

LIFE AT CEDAR GROVE

Research Report for the Thomas Cole National Historic Site

January 2011¹

"I often look at our house & think how wonderful that so much of happiness should be comprised in that little spot."

Thomas Cole²

I. Summary

In the summer of 1836, Thomas Cole struggled with the decision of whether or not he should propose marriage to Maria Bartow, the niece and ward of his landlord in Catskill, New York, John Alexander Thomson. Working on the most important series he had been commissioned to paint thus far, he had recently received word that his patron, Luman Reed, had suddenly died in New York. Thomas wrote to his sister Sarah, then visiting family in Baltimore, of his difficulties in completing the paintings and his worries about the viability of the commission itself. He was further troubled by the economic challenges he was already facing. Cole had, at the age of 35, been the sole support of his aging parents, who lived in New York, as well as Sarah, for almost a decade; he also was responsible for nephew William Henry Bayless and his mother. For Thomas Cole, consideration of marriage necessitated a close examination of the economic repercussions, as well as the questions concerning love, companionship, and compatibility.

¹ This report was prepared by independent researcher Maureen Hart Hennessey for the Thomas Cole National Historic Site Interpretive Planning Project, with support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

² Letter from Thomas Cole to Maria Cole from the Mountain House, Monday Morning [no date] (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4)

The object of Cole's intentions, Maria Bartow, would bring her own set of issues into a marriage. Like Thomas, Maria came from a family with a history of financial set-backs and problems. Both families had left their home countries for economic reasons (Maria's father to avoid debtor's prison), and neither family had met with success after their moves. Furthermore, Maria's uncle and surrogate father had already borrowed money from Thomas and was dealing with a number of financial and legal issues himself. In addition, it seems likely that Maria's sister Frances was already suffering from the mental illness that would send her to residential treatment more than a decade later.

It might seem that the odds were against such a marriage ever taking place. Four months later, however, Thomas and Maria Cole were married at Cedar Grove, which would be their home for the rest of their lives. Here, the couple's five children were born, and here, too, Cole would spend the second half of his too-brief career. *The Voyage of Life* series was painted at Cedar Grove, as were some of Cole's most remarkable paintings, including *View of Schroon Mountain*, *Sunset in the Catskills*, and views of Florence and Mount Etna based on sketches from his European sojourn in 1841-2.

Within months of their marriage, Thomas Cole would begin the pattern of leaving home to conduct "the business of art" that would last for the twelve years of their marriage. Business trips, frequently to New York but also to Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, were required to arrange for the exhibition of his paintings, meet with patrons and potential patrons, and participate in National Academy activities and events. In addition, sketching and painting trips to the Adirondacks, western New York, the coast of Maine, and New Hampshire took the artist from home. The longest of these trips sent Cole to Europe for eleven months, from August 1841—July 1842.

The Coles were a devoted couple, and the separations were extremely difficult for both. When time, children, and funds allowed, Maria would accompany

Thomas; in the first year of their marriage, the couple went to Schroon Lake in the Adirondacks with Mr. and Mrs. Asher B. Durand, hearing a lecture by artist George Catlin in Albany while on their journey north, and, even after the Cole children began to arrive, Maria would often take the steamboat down the Hudson to join Thomas in New York. At those times, the extended family at Cedar Grove – Emily, Harriet, and Frances Bartow, servants, and, at times, other cousins and relatives – assisted with child care, served as Cole's agent with prospective patrons, and even oversaw the activities of Church and McConkey.

For much of their married life, however, Thomas was away from Catskill pursuing the more mundane side of an artist's life, as well as painting, and Maria was (literally) tending the home fires at Cedar Grove. Their correspondence during those separations became a continuation of their daily conversations, filled with news of the children's progress or details of the exhibitions and patron interactions of the day. While in New York, Thomas stayed with his family and, when there for extended periods, would set up a painting room and continue to work. This ability was extremely important to his commissions and exhibitions; there were times when Cole would begin a painting after he had begun to set up an exhibition and realized he needed a particular kind or even size of picture to complete the gallery. Sketches, studies, books and reference materials, and even correspondence about commissions were found in his Studio, as well as his artist's materials and equipment.

Home at Cedar Grove, Thomas Cole's work was supported directly by his family. Maria spent many of her days in the Studio, reading aloud to her husband while he painted and commenting on the pictures as he worked. Even when Thomas was home, his sisters-in-law must have taken on many of the duties of child-care and housekeeping, to allow Maria time in the Studio. The children were welcome visitors to the Studio, and Frederic Church even comments that young

Theddy Cole liked to grind paints. Writing from Europe in 1841, Thomas Cole gives us a glimpse of his family in the Studio:

"But how can I paint without you to praise, or to criticise, and little Theddy to come for papa to go to dinner, and little Mary with her black eyes to come and kiss the figures in my pictures. Indeed I feel lonesome in my room."³

Other family members participated even more directly in the creation of art. Thomas brought his sister Sarah copper plates and etching apparatus to create prints of his paintings.

In addition to painting, Cole continued to organize exhibitions, communicate with patrons and fellow artists, and conduct business transactions. While in Catskill, however, Cole had to undertake all these activities by correspondence. The volume of letters produced by Cole throughout his career is extraordinary; correspondents include patrons such as Daniel Wadsworth, Robert Gilmor, and William van Rensselaer; Asher B. Durand and other leading artists of the period; and a wide range of family members, both in the United States and England. Again, his family took a role in the commercial side of the process, representing Cole in the City when he was unable to be there himself.

When in Catskill, Thomas Cole was part of a large household that included his wife's uncle, three unmarried sisters, and cousin, as well as visitors, servants, hired hands and even Cole's students. According to data from the four US Censuses taken between 1820 and 1850, the average number of residents at Cedar Grove was 11.25 during those years. The size, activity, and even sounds of the household were not solely affected by the number of inhabitants: by 1840, two of the residents were children (with other children to follow) and, throughout this period, one family member most probably suffered symptoms of mental illness.

³ Letter from Thomas Cole to Maria written in Rome, November 11, 1841

While Cedar Grove seems a substantial house in size, it is not surprising that, at times, Maria Cole felt that "the House is not half large enough for us."⁴

The work of Cedar Grove focused on the farm and garden, with apples and other crops grown both for the family's use and for sale. Sewing and quilting, visiting, and, especially, reading were favored activities of the family. Still, Cole felt the intellectual and social isolation of Catskill keenly, particularly during the winter months when the Hudson River froze and the quick and convenient steamboats stopped running. His decision to spend the winter of 1843-4 in New York without his family, however, was even more difficult, and he determined that he would never again be parted for them for so long a period.

Despite his best efforts, however, Cole's financial situation was challenging. The financial Panic of 1837 caused bank and investment firm failures, dropping property values, and high unemployment; the resulting depression lasted five years and impacted virtually all citizens' economic stability. In addition, Cole continued to support his sister Sarah and became involved in a business scheme with his nephew William Henry Bayless to build him a house in New York City, which cost Cole a great deal of money. The deflation caused by the Panic resulted in falling prices for Cole's pictures; a number of exhibitions lost money; and Cole worried about patrons and selling his pictures.

The births of three surviving children brought Thomas and Maria great joy. Cole was a doting father and wanted Maria to spare no detail of each child's activities and progress, worrying when he was away that the children would not remember him on his return. The last years of his life, however, were clouded by the deaths of Maria's Uncle Sandy, the head of the household, and of the couple's fourth child, Elizabeth, who lived only a few days. Thomas Cole himself survived his daughter by less than a year. The most gifted landscape painter of

⁴ Letter from Maria B. Cooke to Thomas Cole, postscript by Maria Cole, March 12, 1842. TCNHS, Box 4, Fldr 2

his time died at Cedar Grove after a short illness on February 11, 1848. Only 47 years of age, he left a wife and three young children; his last child and namesake was born seven months after his death.

II. The Cole and Thomson-Bartow Families

To understand the dynamics of life at Cedar Grove during the period of Thomas Cole's residence, it is important to begin with both the Thomson-Bartow and Cole families. For virtually all of his professional life, Thomas Cole was responsible for supporting, in whole or in part, many members of his own family; with his marriage to Maria Bartow in 1836, he became part of the extended Thomson – Bartow family, with all its attendant joys, supports, and challenges.

The Cole Family

The story of Thomas Cole's early life has been covered in some detail by several writers and art historians, and this report will not reiterate all elements of that history. James Cole and Mary Holloway (or Halloway) were married November 23, 1791.⁵ Thomas was born on February 1, 1801, in Bolton-le-Moor, Lancashire, the seventh of James and Mary Cole's eight children. His father, a textile manufacturer,⁶ had several business set-backs, a pattern that would continue after the family's emigration to America. Thomas did attend boarding school briefly, where he may have had lessons in drawing, and then became an engraver at the calico print works in Bolton.

⁵ Duffield Parish Registers, information provided by Dr. Birgitta Hoffman

⁶ Powell identifies James Cole as a woolen manufacturer (Powell, pg. 12), but a recorded power of attorney indicates that James Cole was a "muslin manufacturer of Bolton County of Lancaster, England." This power of attorney is described in the catalogue for "The Works of Thomas Cole 1801-1848 an Exhibition at The Albany Institute of History and Art Albany, N.Y.," November 1-December 15, 1941; TCNHS archives, Box 12, Folder 3.

Thomas Cole came to America in 1818. In Dunlap's *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, published in 1834, however, the author wrote that Cole's relatives "both by the male and female side, resided in this country [U.S.], prior to his birth," and that Cole's grandfather has been a "yeoman cultivating his own soil in Baltimore, in the latter part of the last century."⁷ Dunlap also states that Cole came to America when he was very young. Dunlap was creating a history of American art and wanted to make the case that Cole was American, so he had a clear agenda, but he received the information about Cole's family background directly from Cole himself.⁸ There are connections between the Coles and the Chapman family in Baltimore by the mid-1830s, which would be explained by members of the Cole family having settled there in the late 1790s.⁹ Further extensive genealogical research will be needed to establish the veracity of the claim.

When James Cole sailed from England in the spring of 1818, following repeated business failures, he was accompanied by his wife Mary, daughters Ann, Mary, and Sarah, his son Thomas, and Lydia Hooloway, according to transcription of the ship's manifest. While some have assumed that Lydia was a servant, it seems probable that she was, in fact, an aunt. In the 1820 US Census, one can account for James and Mary, the three daughters, and son Thomas in the listing for the household of James Cole in Steubenville, Ohio. There are two additional members of the household, however: a free white boy under the age of 10, and a free white woman age 45 or older. Throughout Thomas and Sarah Cole's correspondence into the 1840s, there are many references to "Aunt" as part of

⁷ Dunlap, pg. 251

⁸ *Landscape into History*, pg. 104

⁹ Letter from Sarah Cole in Baltimore to Thomas Cole in Catskill, June 29, 1836: Sarah directs that her letters be sent to "Mr. J.L Chapman, corner of South and Market Streets, Baltimore, and says that she is staying with "John and Elizabeth," Elizabeth the daughter of Mr. Chapman. NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 1

the household.¹⁰ Given the challenges of reading eighteenth and nineteenth century script, it is likely that Mary Holloway (or Halloway) Cole and Lydia Hooloway were sisters and that Lydia remained a part of the extended family for whom Thomas would ultimately have responsibility.

The Coles left many relatives behind in Lancashire when they traveled to America. James's brother William was an engineer in Bolton, and his sister Mary (with whom Thomas later maintained a correspondence) lived in Preston, near Bolton. Another Cole sister married Jonathan Pendlebury, a bleacher in Heapey. Their son William was a successful businessman in Bolton, while their son John was an eminent physician.¹¹ Thomas visited both brothers while in Europe. William Pendlebury maintained a correspondence with Thomas, including during Thomas's trips to Europe, and he represented Thomas in some business dealings after Thomas left Europe in 1842.¹² William Pendlebury also had the sad task of writing to Maria Cole in April 1848 to inquire if the story in a British newspaper about the death of the American painter Thomas Cole was true, as he was surprised not to have heard this news "from any one of my relations in America," and expressing the condolences on behalf of the family if the story was, in fact, accurate, writing that he had often heard Thomas speak about her and the children.¹³

Aunt Mary Cole kept the American branch of the family updated with letters full of news about the Coles and Pendleburys in Lancashire, corresponding with

¹⁰ Letter from Sarah Cole in New York to Thomas Cole, May 29, 1842: "Maria, Ann, Emma, Theddy, Henry, & Aunt all join in best love to you;" letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, September 28, 1844, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3

¹¹ *Landscape into History*, pp. 24-25

¹² Letter to James and Thomas Cole from _____ Pendlebury and William Pendlebury, August 2, 1825, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 1; Letter from William Pendlebury to Thomas Cole in London, December 25, 1829, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 1; Letter from Mary Cole, Preston, England, to Thomas Cole, December 17, 1845, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 4.

