a story of polite refinement of his trips up and down the Hudson, brushing elbows with some of the river’s gentry, even though he would eventually fall in more with bourgeoisie artists, industrialists, and military men who occupied a refined but not aristocratic stratum. The city of prostitutes, beggars, and immigrants is entirely absent to his pen, perhaps because as a young, educated, and artistically talented English immigrant himself, he was able to immediately begin his circulations with these “better sorts.” It is something short of astounding that he tells us nothing of the roiling 1830s in New York and the city that would see the overlapping worlds of Edgar Allan Poe, P.T. Barnum, and Sir John Herschel (author of the Great Moon Hoax of 1835, which seems to have entirely eluded the young artist, even though he was partly circulating in the world of the press with his *New-York Mirror* entanglement with Morris and Weir at the time).⁶⁸ Wharton’s theological fervor, more ardent as a young man, may also have kept him on the straight and narrow, and once he joined the teaching staff at a theologically grounded college and found

himself at a remove from the city in more genteel Flushing, it may be that he felt that he really had joined the novitiate.

There are wide areas that escaped his writing—though not, one presumes, his prodigious attention—that need to be understood to place Wharton’s journal in context. Wharton has little to say about class relations or politics at all. Even world affairs don’t appear in the earlier section of the journal, though by 1853 he occasionally alludes to but does not dwell on some scandals of the day, such as train accidents and murders like the 1849 Parkman-Webster murder.⁶⁹ Otherwise the huge issues of the day—from presidential elections to economic booms and busts or any discussion of slavery—make no appearance in the early years of his journals, despite the fact that we know he engaged in lively discussions on these matters with the people of some import that he met, such as at a dinner party with Gouverneur Kemble and James Kirke Paulding.⁷⁰ His later entries observe more local politics and elections, though even the onset of the Civil War elicited only a few lines of notice.⁷¹ Though he was present in the embryonic New York artist community and nearly in the founding of groups like the National Academy of Design, he avoided editorializing on the position of the artist or the generosity or parsimony of patrons. Most of his worries are indeed quite personal. The only common thread throughout the journal is the fear of epidemics in cities. The second cholera pandemic that struck the globe from 1829–1851 killed tens of thousands and spread along transportation routes in an era that fully understood its lethality but not its waterborne mechanism or any real effective prevention. Yellow fever was similarly destructive, though through a different vector (mosquitos) and against which one could develop an acquired immunity. Though mostly contained today, we must not forget how virulent nineteenth-century epidemics were, easily carrying off 5 percent of the population in some outbreaks.⁷²

Wharton makes little mention of women, other than his immediate family members and wives of acquaintances, in his 1830s entries, despite being an eligible young bachelor in the big city. One can at once perhaps catch a glimpse of his mild infatuation with refined young ladies whose paths he crossed, such as Emily Hosack, but at the same time, early-nineteenth-century masculinities being what they were, our modern eye is perhaps too prone to read Wharton’s ardor for the men he meets up and down the Hudson as more than boon companionship or admiration. Given that the 1830s portion of the journal was rewritten and we know that he explicitly excised some text from his original journal, it is entirely possible that he bowdlerized events and relations during his youthful New York period. Two decades later, as a respectable married man in his trip to the Northeast, and now assured of his station and role in the world, he still only once pauses to opine how “strong women” who wore trousers made for a sight “*tout ensemble* ungraceful, inelegant to the last degree.”⁷³