¹³ Letter from William Pendlebury, Heapey, England, to Maria Cole, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4

Thomas until the time of his death.¹⁴ When James Cole died, Sarah asked Thomas to write to Aunt Mary, sending the unhappy news to Aunt Pendlebury herself.¹⁵ At her death in 1855, Mary Cole left legacies in her will for her American nieces: £200 each to Ann Ackerly, Sarah Cole, and to “the widow of my late nephew Thomas Cole and his children...to be equally divided between or amongst them share and share alike” with the children’s shares to be paid when they reached the age of 21.¹⁶

In his first six years in America, James Cole opened and closed three businesses: a dry-goods store in Philadelphia, a block-printed wallpaper manufactory in Steubenville, and a block-printed floor cloth business in Pittsburgh. When the family headed west to Ohio, Thomas remained in Philadelphia, traveling with a friend to Saint Eustatius in the West Indies before joining the rest of the family in Steubenville in May 1819. James Cole moved his family to Pittsburgh during the period that Thomas was making a tour of the towns in east-central Ohio, attempting to establish himself as a portraitist. In November 1823, Cole moved to Philadelphia, a period he referred to as the “winter of my discontent.” There, he boarded with a family, living in an upstairs room with insufficient heat. Cole fell ill but recovered and began painting landscapes and ornamental paintings of birds and flowers on Japan ware. In the spring of 1825, he joined the rest of his family in New York, where he painted in his father’s house on Greenwich Street.¹⁷ Shortly thereafter, Cole was able to sell three paintings, including the view of Kaaterskill Falls that went to Colonel Trumbull, and his career was launched. It was during this period, however, that Thomas Cole also became the primary support for his family. James Cole does not appear to have

¹⁴ Letters from Mary Cole, Preston, England, to Thomas Cole: February 11, 1840, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 1; February 11, 1843,, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 1; December 17, 1845, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 4.

¹⁵ Letter from Sarah Cole in New York to Thomas Cole, March 15, 1837, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 1

¹⁶ Letter from William Pendlebury, Heapey, England, to Maria Cole, asking her to send him a list of her surviving children’s names and ages. NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4

¹⁷ Powell, pg. 16; *Landscape into History*, pg 25

undertaken any additional business activities.¹⁸ Trying to meet the financial needs of his family would be a concern of Thomas Cole for the rest of his life. Writing from New York to Thomas and Sarah Cole, then in Catskill, on January 17, 1836, James Cole laments that the family “had a very dull Christmas as we had no company...as we are quite out of money.”¹⁹ Thomas Cole would hear that refrain again and again from members of his family.

Cole’s sister Ann was married to Dr. George Ackerly and had a daughter, Emma. It is not clear where the couple met or married, although letters to Thomas Cole from a Samuel Ackerly with ties to Steubenville indicate that the pair met and courted in Ohio.²⁰ By the 1830s, however the Ackerlys were living in New York, and it appears that James and Mary Cole, unmarried daughter Sarah, Cole’s nephew William Henry Bayless, and someone Thomas referred to as “Aunt” (perhaps Lydia Holloway?) lived with the Ackerlys. Thomas and his brother-in-law George seem to have been very close: the two wrote to each other frequently, including George’s letter congratulating Thomas on the birth of his son Theodore. George shared Thomas’s interest in and love for poetry and, in one letter, sends Thomas a detailed accounting of projected costs for printing a volume of poetry.²¹ Dr. George Ackerly also suffered many financial losses and failures over the years (the Panic of 1837 seems to have affected him particularly hard) and, as was the case with so many other family members,

¹⁸ In a letter dated August 12 [no year] from New York to Catskill, James Cole writes to his son “For my part I am quite Idle having mothering to do and do not know what Business to follow as yet, which makes it very uncomfortable but hope something will turn out.” AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 1; *Landscape into History*, pg 25

¹⁹ NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 1

²⁰ Letter from Samuel Ackerly, Kentucky, to Thomas Cole, Ohio, July 13, 1821 (NYSL, Thomas Cole Papers)

²¹ Letter from George Ackerly to Thomas Cole COMPLETE CITATION NEEDED

frequently wrote to Thomas, complaining about the lack of money and, often, acknowledging the receipt of funds from Thomas.²²

It was George Ackerly who wrote to Thomas about James Cole's fatal last illness in his 74th year; described as ill with "apoplexy," James Cole's symptoms sound similar to those of a serious stroke, with paralysis on the left side and Cole in a "state of stupor." Even James Cole's last days were affected by the family's financial situation: Ackerly wrote that treatment for James was minimal due to the lack of finances. These sad days were further impacted by the news that the family's rent was being raised, and nephew Henry was looking for another house for the family, although, due to the impending financial crisis, "rents have risen all over the City."²³ Sarah Cole added a postscript, begging Thomas to come. Thomas's mother, Mary Cole, died later that same year.²⁴ George Ackerly himself would die on May 24, 1842, leaving his wife and daughter, as well as the members of the extended family (Sarah Cole, William Henry Bayless, and Aunt) that lived with the Ackerlys in New York.²⁵ Emma Ackerly married John Chapman of Baltimore in April 1847. Thomas and Teddy were in New York for the wedding, but Maria stayed home as the wedding took place not long after the death of the Cole's infant daughter.²⁶ Ann Ackerly went to live with her daughter in Baltimore after her marriage; Sarah Cole often stayed with the Chapmans in the late 1840s and early 1850s as well.²⁷ After many years of

²² In a letter dated March 25, 1837, George Ackerly wrote to Thomas Cole of "the great depression occasioned by the want of money." In a subsequent letter dated January 10, 1838, Ackerly thanks Thomas for sending him \$450, writing that "money is as scarce as ever;" this is also the letter in which George congratulates Thomas on becoming a father; both letters: NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 1

²³ Letter from George Ackerly to Thomas Cole, postscript from Sarah Cole, February 3, 1837, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 1

²⁴ Letter from Thomas Cole to Maria Cole, October 20, 1837, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 1

²⁵ Letter from Sarah Cole in New York to Thomas Cole, May 29, 1842

²⁶ Letter from Teddy Cole in New York to Maria Cole, April 17, 1847, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4; Letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, April 21, 1847, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 8; Letter from Emma Chapman in Baltimore to Thomas and Maria Cole, August 14, 1847, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4

²⁷ Letter from Sarah Cole in Baltimore to Theodore Cole, March 17, 1849,, TCNHS, Box 1, Fldr 28

supporting family in New York, it seems that Cole was relieved of that duty for the last year of his life.

Little is known about Cole's sister Mary, who died in 1839 in New York and was buried with Cole's parents. The most challenging member of the Cole family to identify is William Henry Bayless, identified as Cole's nephew. It is possible that Henry is the little boy, under age 10, listed in James Cole's household in Steubenville in the 1820 Census.²⁸ By the 1830s (if not before), Henry is living with the Cole-Chapman family in New York. The connection is obviously a close one, as, in February 1835, Thomas arranges for Henry (as he is known within the family) to receive training as an architect, signing an agreement with architect Ithiel Town who was to provide five years of training, with compensation to begin in the third year. Thomas signed a second agreement in November 1837, when Henry's apprenticeship was transferred to Isaiah Rogers (Thomas Cole would have additional dealings with Ithiel Town over Town's unhappiness with the commissioned work, *The Architect's Dream*).²⁹

Henry Bayless's plans would prove to be a great financial drain on Thomas Cole. As early as 1836, Sarah Cole wrote to her brother of her concerns about Henry and his need for money.³⁰ Henry often served in the role of an agent for his uncle in New York, looking for exhibition rooms, communicating with possible patrons, and handling other business transactions for his uncle.³¹ Henry also received an early commission to "build a painting room for Mr. Durand which is

²⁸ John C. Bayless owned the paper mill in Steubenville during the period when James Cole was there and operating his wallpaper manufacturing business. It is possible that William Henry Bayless is related to John C. Bayless but the connection of Henry Bayless to either the Coles or John C. Bayless has not yet been established. Sarah Cole, in a letter to Thomas in 1836 discussing the support of various family members, writes, "Henry will soon get a little land...and before very long he will be able to provide for his mother " but it remains unclear who is mother is (Letter from Sarah Cole in Baltimore to Thomas Cole in Catskill, July 3, 1836, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2). Extensive genealogical research beyond the scope of this project is necessary to establish those family connections.

²⁹ Both contracts: NYSL, Box 6, Fldr 6

³⁰ Letter from Sarah Cole in Baltimore to Thomas Cole, July 3, 1836, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 1

³¹ Letter from WH Bayless in New York to Thomas Cole, November 14, 1842, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2

about completed" in 1842.³² By the following year, Henry Bayless bought land on Bank Street, planning to build six houses on the block;³³ in 1844, he began to build a house for his uncle Thomas, which would become an enormous financial drain on Cole's resources and cause the artist a great deal of anxiety: "Henry is going on with the house," Thomas wrote to Maria on January 21, 1844, "it draws a great deal of money from me, & I feel anxious to be able to carry it through."³⁴ The scheme, if successful, would have provided housing for Ann and Emma Ackerly, Sarah Cole, "Aunt" who still is living with the family,³⁵ and Henry, as well as a place for Thomas and Maria and their family to live (and Thomas to work) when in the City, as well as launching Henry Bayless's career as an architect and builder. Instead, the project required larger and larger infusions of capital. Cole's concerns about "carrying the project through" were prescient. In addition, the building of the house occurred at the same time that Alexander Thomson was continually borrowing sums from Thomas Cole to support his own mortgages and other expenses.

Over the course of 1844 and 1845, Henry Bayless was sending a constant barrage of letters to his uncle, seeking sums to pay for the building of the house on Bank Street. On his uncle's behalf, Henry took out a mortgage from the Cookes, a prominent Catskill family that was close to the Thomsons, dated January 2, 1844.³⁶ It is important to note that, in the nineteenth century, unlike today, mortgages usually lasted for no more than one or two years, and the Cooke mortgage was repaid on August 4, 1846. Henry needed money to pay the Cooke and other mortgages and purchase building materials for the Cole house; he also relied on his uncle to support him as he tried to establish his business, as when the owner of a property he was building suddenly died and

³² Letter from Sarah Cole in New York to Thomas Cole, May 10, 1842, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2

³³ Letter from WH Bayless in New York to Thomas Cole, November 13, 1844, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3

³⁴ NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3

³⁵ Letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, September 28, 1844, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3

³⁶ NYSL, Box 6, Fldr 6

Bayless received no payment. At times, Henry Bayless's letters take on a sense of desperation; in one letter, Henry apologizes to his uncle for the tone of his last letter, demanding that Cole send him money. More than a dozen such letters survive, written between May 27, 1844 and July 10, 1846.³⁷ Henry is also giving money to Sarah Cole to manage the household from the sums he receives from Thomas. In addition, to make ends meet, the family in New York resorted to renting out rooms in the house for the income; in March 1847, Sarah Cole wrote to her brother Thomas that she was in great perplexity as Mr. Spencer told her that Thomas had sold the house.³⁸ A month later, in a letter to Maria, Thomas wrote that he had nothing to say about "the business" of the house.³⁹ In May 1847, William H. Bayless of New York is granted a patent for an evaporating pan;⁴⁰ he seems to have no further communication with Thomas Cole in the final year of Cole's life.

The Thomson and Bartow Families

The Thomson family had been long-established in the eastern Hudson Valley by the time Thomas Cole made his first visit to Catskill, with the family living in the area by the late 1700s.⁴¹ The first Thomson of relevance to Thomas Cole's story, however, is Dr. Thomas Thomson, father of John Alexander, Thomas, and their siblings. In the early 1780s, Dr. Thomson was investigated by the Albany Committee for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies. Alleged to have made comments against the Continental government and army while in a tavern, Dr. Thomson was reported to the Committee by a woman working in the tavern.

³⁷ Correspondence at NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3

³⁸ Letter from Sarah Cole in New York to Thomas Cole, March 9, 1847, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4

³⁹ Letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, April 21, 1847, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 8

⁴⁰ Patent #5136: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nyononda/patents/Patents1845-1849.htm>

⁴¹ Raymond Beecher wrote a series of three articles for the Greene County Historical Journal, Vol. 20 (1999) entitled "The Thomsons of Catskill Landing: An In-Depth Study," which provides a comprehensive look at the family's history in the Hudson Valley.

Although he was imprisoned while awaiting trial, the charges were dropped, and Dr. Thomson was released. After this experience, Dr. Thomson and his wife Sarah (née Harvey) moved their family of three sons (John Alexander, Thomas, and James) and four daughters (Maria, Catharine, Harriet, and Fanny) across the Hudson River to Catskill Landing.⁴²

The Thomsons' daughter Maria married Stephen Bartow on January 10, 1792.⁴³ In the years following the marriage, Stephen Bartow's mercantile business in Catskill failed, leading to serious economic losses for Major Augustin Prevost, a prominent Greene County resident. Prevost swore out a warrant for Bartow's arrest for debt, and, sometime around 1800 but before 1805, the Bartow family fled to Upper Canada (now Ontario), settling in Charlottesville.⁴⁴ At least four of the Bartow's children were born in Canada: Emily (4/8/1804); Harriet (11/8/1808); Maria (Cole)(8/3/1813); and Frances (Fanny) Elizabeth (1815). Daughter Sally Amelia was born while the Bartows were still in Catskill;⁴⁵ it is unclear where the Bartows' sons Thomas Alfred (called Alfred) and Edwin were born.

Family separation and anxiety, particularly for her children, was a constant in Maria Thomson Bartow's life, as it would be in the life of her daughter and namesake. Yet, the importance of education, for girls as well as boys, was considered paramount, and sacrifices were made to ensure that her children were educated. Maria and Stephen's daughter Sally was sent to live with John Alexander Thomson to be educated when she was only about 10 or 11 years old (ca. 1805); in a letter to her brother "Sandy" dated July 7, 1805, Maria writes of Sally, who has recently been sent to Catskill, "I hope she makes great

⁴² TCNHS, Box 1, Fldr 67 and Box 7, Fldr 2

⁴³ TCNHS, Box 8, Fldr 11

⁴⁴ There is no contemporary town of Charlottesville in Ontario, but old records indicate that Charlottesville was in the London District; the city of London, Ontario, is located in southwest Ontario, about halfway between Toronto and Detroit.

⁴⁵ June 1, 1894 (TCNHS, Box 8, Fldr 11). Sally Bartow was married in the late 1810s to John B. Spencer, brother of her aunt Harriet's husband Mark, who frequently served as a New York agent and contact for Thomas Cole. Sally died on August 8, 1825 and sadly disappears from the Cole family story.

proficiency in learning." In a letter to her daughter written in July 1806, Maria says she has prevailed upon an old man to stay and eat dinner so she could hurriedly write a letter to her daughter, which the old man had promised to deliver; "I am happy to hear that you still go to school, and I hope you will improve every moment of time you have in learning and improving your mind, believe me, my child, the greatest accomplishment a young girl can have, is a mind well stored with useful knowledge." Maria tells Sally about her little sister Emily (then about 2 years old), saying that Emily is a "great talker" and lamenting that the toddler is "all the company I have." Maria poignantly concludes, "Adieu My Dear Child, do not forget that you have a father and mother who feels for you every tender affection."⁴⁶

Other threats would prove more ominous for the Bartows. The arrest warrant against Stephen Bartow remained in effect throughout the rest of his life, with one short exception in 1806,⁴⁷ and the family moved back to New York only after Stephen's death. The area of Upper Canada in which the Bartows lived was the site of several battles during the War of 1812, including significant battles at York (Toronto) and Detroit, as the British forces allied with the First Nations, led by Tecumseh: in a letter written May 17, 1815, Thomas Thomson, recently returned to Catskill, wrote that he had worried about the safety of his sister and her family during "our late unhappy war."⁴⁸ The threat from Native Americans continued after the war's end in early 1815; young Edwin Bartow was

⁴⁶ TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 4

⁴⁷ On August 16, 1806, Augustin Prevost signed an agreement with Stephen Bartow "not to arrest or in any manner to molest the person of the said Bartow or to take any advantage in any possible manner or degree of his presence in this state for the space of one month from the time of his entering this state. This agreement to be void after five months from its date." Prevost was a property owner and business man who had had dealings with members of the Thomson family (John Alexander Thomson rented a house from Prevost in 1811). It seems likely that members of the Thomson family prevailed upon Major Prevost to issue the agreement after Dr. Thomson's death, to allow Stephen and Maria to come to Catskill for the settling of her father's estate, although it is not clear whether the Bartows did, in fact, come to Catskill at that time. (TCNHS, Box 7, Fldrs 2 and 6)

⁴⁸ AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 11

killed by Indians at Malcom Mills, District of London, Province of Upper Canada, on November 5, 1815; he was about 15 years old.⁴⁹

The three Thomson sons had varying successes in business. As a young man, Alexander Thomson may have been a surveyor before he was a storekeeper, his profession for most of his life; there are entries in the daybook of Dr. William Wilson of Greene County for payments to Alexander Thomson for surveying work, dated 1796-1801.⁵⁰ Thomas Thomson went to work for Williams Radclif of New York City and was sent to Demerara, British Guiana to collect on a bill. While there, Thomas began trading, eventually establishing a prosperous business of his own, trading rum, molasses, textiles, horses, and fish, returning to Catskill in 1815, wealthy but with his health broken. James Thomson married and had children, including sons Thomas and Edward and daughters Julia Antoinette, Helen Harriet, and Charlotte; like his brother-in-law Bartow, he was never successful in business.⁵¹ The children of James Thomson and Maria Thomson Bartow, as well as Maria herself and her unmarried sisters Fanny, Harriet, and Catharine, all would come to rely on "Tommy" and, even more so, "Sandy" for support.

With the return of Thomas Thomson to Catskill in 1815, the Thomson brothers undertook a program of building. The "Old Stone Castle," the old store which had belonged to their father and been taken over by Alexander, was in a dilapidated state and was demolished. Alexander rented another store for the summer of 1815. In the meantime, the brothers built a pair of brick stores in the former garden of the Old Stone House: "Uncle Sandy will occupy his but I think Uncle Tommy builds his to let," wrote Sally Bartow to her father in August, 1815.

⁴⁹ TCNHS, Box 8, Fldr 11 – copied from Family Bible

⁵⁰ TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 15

⁵¹ In a letter dated July 7, 1805 to Sandy Thomson, Maria Thomson Bartow writes that she is glad to hear that Thomas is so well and successful and saddened to hear the reverse of James. She also is disappointed that "Pappa cannot afford Money enough to make us a visit." (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 11)

In addition to the commercial buildings going up that summer, both Thomas and Sally, in letters written in the summer of 1815, make reference to Alexander (not Thomas) building a house in Catskill to accommodate his growing number of dependents. On May 17, Thomas wrote to his sister Maria that Alexander had “commenced building a very comfortable House on the Hill *for the Family* [italics added], which I trust will be ready by next December.” Sally Bartow, in the letter referenced above, told her father that “Uncle Sandy is also building a Dwelling House on the Hill which will not be completed till the spring.”⁵² However, in a November 1816 letter, Thomas Thomson writes that “I have completed my dwelling house for my brother & sisters in Catskill.”⁵³ Cedar Grove was clearly meant for the extended family of Thomsons.

After the death of Stephen Bartow in 1817, Maria and her five surviving children returned to New York. Thomas allowed the Bartows to live at and have use of his farm in the town of Broome on their return.⁵⁴ Members of the Bartow family would remain on the farm in Broome until Maria Bartow's death in 1832; the members in residence would change over time, however, as Maria and her children moved easily back and forth between Broome and Cedar Grove.

Alexander and Thomas Thomson paid for the education of their nieces and nephews, beginning with Sally Bartow's arrival in Catskill, ca. 1805, as evidenced by many receipts for school tuitions found in the Thomson family papers. The family demonstrated a significant commitment to the education of their young people. Formal schooling was important to most American families, although expectations were limited, and education was by no means universal or always accessible in the early part of the nineteenth century. A law requiring each town to provide elementary education facilities for residents was passed in New

⁵² Letter from Thomas Thomson to Maria Thomson Bartow, May 17, 1815; Letter from Sally Bartow to Stephen Bartow, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 11

⁵³ NYSL, Thomson Family Papers

⁵⁴ Thomas Thomson's will, TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 4

York State in 1812 but only mandated that a school be available; tuition-free public education was not legislated until 1867. In the intervening years, “free” public schools were free in the sense that they were open to all white residents, but students were required to pay tuition, and parents (or in the case of the Thomson family, “uncles”) were responsible for funding education. Students were expected to learn basic reading, writing, and calculating, allowing them to participate in business transactions and read the Bible or a newspaper.

In addition, the young Thomson relatives received many benefits and supports from their uncles, including housing, food, and clothing. In December 1815, Sally Bartow wrote to her parents that she and Aunt Fanny Thomson were preparing to go to New York City for the winter: “Uncle Tommy remains there this winter and has taken rooms for us.” Grateful for these circumstances, Sally continued, “it is certainly very kind of him indeed and will be at considerable expense and chiefly on my account. I hope I may never prove ungrateful for their kindness and affection toward me which I acknowledge with feelings of gratitude and pleasure.”⁵⁵ After her marriage, Sally wrote to her husband while staying with her uncle in Catskill that Uncle Tommy was being very kind and getting furniture for them.⁵⁶ Receipts and invoices to Alexander Thomson for shoes and other items, for his nieces particularly, demonstrate both his level of generosity and role as surrogate parent while giving a picture of who was living at Cedar Grove at any given time.

Thomson Family Financial Dealings

The death of Dr. Thomas Thomson in 1805 was the beginning of decades of economic complications and hardship for the Thomson family. Sarah Thomson had died in 1798, so the Thomson's seven children inherited the estate, and son John Alexander and daughter Catharine were appointed executors. The

⁵⁵ Letter from Sally Bartow to Maria and Stephen Bartow, December 2, 1815 (TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 4)

⁵⁶ Undated letter from Sally Bartow to John Spencer (TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 14)

challenges of administering the estate were twofold: first, because Dr. Thomson died intestate, each item of personal property and each piece of real property were to be divided seven ways equally; each of his heirs owned one-seventh of everything. This meant that the Thomson siblings needed to buy and sell their individual shares of their father's property to each other, leading to intricate financial transactions, further complicated by the fact that both Thomas and Maria were out of the country and not present at the time the estate was being settled.

More troublesome, however, was the finding that a number of items assumed to be assets were worthless. The Doctor held IOU's from 24 individuals that it was determined would never be paid back. As a result, Dr. Thomson's personal estate was insufficient to meet all the estate's creditor claims, requiring the sale of some real estate. Again, the claims of each of the seven siblings against each item of property had to be settled before the property could be sold to settle the estate's debts. The Thomson family papers are full of leases, deeds, quit claims, and mortgages between members of the family, as well as with other individuals, that extend for decades. For example, a deed dated 1806 states that Stephen Bartow of the Township of Charlottesville in the County of Norfolk, Upper Canada, Merchant, and Maria Bartow, his wife, are entitled to "one equal seventh part of all the real estate of Dr. Thomas Thomson;" in 1817, Maria Bartow, still in Charlottesville, sold land to her brother Thomas, part of the inheritance from her father; four years later, Thomas Thomson specified in his will that his sister Maria must quit any claim to her father's estate in order to inherit from him, indicating that the estate was still not settled in 1821, sixteen years after Dr. Thomson's death.⁵⁷

When Thomas Thomson returned to Catskill in 1815, having made his fortune in business, it is safe to assume that the family believed there might finally be an

⁵⁷ TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 2 and Fldr 4

opportunity both to settle the estate of their father and to ensure the future of the numerous nephews and nieces left to their care. Thomas's premature death in 1821, however, put an end to hopes for financial security. The financial Panic of 1819 was the first major financial crisis in the United States, lasting until 1823, and it had a significant impact on the value of Thomas Thomson's estate. Real estate values in New York State fell an estimated 18%, and many banks and financial houses collapsed. It is possible that Thomas Thomson underwent significant losses about the time of his death, as New York financial institutions failed and that these losses impacted the value of his estate.

Thomas Thomson's will, dated January 1, 1821, provides bequests to almost all members of the Thomson family by name. Thomas leaves his sister Maria Bartow "the use and occupation of My farm...situate in the Town of Broome & called the Stout Farm" so long as she releases all claims to any part of her father's estate. Niece Sally (Bartow) Spencer, who was over 21, received an outright bequest of \$1,000. Bequests of \$1,000 were also promised to Thomas's other nieces and nephews when they turned 21; these included Thomas Alfred, Emily Catharine, Harriet, Maria, and Frances, children of Mrs. Bartow, and the children of "my brother James, deceased: Thomas, Edward, Julia Antoinette and Charlotte." Only James's daughter Helen seems not to have been included, whether by oversight or intention. There are bequests to his sisters Catharine and Harriet Thomson. The remainder of his estate is left to his brother Alexander and sister Catharine, who also serve as executors. In a separate document, dated only 1821 (no month or day), Harriet Thomson sells her interest "in the furniture, farming utensils, stock in the farm, goods or articles contained in the Inventory which now remain in Catskill" for \$658.16.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ All documents referred to in this paragraph are found in TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 4. These include the will, Maria Bartow's agreement to quit claim on Dr. Thomson's estate, and Harriet Thomson's agreement to sell her interest in Thomas Thomson's remaining personal property. On July 21, 1822, Harriet Thomson

Throughout this period, Alexander Thomson continued to both manage his store and the farm at Cedar Grove. His niece, Sally Bartow, wrote of him in 1815, "he is very busy indeed he hardly allows himself time either to eat or sleep."⁵⁹ It is safe to assume that he continued to push himself as he tried to maintain the family and its holdings on his own, until Thomas Cole joined the family in 1836.

While still trying to settle their father's estate, Alexander and Catharine Thomson were now faced with the task of managing their brother's estate, with the additional challenge of the ongoing financial crisis caused by the Panic of 1819. In an undated agreement signed by Catharine, Alexander, and Maria Bartow, the executors agree to leave the Broome farm in Maria's possession, as specified in Thomas's will, "until they [executors] determine to the contrary, of which thirty days notice shall be given." Whether this agreement that the farm could not be removed from Maria's possession on less than thirty days notice was completed to protect Maria from any of the Thomsons' creditors forcing a quick sale or whether it was meant to serve as a warning to her that, despite her brother's will, she may not be able to enjoy a life tenancy there, is not clear. What is clear is that Alexander continued to deal with challenging economic issues in trying to support himself and the extended family for which he was increasingly responsible for the rest of his life. Catharine's death in 1826 and the settlement of her estate, which included legacies to four nieces, only added to the challenge.⁶⁰ These burdens would be inherited by Thomas and Maria Cole and the Bartow sisters at Uncle Sandy's death in 1846.

married Mark Spencer of New York City, and the folder also contains a formal recognition that Harriet Thomson is now Harriet Spencer.

⁵⁹ Letter from Sally Bartow to Stephen Bartow, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 11

⁶⁰ Catharine Thomson's will is found in NYSL, Thomson Family Papers. In 1841, the collection of Julia Thomson's legacy was turned over to "Mr. Powers," presumably the constable, for settlement, 15 years after Catharine Thomson's death, and Alexander Thomson turned to Thomas Cole for assistance in handling the matter (Letter from Maria to Thomas Cole, April 24, 1841; NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2).

The Household at Cedar Grove, 1815 – ca. 1835

Cedar Grove was built to serve as a home for the extended Thomson family. Despite his status as a bachelor with no children of his own, John Alexander Thomson maintained a fairly large household which included family members, servants and hired hands, and, before 1820, slaves. According to US Census data, 14 people lived at Cedar Grove in 1820, with 10 in residence in 1830.