Wharton is also curiously quiet about race throughout the first volume of the journal. Later in the 1850s he tended to be anti-abolitionist and joined the Know-Nothing Party, and he makes no reference to the ethnicity of a servant, Francis,

in New Orleans who might possibly have been his slave (1860 census records do not list her in his household and Wharton is missed in the 1850 New Orleans census).⁷⁴ In fact, from the words he writes in the first volume of the journal, the only place he even encountered African Americans was on Dr. Hosack's estate in Hyde Park: he mentions in passing a "black boy" who rang the morning bell and noted with some apparent amusement the black coachman who "bent his, by the by, excellent figure, from the coach box to salute one of the Doctor's black women and begged her to 'excuse his glove.'"⁷⁵ It is likely that he was surrounded by a fair number of abolitionists in the Episcopal movement in the 1830s, and the abolition of slavery in the British empire in 1833 certainly elicited great debates in America at the time (e.g., ten days of pro-slavery rioters attacked African Americans and Englishmen in New York City), yet we hear nothing of that in his journal.⁷⁶ We know that people he associated with were abolitionists (as a US representative, Gouverneur Kemble voted for abolition in 1838, though the House motion was ultimately merely symbolic),⁷⁷ but perhaps in the 1830s Wharton's views on the matter were insufficiently developed to have made the pages of his journal, or by the time he recopied that period in the 1850s his views were changing.

By 1853, though, one would expect at least some mention. Once the Civil War broke out, Wharton took the side of the Confederacy and viewed the North as trying to destroy a way of life, and a way of life that Wharton had married into—recall his first wife's family were plantation owners and had forty-one slaves on their Holly Springs plantation in 1840 and seven slaves in the 1860 federal census slave schedules—and had apparently quite contentedly adopted for more than fifteen years at that point. In 1860, a week before Secession, he noted, "News from the North indicates a gradual return to 'common sense' on the part of the canting, hypocritical, 'Black Republican' party. The anti-slavery agitation should now be set at rest *for ever*."⁷⁸ So in 1853, and again recalling that this journal was filtered for his toddler son's later eyes, perhaps Wharton trod the middle road to avoid engaging in such concerns.

Artistic Ambitions

Wharton's journals offer a glimpse at how a well-educated immigrant who was initially destined to be an artist and architect evolved into an architect and construction manager in a burgeoning country full of opportunity. His years teaching at Episcopal schools also help us understand the fluidity of the professions at the time. We ought, then, to consider the circumstances of the young and then the adult Thomas Kelah Wharton as he circulated in New York and Boston society in antebellum America. As will be seen from the included sketches in the following chapters (though these are barely half of the total in the journals), Wharton was a natural artist with a near photographic eye for detail. He began circulating in the emerging Hudson River School of artists centered around Thomas Cole, Asher B.

Durand, Frederic Church, and John Frederick Kensett, getting so far as exhibiting at the National Academy show in 1834. There, the *New-York Mirror* said he had “shown skill” in his painting of “Falls of the Indian Brook, opposite West Point” that “places him among our successful landscape painters. We understand he is a young artist from England, and we are happy to give him a welcome.”⁷⁹

Ultimately, though, he did not quite join the ranks of the noted. Perhaps his skill in oils and watercolors was underdeveloped. Perhaps it was because his pen was more suited to the world of engravings and the publication industry was still more than a decade from lavishly illustrated weeklies like *Harper’s* or *Frank Leslie’s*. Perhaps the allusions in the journal to conflict with Robert W. Weir, in charge of illustrations for George Pope Morris’s *New-York Mirror*, hints at some larger pressures that kept him out of those ranks. Wharton had in fact gone to New York expecting to enter a master-apprentice relationship under Martin E. Thompson, but arrived just as that system was giving way to a new mode of relationships, that of education-based credentialism. The collapse of the architecture market due to the cholera scare just as Wharton arrived in New York pushed him into the latter system as he learned more technical drawing at West Point. At the same time, it wrenched him out of the world of artists and patrons, though we see him trying to keep a hand in at a personal level for a couple years. His teaching at Flushing, which would have included both artistic and technical drawing, and the fact that some of his students went on to be architects, suggests more strongly that he found a good home in the new educational system. His mix of architectural critique within aesthetics and his eye for mechanical detail appropriate for a contractor, as well as his later role as managing engineer at the New Orleans Customs House, demonstrate a breadth beyond mere artistic details and the rote of architectural orders.⁸⁰