In the 1810 Census, John A. Thomson, living in Catskill though not yet in Cedar Grove, is listed as head of a household that includes a free white male aged 26-45 (Alexander Thomson himself); a free white female 10-16 (presumably 16-year-old Sally Bartow); a free white female 16-26 and a free white female 26-45 (perhaps two of the three Thomson sisters: probably Catharine and either Fanny or Harriet Thomson); two “others” which would include free persons of color living with and working for Alexander Thomson; and one slave. In the 1817 Catskill Village Census, John Alexander Thomson's household consists of eight persons, including two free blacks and two slaves.⁶¹

Alexander Thomson's household, now at Cedar Grove for the 1820 Census, had grown to encompass 14 people, including three free persons of color (but no slaves). The census lists four persons as engaged in agriculture. Three free white males aged 26-44 are counted; assuming that Thomas and Alexander account for two of these, the third is probably a hired (white) man who works on the farm. One black male aged 14-25 is also counted, probably another farm worker. There are four free whites under the age of 16, as well as two free white females aged 26-44. Again, the older white females are probably Catharine and one of her sisters; the four youths (two young men, both 10-15, a girl under 10, and another girl aged 10-15) are probably Thomson and Bartow nieces and nephews. Finally, two black women aged 14-25 are living and working in the house.

⁶¹ TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 15

It seems most likely that Catharine Thomson “kept house” (i.e., managed the household) at Cedar Grove until her death, which occurred while she was visiting Maria Bartow in Broome, in 1826. By that time, some of her Bartow and Thomson nieces would have been of an age to assume management duties.⁶² Even after Catharine’s death, Maria Bartow remained on the farm in Broome, which was being run at that time by her son Alfred, although she was a frequent visitor to Cedar Grove.⁶³ Her daughters also moved between the two locations, particularly the younger daughters who attended school during the 1820s.

Letters, as well as Cole family oral history, confirm that the three unmarried Bartow sisters were referred to as “the girls.” In fact, there seems to have been a cadre of “girls” at Cedar Grove beginning in the 1820s: in addition to the four Bartows, the three Thomson sisters (Helen, Charlotte, and Julia) were also in residence periodically. In a letter written from “Cedar Grove, Fryday [sic] May 15” 1829⁶⁴ and addressed to Emily Bartow, Mountain Farm, Broome, Maria writes that writes that “your Uncle Sandy” took the back road from Jefferson and we drove to the door steps before *the girls* [added italics] had the least intimation of our being near.” Maria goes on, “The girls...had got all their house cleaned and everything in apple pye [sic] order – except the milk room and the kitchen.” Among the girls mentioned in the letter are Harriet (Bartow) and Charlotte and Helen (Thomson). Helen Thomson appears infrequently in letters about Cedar Grove; she is included in Alexander Thomson’s will as “my niece Helen Sheppard,” indicating she had married, leaving Cedar Grove permanently at

⁶² While Charlotte Thomson’s birthdate is not known, Emily Bartow was 22 at the time of her Aunt Catharine’s death and Harriet was less than two months shy of 18. Emily seems to have been left to manage the household in Broome during Maria’s visits to Cedar Grove, as Maria addressed letters to Emily at “Mountain Farm, Broome” during her absences.

⁶³ Alfred and Maria Bartow died within five weeks of each other in 1832 (November 20 and December 30, respectively). TCNHS, Box 8, Fldr 11

⁶⁴ The letter from Maria Bartow to her daughter does not bear a year but was probably written after Catharine Thomson’s death in September 1826, as there is no mention of Catharine in the letter and the “girls” seem to have taken on the responsibilities of housekeeping at Cedar Grove. Since the letter specifies that it was written on “Fryday May 15,” that date fell on a Friday in 1829. TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 4

that time. Julia Thomson also lived for at least some period as one of the “girls” of Cedar Grove.⁶⁵

Charlotte Thomson seems to have remained a resident of Cedar Grove for a longer period than her sisters, living there into the 1840s. Charlotte and the younger Maria Bartow were at Cedar Grove together in June 1831, when Maria wrote to her sister Harriet at Broome, “How I should like for Lot and I to take a trip out to see you. She is I believe going to write you one of her good long letters...I heard her say she would have to go in the street to collect some scandale [sic] before she wrote...”⁶⁶ Maria Thomson Bartow, in a letter to her daughter Harriet written from Cedar Grove, also refers to Charlotte as her “principal escort...through the grove and to the river.”⁶⁷ The Thomson Family Papers in the New York State Library contain an invoice to Alexander Thomson dated 1840 for shoes for “Miss Thomson” and “Miss Bartow,” and Charlotte is still in Catskill when the Coles’ pastor and friend, the Reverend Mr. Phillips, and his family left St. Luke’s for a parish in Middlebury, Vermont; Charlotte, in fact, traveled with the Phillipses to their new home, in 1843. In a letter to Theddy Cole, written ca. 1845-46, Sarah Cole, another frequent visitor to Cedar Grove, sends her love to Maria, her sisters, “Cousin Charlott [sic], and U. Sandy,” and Emma Chapman sends greetings to Miss Thompson [sic] in August 1847.⁶⁸ Charlotte Thomson never married and is buried in the Thomson family plot in Thomson Street Cemetery.

Census records also support the idea of “the girls” at Cedar Grove. In 1830, there are three white females aged 15-20 and three aged 20-30 in residence

⁶⁵ Letter from Maria Bartow at Cedar Grove to Harriet Bartow at Broome, June 27, 2831, NYSL, Thomson Family Papers; after describing the activities of the household’s members, Maria writes, “They have all gone to bed [except] Julia which [sic] is in Uncles room but she is now coming.”

⁶⁶ Letter from Maria Bartow at Cedar Grove to Harriet Bartow at Broome, June 27, 2831, NYSL, Thomson Family Papers

⁶⁷ NYSL, Thomson Family Papers

⁶⁸ Letter from Sarah Cole to Theddy Cole, ca. 1845-46, TCNHS, Box 1, Fldr 12 – the letter is given an approximate date based on a reference to “Master Church” reporting to Sarah on activities at Cedar Grove and must coincide with the period of Church’s residence there; letter from Emma Chapman, Baltimore, to Thomas and Maria Cole, August 14, 1847 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4)

with Alexander Thomson, according to the census. While it is possible that one or two of these females may be servants, it is likely that several of them (four? five?) are nieces. In addition, a free black female aged 10-24 lives at Cedar Grove. The seven females in residence outnumber the three males: Alexander Thomson (free white male aged 50-60), a young white man aged 10-15, and another aged 20-30. Again, it's possible that both young men are Thomson nephews, although one or both could be hired hands for the farm. Charlotte Thomson's brothers Edward and Thomas Thomson may have lived at Cedar Grove for at least a time in the 1820s and early 1830s. Edward witnessed an agreement between his uncle and a hired man in the spring of 1828; Thomas Thomson signed Thomas and Maria Cole's marriage certificate as a witness and accompanied Sarah Cole on one of her trips from New York to Catskill.⁶⁹ There are no men of color living at Cedar Grove in 1830.

II. Thomas and Maria Cole's Life at Cedar Grove

Thomas Cole made his first sketching trip up the Hudson River Valley in 1825, when Maria Bartow was about 12 years old and perhaps living at her Uncle Sandy's house and attending school in Catskill. It seems highly unlikely that the two met during Cole's earliest sojourns in the area. Shortly after his return from Europe in 1832, Cole traveled again to Catskill, renting a small cottage on the property adjacent to Cedar Grove from Alexander Thomson and setting up his studio there. It is likely that he would have met all four of the Misses Bartow at that time, as their mother and brother had died in late 1832 and the four sisters relocated permanently to Cedar Grove.

In the early 1830s, Cole, until then seemingly a confirmed bachelor, begins to consider his position as a single man and whether he was meant to marry or

⁶⁹ TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 4; Letter from Sarah Cole to Thomas Cole, COMPLETE CITATION NEEDED

remain single. In a letter to his friend Francis Alexander, written from Catskill on September 1, 1834, Cole wrote:

“Thus it is to be a bachelor – restless. I am not determined on bachelorship by any means – the contrary: but the fact is, I find that when I fall in love it is with an ideal character which I have attributed to some earthly fair; and as the ideal does not wear very well in this world, I too soon behold that the object of my adoration is not goddess. What I want is one who is good-looking, has a pleasing expression of countenance, amiable, of good sense, and some sensibility: one who would make one's feelings her own, and love one heart and soul. Are such to be found?”⁷⁰

One might well ask if such was to be found; at the age of 33, Cole had not yet found such a paragon. Cole's thoughts may have been drawn in this direction as his friend Alexander was getting married. In a letter written three weeks later, Cole congratulates his friend on “the treasure you have found” and bemoans his own inability to find such a one.⁷¹ The reality of Cole's financial situation, however, had a more profound impact on his ability to even consider marriage, as he already had so many family members depending on him for support.

Within the month, however, Cole seems to have found an object for his affection. In his November 6, 1834 journal entry, Thomas mentions talking a walk through a favorite dell “in company with Miss B ... a spirit of tranquility seems to dwell in this little valley.” While there are four “Miss Bs” in residence at Cedar Grove, one assumes that Thomas is referring to Maria Bartow, then 24. They discussed a walk in the same place earlier in the fall, “when the woods were in their glory,” and also talked of his sister Sarah, who had accompanied them the first time they had visited the place. Two days later, while packing to return to New York for the winter, Thomas wrote in his journal, “It is a rather melancholy

⁷⁰ Noble, pg. 136

⁷¹ Noble, pg. 137

business. After my summer in the country, I always go to the city with a presentiment of evil."⁷² Cole returned to Catskill the following summer and continues to record in his journal his loneliness for "a companion of genial soul," someone to talk with who would share his love and appreciation of the beautiful. He determined to spend remain in Catskill through the winter of 1835-36 to complete *The Course of Empire* series.⁷³ Whether the presence in Catskill of Miss Bartow had an impact on his decision to remain for the winter is not known.

Despite, or perhaps because of, his feelings for Maria Bartow, Thomas Cole does not seem to have been able to commit to a proposal of marriage into the summer of 1836. His own financial concerns certainly had an impact on his decision; he may also have had some sense of the Thomson-Bartow family's financial situation and that may have had influenced him as well. Cole's hesitation may not have been entirely based on financial realities. On June 26, 1836, feeling depressed, he wrote to his sister Sarah, then staying in Baltimore, about his hopes and concerns. She replied on July 3, attempting to encourage him:

"I know that you must necessarily be anxious about our family, they must be provided for, but I hope that your expenses for them will decrease, I hope that I shall in time be provided for and that will be a good deal for I have been a great expense to you, you have given me everything that I could reasonably wish for cheerfully. Henry will soon get a little land...and before very long he will be able to provide for his mother."

Sarah writes that their parents "feel their dependence" on Thomas, but she does not think that much can be done on that score. She continues:

"Respecting yourself and Maria if you think that your circumstances will reasonably allow of it nothing would give me greater pleasure than your

⁷² Noble, pg. 140

⁷³ Noble, pg. 153-155

union with her. I know she has, like other people, her peculiarities, and who is free from them? I have often said that I did not know any one that I should like for a sister in law than Maria. I think she would make you very comfortable. I do not see that you need be much troubled with her family affairs. Emily and Harriet are both very good. Your own family must be first after Maria.”⁷⁴

Sarah’s letter gives us a clear understanding of Cole’s family and financial situation, as well as a sense of the family to which he would be joined by marriage to Maria. Cole’s aged parents, nephew Henry and his mother, and Sarah herself were all dependent upon him for support. While Sarah was optimistic about her own and her nephew’s prospects, Cole was supporting a family of six (including himself) already, and, although his career seemed to be going well, his patron Luman Reed had died less than a month before, with his commission for *The Course of Empire* not yet completed. These economic realities must have weighed heavily as he considered his future. Yet, despite these challenges, Thomas decided to ask for Maria’s hand.

Thomas and Maria Cole were married four months later, on Tuesday, November 22, 1836, at Cedar Grove (“at the mansion of said John Alexander Thomson”) by the Rev. Joseph M. Philips, Rector of St. Luke’s Church in Catskill.⁷⁵ Thomas Thomson and Hiram Clarke are named as witnesses in the certificate text, but the document was signed by Hiram Clarke and Emily C. Bartow. In early November, Thomas and Alexander Thomson traveled to New York, to prepare for the impending nuptials: “We have been running about Shopping,” Thomas wrote to Maria, “and have had in a few days more experiences than I ever had in my life before in that way.”⁷⁶ Thomas does not give details of their shopping, although George Ackerly wrote the week before the wedding, in some

⁷⁴ Letter from Sarah Cole in Baltimore to Thomas Cole in Catskill, July 3, 1836, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2

⁷⁵ Marriage Certificate for Thomas and Maria Cole, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 8

⁷⁶ Letter from Thomas Cole to Maria Bartow, November 10, 1836, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 1

agitation about Cole receiving the coat in which he would be married on time as “you cannot well be married in your shirt sleeves.” Ackerly also writes that Ann and Henry will leave New York for Catskill on Saturday night, but that he will send Cole’s coat in case they are delayed in their travel. Cole also wrote a somewhat lighthearted letter to Asher B. Durand, begging him to round up “Morse, Ingham, Cummings, and Inman” and come to Catskill for the wedding. “Don’t make me stand up without a single soul to keep me in countenance. Come – come – come! I will not be disappointed.”⁷⁷

Whatever concerns Thomas Cole may have had on entering marriage, by May 1837, when he first takes up his journal after the wedding, he is confirmed in his decision:

“I have been married, and my happiness is increased...The Rubicon is passed and I feel more contented than I should have done had I remained single. It was a serious undertaking for me; but I now rejoice and believe that I shall always have reason to do so.”⁷⁸

To his wife, he wrote from New York, “I regret every moment that I am away from you. How much more delightful it is to me to be rambling through the grove with you than treading these dirty pavements.”⁷⁹ Only three months into their marriage, however, Thomas had already had occasion to leave home for business reasons; it would become the pattern of their married life, with Maria accompanying him when time, children, and other factors permitted.

The Cole’s correspondence over the twelve years of their marriage is conversational in tone, full of affection and anxiety for each other’s welfare and health; this becomes even more pronounced once the Cole’s children are born. “I hope you will not think I write too often,” Thomas writes to Maria, “but when

⁷⁷ Noble, pg 175

⁷⁸ Noble, pg. 176

⁷⁹ NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4

anything pleasant occurs, I am desirous that you should enjoy with me."⁸⁰ Thomas's letters are primarily concerned with business and activities related to his paintings and career. Arrangements for exhibitions, National Academy activities and events, meetings with patrons, and commissions, fill the pages of his letters home to Cedar Grove. Salutations or expressions of affection from members of the Cole family to Maria and her family usually close Thomas's letters, with regrets that he has not returned sooner or messages about how much he misses her: "I was dreaming about you last night so you see if I cannot enjoy your company in the daytime I take advantage of my sleeping hours."⁸¹

The Coles are especially solicitous of one another's health, physical and mental. Thomas, especially, is anxious about his wife's wellbeing, worrying that, if Maria does not specifically mention her health in a letter, it means that something is wrong.⁸² Their concerns were well-grounded, as threats to health and wellness were widespread, especially in New York, where there were frequent outbreaks of cholera and dysentery and other diseases, causing many deaths.⁸³ Mental illnesses were also a worry, and given that Maria's sister Frances had a serious condition (see below), it is understandable that Thomas became "almost frightened" when Maria wrote that she "shall have the blues all winter in all probability."⁸⁴

Maria's letters, as might be expected, are equally full of love and concern but focus on the day-to-day activities of the family at Cedar Grove, particularly the Cole children, and of their friends and neighbors in the village of Catskill. Uncle Sandy superintending the digging of trenches; taking the stoves down and beginning spring cleaning; church business; occasionally politics; and, always,

⁸⁰ Letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, December 6, 1837, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 1

⁸¹ Letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, April 11, 1837, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 1

⁸² Letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, February 12, 1844, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3

⁸³ Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole in New York, February 19, 1844, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 8

⁸⁴ Letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, December 24, 1840, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2

an update on the weather, were shared, giving Thomas a glimpse at home.⁸⁵ Her sporadic journal entries often include the kind of melancholy lament that she seems to keep out of her letters to Thomas: "Wish very much that our absent ones were at home" "Tis quite sad and lonely to be without them [Thomas and Theddy] but if they are enjoying themselves & will return in good health I will be content," and "I am wishing him [Thomas] to return, I always feel so lonely without him."⁸⁶

Maria Cole was a partner in her husband's work, and he refers to his dependence on her praise – or criticism. She frequently read to him while he was painting and, in one instance, writes in her journal of his reciprocating the act and reading to her in the evening while she worked after she had spent the day in the Studio.⁸⁷ The presence of her sisters to care for the children, their home, and even Cole's students during his absences also meant that, from time to time, Maria could accompany her husband. She often traveled to New York, either with him or to visit him during more extended visits; she accompanied him less frequently on sketching trips, beginning in 1837, when she and Thomas joined Asher B. Durand and his wife on a trip to Schroon Lake in the Adirondacks.⁸⁸ On these trips, Maria's role seemed to be more as a general support and companion, to manage the details allowing Thomas to focus on his art. In New York, Maria took a more active role, as she did at Cedar Grove, reading to Thomas in the Painting Room and commenting on his work.⁸⁹ Maria also seems to have been directly involved in the oversight of Cole's students at work (as well as in their participation in the household). In a letter from New York dated March 3, 1845, Thomas writes to Maria that she should "Ask Mr. Church if

⁸⁵ Letters from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole: 12/23/1841, 2/10/1842, 4/18/1842, (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2); 2/19/1844 (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 4)

⁸⁶ Maria Cole's Diary, entries for April 27, 1837, April 6, 1842, and August 27, 1844, AIHA, Box 1. Fldr 13

⁸⁷ Maria Cole's Diary, entry for March 23, 1843, AIHA, Box 1. Fldr 13

⁸⁸ Letter from Maria Cole at Schroon Lake to Emily Bartow, June 24, 1837, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4

⁸⁹ Letter from Maria Cole to Harriet Bartow, March 14, 1845, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4

he will, now & then, give Theddy a little lesson. Tell Mr. Church that I expect to see something quite fine on my return."⁹⁰

In addition to supporting her husband's work, of course, Maria also participated in housekeeping duties at Cedar Grove. While all women of the Bartow's station were taught to sew, in the apparent division of labor that grew among the sisters at Cedar Grove, Maria seems to be the chief seamstress. She mentions quilting in her letters and journals, ending one entry: "I must leave this to cut out Pach [sic] Work which I like to do better."⁹¹ In one diary entry, she has cut out a couple of pairs of pantaloons, and Thomas and Sarah in New York often procure fabric for Maria.⁹² In addition, Maria was involved in tending the gardens, although her sister Harriet seems to have had the reputation as the family's gardener.⁹³ On November 2, 1842, Maria wrote in her diary that, in the waning days of Indian summer, she wanted to work in the flowers but felt that she had a great deal of sewing to do instead.

Europe 1841-41

As difficult as the separations were when Thomas went to New York or on a sketching excursion, it is clear that both Thomas and Maria understood the need for these trips as critical to the success of Thomas's career as a painter. Thomas and Maria both came from families that faced terrible economic hardships, challenges that caused both families to leave their homes and attempt to start over in a new country, although these emigrations ultimately proved unsuccessful for their respective fathers' fortunes. The Coles recognized that, for

⁹⁰ NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4

⁹¹ Maria Cole's diary: 3/7/1842 (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 13)

⁹² Maria Cole's diary: 3/28/1837 "Quilted the greatest part of the day; 11/2/1842 "cut out 2 pairs of pantaloons for Theddy" (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 13); letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, December 15, 1840 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr2)

⁹³ Maria Cole's diary: 11/1/1842 waiting for a man "to help me set some shrubry [sic] (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 13); in a letter to Thomas in New York, 10/30/1843, she writes that she has taken up the dalias (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 8)

Thomas, these trips were a necessity for him to meet with prospective patrons, keep his name before the critics and writers who wrote about artists, and participate in exhibitions. The extent to which the couple was willing to sacrifice their own feelings and time together is most clearly and strongly demonstrated by the decision that Thomas Cole should make another trip to Europe.

Most of the discussion about Thomas going to Europe undoubtedly took place when the Coles were together. Given the frequency of their separations, however, it is only natural that these conversations should continue through their letters when they were apart. The question of a trip to Europe was raised more than two years before Cole would embark in August 1841; in a letter to Maria dated June 9, 1839, Thomas writes that he is continuing to think about going to Europe:

"I think I shall have to go but the idea of leaving you & Theddy causes me much pain and I can hardly find it possible to make up my mind to do so & defer it as long as possible. Mr. Morse will give me letters to distinguished individuals abroad and I can get others very important. But how can I go and leave you?"⁹⁴

Maria's reply, written just two days later, supports the trip, as difficult as the separation will be:

"I received your letter this morning & hasten to beg you not to let me in any way prevent you from going abroad If you feel it at all necessary...I have thought of it so long that I have quite made up my mind to be perfectly resined [sic] to it – but I don't believe that I ever can again – so if you ever think of going without me do go now. I have no doubt myself that it will be advantageous."⁹⁵

⁹⁴ NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 1

⁹⁵ NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 1

Mary Cole was born in September 1839, and the idea of leaving his wife and two young children (Theddy was then only 20 months old) may have been the reason that Thomas delayed his trip for another two years. Continuing financial difficulties may have contributed to the delay as well.

When Thomas finally departed for Europe on August 8, 1841, his conviction that the trip was important for his development as an artist and his career wavered in the face of the separation from those he loved most. In a letter to Maria begun on August 21 (the day after he arrived in London), he wrote of his great melancholy on the night before his departure from New York, "The reasons I had for leaving you & visiting Europe & which I had considered so forcible under this gloomy influence appeared trifling & unsatisfactory."⁹⁶ By the morning, however, he felt better and more hopeful that the trip would result in prosperity.

Thomas's letters from Europe differ from those written from New York, containing lengthy descriptions of the scenery, sites, and sounds he encountered, attempting to share with Maria his experiences and frequently lamenting "O how I did wish for you" or "there is no place like home." In his letter begun on August 21, Thomas writes of his melancholy in hearing street musicians beneath his window in London playing the Scottish air *O where & O where is my Highland laddie gone*: "It brings the tears to my eyes for it calls to my mind recollections of home – You know I used to play it on the guitar." He tells Maria about art-related matters, the exhibitions he has seen and his plans for travel but, knowing where her interests lie, includes the observation: "It is really worth a voyage across the Atlantic merely to see the shops...the articles displayed beyond description." By the end of the letter, however, Thomas laments "I linger over this letter and hate to finish it because while I am writing I feel as though I were conversing with you." Thomas had "a present made me for you – a cameo –

⁹⁶ NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2

Raphael's Madonna de Sisto...so I have something for you when I come back."⁹⁷

Maria's letters continue to be full of the details of daily life at Cedar Grove, giving him (and twenty-first century readers) a vivid picture of the family at home. His extended absence has changed some of the daily patterns: Maria seldom lights the fire in their second floor sitting room but joins the others downstairs "for our party appears so few in number that we all congregate together."⁹⁸ Perhaps because she is home with her children, family, and friends, she is less emotional in her tone than Thomas, but she is soothing, calling him "Deary" and assuring him that he need not worry because they are all well. It is interesting to note that, while Maria's diary-keeping was very sporadic, there are entries for July 4 and August 9, 1842, with several pages between these dates (the period of Thomas's homecoming) removed; we, therefore, have no record of the family's activities to celebrate Papa's homecoming after so long away.

The Cole Children

On January 1, 1838, Thomas and Maria Cole welcomed their first child, Theodore (called Theddy) into the world. The baby may have arrived early, as George Ackerly wrote to Thomas that he not expected Thomas to become a father so soon.⁹⁹ Twenty months later, Mary Cole was born (September 23, 1839). Thomas was a doting father, interested in all details of his children's progress and activities.

Theddy and Mary seem to have been healthy and active children. The children were outside as much as possible; "I can see them trotting about on the Piazza," Thomas wrote from London in 1841, while Maria writes of their collecting the water running off the roof in the spring and, in winter, of Theddy's frequently

⁹⁷ Noble, pg. 234

⁹⁸ Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole in Paris, December 23, 1841, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2

⁹⁹ Letter from George Ackerly to Thomas Cole COMPLETE CITATION NEEDED

playing with his little sleigh.¹⁰⁰ Teddy had a rocking horse, passed down from his cousin Emma Ackerly in the fall of 1840: the attentive father first wrote of making arrangements to send the horse by boat so that Teddy would have his enjoyment sooner rather than later, but, then, holds back for “I should like to see Teddy mount it for the first time.”¹⁰¹ Teddy was also the lucky recipient of a boat made by a friend of Cole’s in New York.¹⁰² Perhaps most telling, Thomas seems to have had the idea that his son might follow in his footsteps, asking that Mr. Church give Teddy drawing lessons and buying “a grand box of paints for Teddy” when the boy was 6 years old.¹⁰³ Both Teddy and Mary drew: writing to Teddy in July 1847, Mr. Church asked Teddy if he still drew every day, warning him that if he did not keep up with his drawing, Mary would beat him.¹⁰⁴ Church also reminisces about little Emily presiding over the tea table and taking all the good things for herself. Emily also had a doll who she named “Mary Augusta.”¹⁰⁵

As with his concern about missing the first ride on the rocking horse, Thomas was, in general, very sensitive to missing the milestones and “firsts” in his children’s lives and, when possible, wanted to be present for them. He was also very troubled by the affect his absences had on the children and his relationship with them. Calling Mary by a pet name, “little Pinky,” he wrote to Maria from New York, “I am afraid they will have forgotten me before I get back.”¹⁰⁶ This fear was especially strong during his eleven months in Europe, 1841-42, and Maria’s letters to him share stories of the children’s talking about Papa. One particular

¹⁰⁰ In his journal on May 30, 1841, Cole wrote of the wonderful weather and noted, “The children are happy in these days. There is no keeping them within doors. It would be a sin to do so,” Noble, pg. 219; Letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, February 12, 1844, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3; Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole in New York, January 6, 1844,, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3

¹⁰¹ Letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, November 22, 1840, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2

¹⁰² Letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, January 29, 1843, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2

¹⁰³ Letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, August 18, 1844, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Frederic E. Church in Lee, MA, to Theodore Cole, July 25, 1847 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4)

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Harriet Bartow to Frances Bartow, Hartford, 1847 COMPLETE CITATION NEEDED

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, November 15, 1840, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2

story is notable in that it makes clear little Mary's memories of her Papa involve his work as well as home life:

"I think that little Mary will remember you quite as long as Theddy will. A few days ago Emily was using some spirits of turpentine in the Basement which made quite a strong smell, as soon as Mary went in she said Papa Painting room, I was perfectly astonished for she has not been there more than once or twice since you left & that was soon after you left."¹⁰⁷

The children, as well as Maria, often had dreams about Cole returning home, Mary once having a vivid dream of Papa in the sitting room in the rocking chair, and Maria, Theddy, and Frederic Church all having a dream about Cole coming home the same night.¹⁰⁸ The letter in which Maria shared the story of Church's dream also shows her wit; the family is anticipating Cole's return from his painting trip to Maine, and Maria writes that, "I shall hope that the Desert Isle has not proved altogether barren to you."