There can be no doubt that the well-to-do Wharton family gave their eldest son (or perhaps all their children, as we learn that Wharton’s sisters were enrolled in Astoria in the 1830s) a strong classical education. Thomas not only was well versed in classical and modern poetry, he knew his Linnaean botanical classifications in Latin, and later taught German and French. Though he seems to the modern eye to have been college educated, his command of Latin and classical allusions would have been had from a strong, early-nineteenth-century grammar school. He makes no mention of boarding school or traveling to another city for lessons, although one enigmatic mention of the “intensively beautiful chimes of the churches in Manchester . . . which I used to listen to with the sensitive and delighted ears of boyhood,” could possibly suggest he was also a student in that city, as does his sketching of Kirkstall Abbey in Leeds in 1929⁸¹. Neither does he mention any specific later schooling, so we should presumably infer that he went to the Hull Grammar School, with Rev. William Wilson as master. Alternately, by 1800 many private schools, such as Snowden’s Academy in Hull, which Thomas Sr. could easily have afforded for his son, had sprung up, offering more mixed curricula for the children of the middle class that included not only classical education but natural sciences as well. At Hull, Wilson and the previous masters, Rev. John Scott and

Rev. George John Davies, had brought the Hull Grammar School forward from its strictly classical education toward a modern comprehensive one. Although the Hull Grammar School did not officially add sciences to its curriculum until the appointment of J.D. Sollitt in 1838, under Wilson the school did try to recruit a new usher to teach “the higher branches of mathematics, astronomy and fluxions included.” And of course, it is also possible that his father, “an excellent, but not remarkably intellectual man,”⁸² had hired private tutors for young Thomas (a distinct likelihood since advanced instruction in art was rarely offered by any grammar or private school at the time).⁸³ He presumably recognized the artistic talent in his son and got him a broad education, as skill in learning and with the pencil was on full display by the time he left England.

Although Wharton left teaching behind by 1850, when the New Orleans Mechanics Society, an educational college for tradesmen, was considering adding a drawing department, they sought out Wharton’s opinion on the matter. His reply, printed in a New Orleans newspaper, enunciated a position that sought to give every architect, engineer, machinist, and “the operative in every other branch of industry” a good working knowledge of the “Arts of Design”: “Every intelligent and well-instructed mechanic should be, to some extent,” he argued, “a draughtsman.”⁸⁴ He seemed to add a certain autobiographical component when he said in an aside,

It is not expected that all mechanics should be artists, though it may be remarked, that were a proper regard paid to the subject in the education of our youth, many would eventually rise to high artistic distinction, whose abilities would otherwise be dormant.

Wharton argued that drawing was of high importance in the construction trades, *indispensable* in “ornamental construction,” and many a builder, when put in charge of great works will find himself mortified by his inability to communicate a design because his artistic ability is lacking. Further, every “handicraftsman [will], without correct drawings, plans, sections, elevations, &c., continually work to disadvantage, will frequently be at a loss, and always deficient in precision and accuracy.” The solution, Wharton suggested, lay in creating a professorship in the “Arts of Design” that would teach three courses on picturesque drawing, architecture, and perspective drawing. One wonders if Wharton hoped that he might be asked to fill such a chair, though it does not appear that the Mechanics Society took up the idea.

Back in New York in the 1830s, Wharton seems to have remained on the periphery of the artistic and publishing world, befriending George Pope Morris, the publisher of the *New-York Mirror*, and others. Morris’s *Mirror* was “the most complete coverage of the American art scene before 1855 [whose] able editors, especially . . . Morris, not only gave this literary magazine a longevity surprising for its day, but also greatly widened its scope without reducing the contents to mere superficiality.”⁸⁵ In addition, while Wharton worked for Rev. Hawks at St. Thomas’s Hall, Hawks wrote frequently for and was briefly the editor of the *New York Review*. Wharton’s journal of this period records his interactions with many notable artists