Daughter Emily was born on August 27, 1843 and, again, seems to have arrived earlier than expected. In a letter to H.C. Pratt in Boston, Thomas writes, "On returning home I found that a little stranger had arrived before me. A Girl: she and her mother I am happy to say are well." Yet, while Emily is less than two months old, Cole's primary reason for writing to Pratt is to confirm that he will be in Boston to deal with issues regarding an exhibition within a fortnight and will later spend virtually the entire winter in New York without his family.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, Thomas is anxious to know all that is happening with "little periwinkle," as he sometimes calls her: "Does little Emily laugh & talk as much as when I was at home – tell me all the particulars." According to Maria, Emily was a good baby, although she did not nap as well as the older two children, but

¹⁰⁷ Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole, December 23, 1841, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole in Boston, September 4, 1844, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Thomas Cole to HC Pratt in Boston, October 8, 1843, TCNHS, Box 1, Fldr 5

she seemed to start with “her baby talk” earlier than the other two, and, Maria was pleased to report, that visiting neighbors said she was a pretty baby.¹¹⁰

The birth and death of the Coles' fourth child, Elizabeth, must have been a very painful and difficult loss. The baby's birthdate is given as April 15, 1847, in Cole family papers (TCNHS Archives) but, in his journal on April 6th, Thomas writes that the baby died on April 5th. In any case, the child was lost less than a year after the death of Uncle Sandy. In his journal, Thomas does not mention grief or sorrow, taking refuge in the teachings of his church:

“‘The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away.’ Our infant daughter died yesterday afternoon. Its pilgrimage in this world has been short and sinless. God, in his great mercy, has taken it unto Himself before the world could defile its spiritual garments.”¹¹¹

Theddy's letter to his Mamma, written on April 17 from New York, where he had traveled with his father and Aunt Harriet for his cousin Emma Ackerly's wedding, shows compassion: “I was sorry to here [sic] that you were sick and that my little sister died.”¹¹² Thomas, writing to Maria a few days later to share the details of the wedding, does not mention their sorrow. For this couple whose correspondence was a continuation of their daily conversation, there seem to have been no words to share in their loss. Their fifth child, Thomas Cole, Jr., was born September 16, 1847, seven months after his father's death.

The Cole children went through a series of childhood illnesses and, as all children do, tried the patience of their parents from time to time. When Theddy and Mary had colds in March 1842 and had to be kept in for a couple of days, Maria

¹¹⁰ Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole in New York, October, 30, 1843, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 8; Maria Cole's diary, entry for October 27, 1843, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 13

¹¹¹ Noble, pg. 281

¹¹² Letter from Theodore Cole in New York to Maria Cole, April 17, 1847 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4)

wrote to Thomas that she must let them out or “go out myself.”¹¹³ Both Theddy and Mary had chicken pox, and Theddy contracted jaundice when he was small;¹¹⁴ while now easily treated, jaundice particularly could cause liver disease and failure. The children also had typical spats and “turf wars.” Mary and Theddy fought over a pigeon hawk that had been shot, although neither knew what it was.¹¹⁵

As they grew older, the Cole children attended school. Theddy began school in Catskill but was sent to Mr. Wright’s school in Prattsville about 1850. Theddy was unhappy away from home; three years later, his aunt Sarah Cole wrote to him to encourage him to stay at Mr. Wright’s and to work hard.¹¹⁶ Mary attended school in the village.¹¹⁷

The children also had responsibilities on the farm at Cedar Grove. Theddy seems to have had a great love for animals; at one point, he was promised a calf if he did well in school and had particular responsibility for the chickens and ducks, worriedly writing to his mother from school in 1850 that he had heard his chickens’ nests had been “ransacked” and concerned for his “little chickens” and asking his mother how much corn the chickens had used.¹¹⁸ Maria Cole and Harriet Bartow in particular spent a great deal of time in the gardens, and the children were also outside from a young age. Maria made Theddy and

¹¹³ Letter from Maria B. Cooke to Thomas Cole, postscript by Maria Cole, March 12, 1842 (TCNHS, Box 4, Fldr 2)

¹¹⁴ Maria Cole’s diary, August 9, 1842 (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 13); Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole in New York, February 12, 1844 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3)

¹¹⁵ Maria Cole’s diary, April 13, 1841 (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 13);

¹¹⁶ Letter from Sarah Cole in Catskill to Theddy Cole in Prattsville, March 2, 1853 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4)

¹¹⁷ Letter from Mary Cole in Catskill to Maria Cole, October 10, 1851 (TCNHS, Box 1, Fldr 20)

¹¹⁸ Letter from Sarah Cole in Baltimore to Theodore Cole, March 17, 1849 (TCNHS, Box 1, Fldr 28); letters from Theodore Cole in Prattsville to Maria Cole, 6/11/1850 (TCNHS, Box 1, Fldr 8) and 8/10/1850 (TCNHS, Box 1, Fldr 9)

Mary little hoes, when they were only 4 and 2 ½, so they could join the adults outside digging in the garden.¹¹⁹

The Household at Cedar Grove, ca. 1835 – ca. 1850

While Cedar Grove was considered a large house at the time it was built in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was intended to house many members of the Thomson family, as well as visitors, servants, and hired hands. According to data from the four US Censuses taken between 1820 and 1850, the average number of residents at Cedar Grove was 11.25 during those years. In addition, letters and journal entries refer to visitors who stayed anywhere from one night to a fortnight, and Cole also had two students living with the family in the mid-1840s. It is little wonder that, in a letter to Thomas in March 1842, Maria writes that “the House is not half large enough for us.”¹²⁰

In the 1840 Census, Cedar Grove's household has grown to eleven inhabitants, with the females still greatly outnumbering the men. Thomas and two-year old Teddy Cole are now included in the household, along with Alexander Thomson; these are the three males in the household. In addition to Mary, then a baby, the household is counted to include five females aged 20-30 (probably Maria Cole and her three sisters, although Emily and Harriet were over 30 at that time; other candidates include Charlotte Thomson and/or Sarah Cole) and another young woman, probably a servant, aged 10-14.¹²¹ A free black woman,

¹¹⁹ Letter from Maria B. Cooke to Thomas Cole, postscript by Maria Cole, March 12, 1842 (TCNHS, Box 4, Fldr 2)

¹²⁰ Letter from Maria B. Cooke to Thomas Cole, postscript by Maria Cole, March 12, 1842. TCNHS, Box 4, Fldr 2

¹²¹ The birthdates of the Bartow sisters listed in the Family Bible would have made them 36, 32, 27, and 25 in 1840. The 1840 Census, however, lists five females aged 20-30; it is unclear whether the ages of the sisters was listed incorrectly in the Census or (unlikely) if the two older sisters (Emily and Harriet) were not living at Cedar Grove at the time the census was taken. Confusion over the sisters' ages

aged 55-99, lives and works at Cedar Grove as well. Under occupations, one man is listed as working in agriculture (Alexander Thomson) and one as working listed under "learned profession and engineer" (Thomas Cole). In 1840, no hired men were included in the census entry for Cedar Grove.

The 1850 US Census record allowed for the collection of additional information, including the names, ages, professions, races, and birthplaces of all recorded residents, as well as information about disabilities and whether the person had attended school in the past year. Some categories were not completed by the Greene County census taker, but those that were provide a slightly more in-depth look at the Cedar Grove household after the deaths of Alexander Thomson and Thomas Cole. The household remains a large one, with eleven members, but four of the inhabitants are the Cole children and another four represent Maria Cole and her three sisters. Three additional members of the household are listed: 30-year-old Eliza [the last name is a challenge to read and may be Drury, although the transcription in the census databank reads "Dinks"]; Elizabeth, aged 25 (no last name listed); and 25-year-old Hugh Colton. All three are assumed to be hired help at Cedar Grove, and all three are listed as having been born in Ireland. Large scale Irish emigration to North America had begun recently, as a result of the Irish potato famine. For the first time in the nineteenth century census records, there are no people of color living at Cedar Grove.¹²²

"The Girls" at Cedar Grove

As discussed earlier, there were always several unmarried women of the Thomson family in residence at Cedar Grove. In addition to the three Bartow sisters and Charlotte Thomson, Sarah Cole also frequently came to stay in

continues in the 1850 Census, in which Maria Cole is listed as age 32 (b. 1813, her age was 37), Emily as 40 (46); Harriet as 35 (42), and Frances as 30 (35).

¹²² It is interesting to note that, in the 1875 New York State Census, there are two free blacks living at Cedar Grove. Charles Du Bois, age 13, is listed as a servant, domestic born in Greene County; 39-year-old Armstead Robinson, born in Virginia, is a farm laborer.

Catskill. While many details of Sarah Cole's life can be pieced together through her correspondence with her brother and other family members, relatively little is known about the Bartow sisters. While Maria Cole sent letters, begging her sisters to write in return and let her know how her children were, there are not letters from Harriet or Emily to Maria found in the family papers. Given that the sisters, at those times, were caring for an elderly uncle and very young children, overseeing the work of hired hands and servants, and managing a working farm and the daily activities of a large household, it is entirely likely that they did not have time to correspond with the anxious mother. Some details do emerge from Maria's diary and letters sent to Thomas during his absences from home.

Emily Bartow was the eldest of the sisters and, after the death of Uncle Sandy in 1846, was titular head of the Bartow family. Letters of condolence after Alexander Thomson's death were addressed to Emily, and the property values for Cedar Grove were recorded in her name in the 1850 US Census.¹²³ Emily frequently traveled to New York, staying with her aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Spencer; she also seems to have established a friendship with Frederic Church's sister and traveled to Hartford at least once.¹²⁴ At Cedar Grove, Emily kept the family and farm accounts.¹²⁵ She also must have had a role in cooking and managing the kitchen: Emma Chapman wrote from Baltimore, "tell Miss Emily she must not forget how to make all those nice things for I am going to ask her of some receipts when I come. Mother and I have been making some tomatoe catsup and preserves."¹²⁶

Harriet Bartow seems to have been the sister closest to Maria Cole and the most active and lively of "the girls." Harriet traveled frequently to New York, visiting

¹²³ The value of Emily Bartow's property was listed as \$10,000, while Maria Cole's property was listed as \$200, and neither Harriet nor Frances was accorded any property, in the 1850 US Census.

¹²⁴ Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole, October 30, 1843 (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 8); letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, October 1, 1847, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4

¹²⁵ *The Crayon*, Vo. XII, No. 1, Spring 1980, pg. 7

¹²⁶ Letter from Emma Chapman to Thomas and Maria Cole, August 14, 1847 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4)

Coney Island on one such visit and going with Thomas and Theddy on another.¹²⁷

Harriet was known for her love of flowers and gardening, and her obituary in 1904 states that "Miss Bartow was passionately fond of flowers and for 60 years enjoyed the care of them."¹²⁸ Thomas Cole's letters from Europe are full of descriptions of flowers and gardens to be shared with Harriet, and he brought/sent home many seeds and bulbs for the gardens at Cedar Grove. Harriet also seems to have been involved with cooking and the kitchen; there are several specific mentions in letters and diary entries of her boiling candy or making ice cream; Thomas asks Maria to write a full account of all the day's activities even something so commonplace "as Harriet's making of a short cake;" and Maria ends one letter with "Now here comes Harriet with some supper."¹²⁹

While Harriet Bartow remained single all her life, she appears not to have been without at least one suitor. In the 1860s, when Harriet herself was in her mid-50s, she was sent a carte-de-visite of the Reverend Eliphalet Potts ¹³⁰. The back is inscribed to Harriet: "If Potts allure thee___ /say but the word & /he is thine." Perhaps Miss Harriet had no attraction to either of these potential husbands; it is also important to remember, however, that the decision to marry was often based on financial or other family factors. It may have been that Harriet Bartow was too important to the family's life at and management of Cedar Grove for her to leave and start a family of her own. It is Harriet to whom Thomas Cole writes when he needs someone at Cedar Grove to show paintings to Benjamin

¹²⁷ Letter from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, September 28, 1844, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3; Letter from Theodore Cole in New York to Maria Cole, April 17, 1847 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4)

¹²⁸ Harriet Bartow's obituary, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 10

¹²⁹ Letter from Thomas Cole in Rome to Maria Cole, November 30, 1841 (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 8); Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole in New York, October 30, 1843 (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 8); Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole in New York, February 12, 1844 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3)

¹³⁰ TCNHS, Box3, Fldr 34

McConkey, and Maria's letters are addressed to Harriet as well. The reasons that she remained single, however, were never shared in letters or other documents and will never be known.

The youngest of the Bartow sisters, Frances or "Franky" as she was called by her sisters, appears least often in Maria's letters, although the two were only two years apart in age. The first intimation of any concerns can be found in Sarah Cole's letter to her brother in July 1836, referenced above, in which she encourages Thomas to marry Maria. She cautioned Thomas about Maria's troubled family affairs, but writes, "Emily and Harriet are both very good," omitting Frances from the observation. Since all four Bartow sisters were living in Catskill at that time, it is unlikely that Sarah had not met Franky when she visited Thomas and met the other sisters. In October 1844, Sarah writes to Thomas of Frances's visit in New York:

"Frances seems well, I am afraid she is not enjoying herself very much. I wish it was in our power to make her visit more pleasant to herself. She scarcely takes cognizance of what is passing around her. I really think she is suffering only from want of bodily and mental excercise [sic]. She seems to have no complaint whatsoever."¹³¹

It appears, however, that Frances was suffering from some type of depression or other mental illness. It is possible that the loss of her uncle and surrogate father, Alexander Thomson, in June 1846, may have exacerbated the problem. In any case, by January 1847, letters to Franky from her sisters show that she was in Hartford and being treated at the Hartford Retreat for the Insane (now the Institute for Living). The Hartford Retreat, founded in 1824, was one of the first institutions to undertake what came to be known as "moral care," a practice which believed that the mentally ill were curable and that did not use the chains and shackles prevalent in the care of the mentally ill well into the

¹³¹ Letter from Sarah Cole in New York to Thomas Cole, October 23, 1844, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3

nineteenth century. A more open and caring environment than asylums generally, the Hartford Retreat's founders believed in the power of benevolent supervision and the goal of curing the mentally ill, rather than simply controlling them.¹³²

A series of five letters written from January – November 1847 to Franky from Maria and Harriet reveals their hopes and concerns for Franky's treatment in Hartford. Writing on January 13, 1847, Maria expresses her concern for Franky: "Try dear Franky, not to be homesick, for you will recollect how unwell you were before you left us and it is impossible for you to have the care and advice here that you have there."¹³³ Sent with the letter were a dress and "the silk for an apron. Harriet would have made it for you, but she thought that, if you were well enough, you would like to make it yourself." The idea so prevalent in the nineteenth century that idle hands and idle minds are unhealthy underlies Maria's letter, and consequent letters from Harriet. In addition to fabric to make an apron, Maria continues that Emily has put up some knitting work as "you used to like to knit." Two months later (March 13, 1847), Harriet writes to her sister, reporting that she is glad "Cousin Theodore" has seen Franky. In this, as in her other three letters (June 19th, July 12th, and November 9th), Harriet encourages Franky to be active and keep busy, participating in long walks and "delightful rides" around Hartford and undertaking some employment to make the time go faster.

In her first letter to Franky, Harriet writes that she has received a long letter from Miss Church, who says that Franky "is looking so much better." As a result of Frederic Church's time with the Coles and Bartows at Cedar Grove, a close

¹³² *Mad Yankees: The Hartford Retreat for the Insane and Nineteenth-Century Psychiatry* by Lawrence B. Goodheart (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003) chronicles the first fifty years of the Hartford Retreat and the doctors who led the institution from its founding into the 1860s, including Dr. John Butler, whose name is mentioned in letters from Maria Cole and Harriet Bartow to their sister in Hartford.

¹³³ All five letters are found at NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4

relationship seems to have developed between the families, with Emily Bartow visiting Miss Church in Hartford, and Miss Church visiting Frances while at the Hartford Retreat. Given the Churches' prominence in Hartford and the standing of Dr. Butler who directed the retreat in the late 1840s, it seems likely that the Churches were instrumental in bringing Frances Bartow to the Hartford Retreat for treatment. Harriet's later letters make reference to Franky feeling better. Her last letter, dated November 9, 1847, recommends that Franky stay in Hartford for the winter and come home in the spring: "We would live very quietly and lonely so that you would not have as much to take up your attention." No subsequent documentation was found, however, to indicate when Frances Bartow left the Hartford Retreat and returned to Cedar Grove.¹³⁴ Harriet's comment that the family would live quietly so that Franky "would not have as much take up your attention" is revealing in thinking about both living with a mental illness and in living with someone with mental illness in as active and crowded a household as Cedar Grove. Harriet was perhaps engaged in wishful thinking: at that time she wrote, there were three children under 10 in the house, which alone would preclude a quiet home, and an average of more than 11 people living there, plus visitors and non-resident help. The environment would not be a calm and soothing one for Frances; the challenges of someone in such a crowded house having a mental illness must have been terribly difficult for the rest of the family.

Alexander Thomson: "Uncle Sandy"

Alexander Thomson continued in his role as surrogate father and support for an extended family of Thomsons and Bartows, as he had done for the previous two decades. The series of mortgage and lease documents in the collections of Thomson family papers demonstrates that Alexander Thomson kept up the complicated series of mortgages and borrowing to keep the family properties

¹³⁴ Frances is living at Cedar Grove and is included in Frederic Church's Christmas letter and gift in 1888: letter from Frederic E. Church to Harriet Bartow, December 24, 1888 (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 11)

together until his death in 1846. The Bartow sisters and Maria Cole continued the practice for the next three decades, until a group of benevolent friends stepped in to help Maria Cole and her daughters. When Thomas Cole came to Cedar Grove, Thomson began to formally borrow funds from him, a practice that would continue through the 1840s.

The economic Panic of 1837 further complicated Alexander Thomson's financial situation, and he sustained heavy losses. He was still settling the estates of his brother (d. 1821) and his sister (d. 1826); in 1837, he executed a promissory note to Maria Cole guaranteeing her legacy from Thomas Thomson, who had died 15 years before.¹³⁵ In the early 1840s, he turned his ferry lease over to Thomas Cole and Ezra Hawley (Cole's executor), presumably in payment of a debt. In May 1840, Emily Bartow leased all her furniture, household goods, textiles, etc., to Alexander Thomson for \$1 annually for his natural life.¹³⁶ The reason for this lease is unclear, but it is undoubtedly connected to the complicated series of leases and unpaid legacies that Alexander Thomson was juggling. Alexander Thomson also continued to rent out the cottage that Thomas Cole had leased from him: in March 1839, Mrs. W.R. Rodgers wrote to Thomson on behalf of her husband to ask if they could again rent "the little cottage and go up as early as June this year."¹³⁷

Given the complexity and number of financial transactions, the account books for the family are relatively detailed. The Coles paid \$400 a year for living expenses at Cedar Grove; after Thomas's death, Maria continued to pay approximately the same amount or 50% of the living expenses. Emily Bartow kept the farm and family accounts.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ *Memorandum Book of Legacies*, Aug. 1 1837; TCNHS archives, Box 7 Folder 4

¹³⁶ Agreement between Emily Bartow and John Alexander Thomson, signed May 29, 1840 (TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 6)

¹³⁷ Letter from W.R. Rodgers to Alexander Thomson, March 8, 1839 (NYSL Thomson Family Papers)

¹³⁸ *The Crayon*, Vo. XII, No. 1, Spring 1980, pg. 7

Cole purchased two acres on one edge of the Cedar Grove property from Alexander Thomson; Thomson had been forced to sell the land in order to settle a long pending legal dispute concerning his brother Thomas's estate.¹³⁹ Cole drew detailed plans for an Italianate house, now in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Art, but his and Maria's hopes for a home of their own were delayed by the restrictions on his purchase of land, which stipulated that Alexander Thomson could repurchase the property. This land would eventually be used for Cole's New Studio, built in an Italianate style but not until after Alexander Thomson's death in June of 1846. On Christmas Day 1846, Cole wrote in his journal that he was sitting in his New Studio.¹⁴⁰

By 1843, Thomson was heavily mortgaged; paying off these mortgages would become a family project for years to come. This was also the time that Cole was financing the building of his house in New York, so finances could not have been tighter for the Coles. Yet, Thomas maintained his optimism that things would work out, writing to Maria on March 8, 1844, "Henry has built a very good three story house. I think you will like it – the only difficulty will be the paying for it but I hope with health I shall get through that in about a year. And then I intend to take it easy. It will be something better and more substantial than loose money."¹⁴¹ Sadly, Cole would not be able to meet his own expectations and "take it easy" in a year's time.

On July 1, 1846, Thomas Cole wrote in his journal, "I open this book once more, and to record an event which has brought upon me new cares. The death of Mr. Thompson [sic], my wife's uncle, with whom we have lived every since we were married."¹⁴² Two Thomson nieces were mentioned in the will: Helen Shephead was left \$500 and Charlotte Thomson was left her brother's note for

¹³⁹ *The Crayon*, Vo. XII, No. 1, Spring 1980, pg. 7

¹⁴⁰ Noble, pg. 281

¹⁴¹ NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3

¹⁴² Noble, pg. 275-6

\$400. With the exception of his gift to a friend of a gold watch, the remainder of Thomson's estate was left to Maria Cole and the three Bartow sisters.¹⁴³ Cole was named one of Alexander Thomson's executors, along with Ezra Hawley: the task of settling the various estates, legacies, mortgages, and leases would now become his. In addition, Thomas Cole was now the sole means of support for the family at Cedar Grove, as well having responsibility for his sisters Ann and Sarah and niece Emma, still living in New York.

Sarah Cole and Other Visitors

Sarah Cole was a fairly frequent visitor to Catskill, first visiting Thomas when he was renting the little cottage from Alexander Thomson before his marriage.¹⁴⁴ Her primary residence was with her parents, living with Ann and George Ackerly, and remaining there after her parents' deaths in 1837. During the years of Thomas and Maria's marriage, Sarah continued to live with the Ackerlys, visiting the Coles when possible, as well as seeing them, especially Thomas, in New York. After Ann Ackerly moved to Baltimore with her newly-married daughter in the spring of 1847, it seems likely that Sarah made Cedar Grove her primary home, although she visited Baltimore to stay with Ann and the Chapmans. In letters written while away at school, Teddy mentions that he is "glad that Aunt Sarah is home" or asks if she has returned home yet, home presumably meaning Cedar Grove.¹⁴⁵

Cedar Grove also welcomed many visitors, some staying overnight while others made extended visits. Friends and relatives who did not live locally might come for visits of a week or a fortnight. Particularly in the winter months, without benefit of streetlights and modern means of conveyance, even the short trip from the village could mean a treacherous return, and local visitors, come for an

¹⁴³ TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 8

¹⁴⁴ Noble, pg. 140

¹⁴⁵ Letters from Theodore Cole to Maria Cole, June 11, 1850, and August 10, 1850 (TCNHS, Box 1, Fldr 8 and Fldr 9)

evening of socializing, might spend the night, returning home in the morning. A letter from Maria to Thomas on February 19, 1844, includes: "Mrs Prentiss came her [sic] last week & is going to stay, I don't know how long, an old friend of hers is spending the afternoon here & M & Abbie Cooke have come up to spend the night."¹⁴⁶ An old family friend, referred to only as "Germaine Mary," stayed for the whole winter that Thomas was in Europe, and another, Mrs. Doty, came for a fortnight in the winter of 1847.¹⁴⁷

Hired Hands and Servants at Cedar Grove

The challenge of working a farm in the first half of the nineteenth century, particularly without a large number of younger male family members, necessitated the use of hired agricultural workers. Alexander Thomson's account books include payments both to hired men who lived at Cedar Grove year-round and to seasonal farm workers, and also include accounts for farmlands rented to others to work. Relatively little is known about these men, even though the more-permanent hired men were part of the Cedar Grove household. They lived with the family and interacted with them on a daily basis. Yet, with the exception of Hugh Colton, listed in the 1850 US Census, even the last names of these men are not known. Brief mentions in letters and diaries give us the barest glimpses of who they were and, in some cases, how they came to Cedar Grove.

In the spring of 1828, John Alexander Thomson agreed to hire George C. Scovill for one year (May 1, 1828 – May 1, 1829) at a salary of \$110, one half to be paid on November 1, 1828, and half at the end of the year. In return, "said George does promise & bind himself to perform fully & faithfully all reasonable labour required of him on or about the farm or otherwise as may be necessary for the

¹⁴⁶ AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 8

¹⁴⁷ Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole, December 23, 1841 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2); letter from Maria Cole to Frances Bartow, January 13, 1847 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4)

interest of said John." Alexander Thomson agreed to pay Scovill an additional \$34.00 "for certain extra labor & services," including overseeing all the other farm laborers, taking care and protecting from loss all farm equipment and tools, taking the best possible care of the stock, and "to faithfully endeavor to promote the improvement of said farm." Farming was a demanding profession; Scovill was allowed only six days absence, and those to be taken during the period November 1 – April 1. The agreement was witnessed by Thomson's nephew, Edward Thomson.¹⁴⁸

The hired men appear in letters and journal entries from Cedar Grove. "Egbert" is mentioned in Maria Cole's diary and in letters, driving a cart or bringing a lantern to meet Maria and her sisters as they returned home in the evening from the Village.¹⁴⁹ Another of the hired men is "Peter," mentioned in Maria's letter written to Thomas in February 1842: Theddy asks Maria to tell papa that Peter is mending his wagon; "I must introduce you to Peter, as he is one of our household. – he is a very civil Dane, was very destitute & could get no work so Unc S took him in." Two months later, with Thomas still in Europe, Maria became concerned about the effect of his absence on Theddy, who is influenced by "Jonny W.," presumably another of the hired men: "Jonny W. is his only companion. I endeavor to keep them apart as much as possible but I cannot entirely. I think his manners will suffer more than his morals for I do not think Jonny a very bad disposition."¹⁵⁰ And David E. is in residence in the fall of 1844.¹⁵¹

By the mid-1840s, the changing ethnic make-up of America's immigrant population is reflected in the help at Cedar Grove, as the number of immigrants from Ireland increases, particularly after the onset of the potato famine in 1847.

¹⁴⁸ TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 4

¹⁴⁹ Maria Cole's diary, March 1, 1842, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 13

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole in Rome, April 18, 1842, NYSL Box 4, Fldr 4

¹⁵¹ Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole in Rome, September 4, 1844, NYSL Box 4, Fldr 3

Noble writes that, during Thomas Cole's last years at Cedar Grove, his man Martin was a "simple-hearted Hibernian,"¹⁵² and Irish-born Hugh Colton is living and working at Cedar Grove in the 1850 census. There are references to the challenges of hiring and finding reliable workers, which was always a concern. Family members and friends were often on the lookout for an experienced farmer or a suitable man.¹⁵³

Even less is known about the female servants who assisted with the work of the house and farm during the 1830s and 1840s. While the hired men receive an occasional mention in the family's letters and journals, the hired women do not appear. In 1830, a young free black woman lives and works at Cedar Grove and, among the six free white women listed in the census, there may be one or two additional servants. A decade later, an older free black woman (aged 55 or older) is present; the family probably accounts for the five younger white women included in the census records, although it is possible that one may be a servant. As with their male counterparts, the female servants of the late 1840s-1850 reflect the new immigrant demographic, with both Eliza and Elizabeth identified as having been born in Ireland.

Frederic E. Church and Benjamin McConkey

In 1844, Cole agreed to accept young Frederic E. Church of Hartford, Connecticut, as a student, through the auspices of Cole's patron, Daniel Wadsworth.¹⁵⁴ Church's father, Joseph Church, was a successful jeweler in Hartford and served on the boards of several banks and the Aetna Insurance

¹⁵² Noble, pg. 146

¹⁵³ In a letter to Maria from New York dated February 12, 1844, Thomas writes, "You told me in a previous letter that Mr. Witbeck will leave this spring – has your uncle got another Farmer I am anxious to hear." Maria responded the following week, in a postscript added to a letter to Thomas Cole from Jon Mason dated February 19, 1843: "Theodore has a man in view for Unc S – he is expecting to hear from him next week." (both letters: NYSL, Box 3, Fldr 4).

¹⁵⁴ Letter to Thomas Cole from Daniel Wadsworth, NYSL, Box 3, Fldr 4

Company. In his letter to Cole on receiving word that he was to be Cole's student, Church wrote, on May 20, 1844:

"I may say I have seldom felt more sincere joy than I experience when I learned your favorable answer. I had frequently heard, as you intimated in your letter, that you seldom or never received pupils, consequently I scarcely dared to hope that you would be willing to receive me, but your condescension and Mr. Wadsworth's kindness, in offering to use his influence in my favor, even if I had no other object in contemplation, ought to be of sufficient weight to persuade me to exert myself in your art, to the extent of my ability: and if unremitted attention and activity can accomplish anything, it shall not be my fault if I am not worthy pupil of so distinguished an artist."¹⁵⁵

Church, then just 18 years of age, goes on to say that both his parents and himself "would certainly prefer that I should board in your family, when it can be done with perfect convenience to yourself."¹⁵⁶ Church himself anticipated arriving at Cedar Grove within the month, but does not appear to have traveled to Catskill until later in the summer. On his way to Boston in August 1844 to meet up with Henry C. Pratt for a painting trip to Penobscot and Mount Desert Island, Maine, Thomas Cole "spent a day with Mr. Church at Hartford very pleasantly," and wrote to Maria that she might expect Mr. Church at Catskill within a few days of receiving his letter.¹⁵⁷ While several of Cole's biographers have written that Church accompanied Cole to Maine, Cole's letter bears no indication of that, informing Maria of when and where he will connect with Mr. Pratt and their travel plans. In early September, Maria wrote to Thomas anticipating his return

¹⁵⁵ NYSL, Box 3, Fldr 4

¹⁵⁶ Church paid \$3.00 a week for room and board, and a Cedar Grove account book records a payment of \$36 in June 1846: *The Crayon*, Vo. XII, No. 1, Spring 1980.

¹⁵⁷ Letter from Thomas Cole to Maria Cole, August 22, 1844, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 8

from Maine and mentioning that Mr. Church is with them at Catskill, having arrived six days earlier on August 29.¹⁵⁸

Cole's artistic connection and legacy to Frederic Church has been discussed and analyzed by many research historians. There has been less focus on his life at Cedar Grove. His role as a member of the Cedar Grove household for about two years is a significant one, and his relationship with and, perhaps, sense of indebtedness to the Cole-Bartow family lasted long after his student days were over. In addition to his time in the studio and on painting excursions with both Church and his other student, Benjamin McConkey, Cole frequently left them at Cedar Grove during his travels to New York and elsewhere, during which time other members of the family were responsible for their oversight. When Maria joined Thomas in New York in March 1845, she wrote to her sister Harriet (who was also looking after the Cole's three sick children), "How does Church get along?"¹⁵⁹ The two young men did not spend all their time working, and they spent their leisure time with the family, sometimes taking walks and going on outings.¹⁶⁰ Church was asked, during Thomas Cole's absences, to give drawing lessons to Teddy, then about 8 years old¹⁶¹ Church seems to have taken the role of almost a big brother to Teddy particularly, writing long, teasing letters to Teddy about keeping up with his school work, competition with his sister Mary, and the antics of the Cole's dog Tiger. ¹⁶²

Frederic Church continued to be a friend and benefactor to the Coles and Bartows, as his own career and fortunes flourished. As discussed previously, it seems most likely that the Church family assisted in placing Frances Bartow at

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Thomas Cole, Maine, to Maria Cole, COMPLETE CITATION NEEDED; Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole in Boston, September 4, 1844, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3

¹⁵⁹ Letter from Maria Cole in New York to Harriet Bartow, March 14, 1845, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4

¹⁶⁰ Letter from Thomas Cole to Maria Cole, November 27, 1845, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4; Maria Cole's diary, March 1, 1845 (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 13)

¹⁶¹ Letter from Thomas Cole to Maria Cole, March 3, 1845 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr4)

¹⁶² Letters from Frederic E. Church to Theodore Cole, February 20, 1847 and July 25, 1847 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4)

the Hartford Retreat for treatment in late 1846. Later, when Theodore Cole was 22 and facing his own financial and employment difficulties, Church hired him to oversee early development at Olana in 1860 and would later write to Theddy about his concerns over the family's increasing financial "embarrassments".¹⁶³ In 1882, two years before Maria Cole's death, Church was involved in the setting up of two funds, one to pay the Cedar Grove mortgage and one to establish an annuity, for "Miss Mary Cole to draw \$100 (or proportionate sum) per month for Household expenditures."¹⁶⁴ Church's relationship with the family was warm and caring, as demonstrated by the teasing tone of the Christmas letter he sent to 88-year-old Harriet Bartow in 1888. "My dear Miss Harriet," Church begins:

"I have for a long time been wishing to do myself the pleasure of making you a Christmas present but could not decide exactly what it should be. Remembering your old apprehension of burglars I deliberated for some time whether a double barreled gun might not prove useful, as well as ornamental, but it crossed my mind that, knowing as I do your prompt action when suspicious persons appear I should be afraid to call upon you if I was aware that you possessed so murderous an instrument. Again calling to mind your efficient service when the House got afire I bethought me of a handsome portable Fire Engine but on due reflection I decided that the possession of such a machine in connection with your well known wakeful surveillance would cause you to mistake a shooting star or the rising moon for a conflagration and prompt you to run out the Engine in a cold winter's night to the detriment of your health and the great alarm of your family. I was so puzzled to make a suitable choice that I gave it up and beg you to accept instead the enclosed check and use it for purchasing for yourself and Miss Francis [sic] such things as you may fancy.

¹⁶³ O'Toole, *Hudson River Valley Review*, autumn 2010, pg. 73

¹⁶⁴ The account document contains a detailed list of contributors to both funds, including Mrs. [J.P.] Morgan, both F.E. Church and his sister, Morris K. Jessup, and Daniel Huntington, among others. TCNHS, Box7, Fldr 9

We join in affectionate regards for yourself and all the family with Christmas greetings. Sincerely yours, Frederic E. Church"¹⁶⁵

By couching his present of much-needed cash in the joke of being unable to choose a gift based on Miss Harriet's watchful care of her home, Church showed his sense of respect and propriety in the delicate matter of assisting in the support of those with whom he had made his home in the early days of his promising career.

Less is known of Cole's other student, Benjamin McConkey. An undated letter from Thomas Cole to Harriet Bartow at Cedar Grove introduces "Mr. McConkey of Ohio" and directs her to show McConkey the pictures both in the house and in the studio.¹⁶⁶ While the exact date of his arrival at Cedar Grove is unknown, he is in residence by the fall of 1845; in the summer of 1846, he is part of an excursion party of 12 to South Peak, which includes Maria and Harriet.¹⁶⁷ In March of 1847, Harriet wrote to her sister Frances that "Mr. McConkey leaves us soon, and by the summer, McConkey is in Cincinnati (perhaps his hometown?) and serves as Cole's agent with the Western Art Union there.¹⁶⁸ McConkey established a reputation as a landscape painter in Ohio, but died there in 1852, only 31 years of age.¹⁶⁹

Household Animals at Cedar Grove

Dogs were always part of country and farm life. The earliest record found concerning a pet dog at Cedar Grove is an invoice dated August 17, 1839 to John Alexander Thomson for a "Spanish dog" at a cost of \$3.00.¹⁷⁰ In November

¹⁶⁵ Letter from Frederic E. Church to Harriet Bartow, December 24, 1888, AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 11

¹⁶⁶ NYSL, Thomson Family Papers

¹⁶⁷ Letter from Thomas Cole to Maria Cole, November 27, 1845, NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4; Noble, pg. 276

¹⁶⁸ Letter from Harriet Bartow to Frances Bartow, March 1847 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4); *Landscape into History*, pg. 130

¹⁶⁹ Minimal biographical information about Benjamin M. McConkey appears on the websites

www.askart.com and www.antiquesandfineart.com

¹⁷⁰ NYSL, Thomson Family Papers

1842, Henry Bayless wrote to Thomas that “a dog will be old enough to travel in 2 or 3 weeks at which time I will have him picked up and forwarded, although I am afraid his quality is not as good as others I have seen.”¹⁷¹ It is unclear if this dog of uncertain quality is the infamous Tiger, sketching subject of Frederic E. Church. After Theddy wrote to Church in early 1847 about Tiger’s misadventures, Church wrote, “what displeased me...was the account of Tiger’s backsliding, I was very sorry to hear that he had not acted as became an intelligent and conscientious dog....he is what may be called a spoiled dog.” By July, however, Church asks Theddy about the Cole’s new dog, who he has heard barks fiercely and bites. Tiger has, been this time, been banished.¹⁷² It appears that Tiger, identified by Noble as “a fine, large stag-hound, a present to one of the ladies of the family, yet no great favourite with Cole himself,” was guilty of sheep-killing, causing much trouble and expense to the family. The dog was to be killed for his crimes, but, as Noble recounts the story, neither Cole’s man Martin nor Thomas Cole himself could bring themselves to shoot the dog, who was banished to a distant neighborhood.¹⁷³ It was, then, not Tiger, but the fiercely barking new dog who was reported to guard his master’s coffin at Cole’s funeral.

In addition to the dogs, a family of cats was in residence at Cedar Grove. Church, who seems to have had a great interest in the Cole’s animals, reported to Sarah Cole on the feline additions to the household. In a letter to Theddy, ca. 1845, Sarah writes, “Master Church tells me that you have a number of kittens, it is a great trouble to keep so many cats but pleasant and useful to keep one or

¹⁷¹ Letter from W. H. Bayless to Thomas Cole, November 14, 1842 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2)

¹⁷² Letters from Frederic E. Church to Theodore Cole, February 20, 1847 and July 25, 1847 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4)

¹⁷³ Noble, pg. 146.

two."¹⁷⁴ It is not clear, however, whether Aunt Sarah's advice was followed or whether all the cats remained at Cedar Grove.

Daily Life at Cedar Grove

The clearest pictures of daily activities at Cedar Grove can be found in Maria Cole's letters to her husband, particularly during his trip to Europe, 1841-2, and the winter he spent in New York, 1843-4, and her diary entries. It should be noted that many of these focus on life during the winter months; during the spring and summer, especially given the available light well into the evening, activities outside in the garden, with the children, and outings and visiting, limited the time spent indoors writing. The larger volume of writing from the dark and cold months of winter also explains the focus in Maria's writing on the weather and the need for warmth and light. Her writings provide vivid snapshots of moments in Cedar Grove and the activities of its inhabitants.

Despite the many residents and visitors at Cedar Grove, Thomas and Maria were able to maintain some privacy for themselves and their growing family by maintaining their own rooms on the second floor. Current research and analysis indicates that Cole used the large west room on the second floor as a painting room until he moved into what is now called the Old Studio in late 1839. It is likely that this arrangement was precipitated in large part by the birth of the Cole's second child that September, necessitating the need for more living space for the growing family. The Bartow sisters seem to move between the two family sitting rooms: "Em & Unc S are sitting by their stove & I by mine," she writes in a letter to Thomas; and a diary entry notes, "Thomas has gone to spend the evening with Mr. Phillips. "Harriet sits aposit [sic] me reading & my stove pipe is growing to a red heat."¹⁷⁵ That there are, in effect, two households in one house

¹⁷⁴ Letter from Sarah Cole to Theodore Cole, ca. 1845 (TCNHS, Box 1, Fldr 12)

¹⁷⁵ Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole, December 23, 1841 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2); Maria Cole's diary, April 1, 1843 (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr -13)

is particularly demonstrated by Maria's diary notation on October 27, 1843: writing of the winter-like weather, Maria continues, "I have had quite a room full to day, even *Unc. Sandy* consented to come up stairs and sit with us. My stove makes this room the only comfortable one in the house."¹⁷⁶

The emphasis on stoves and fires highlights both the challenges of keeping such a large house as Cedar Grove warm and snug on cold and damp, rainy days, as the comfort afforded by a fire was important to those sitting indoors to do work or read and, especially, when infants and young children, as well as the elderly, were in the house. In a home with a large number of inhabitants, however, having a stove or fire of one's own allowed for some privacy – or even just some quiet. The three Bartow sisters have not left any record of their own desires for some quiet time, but it may be assumed that they shared their sister Maria's wish to stay by her own quiet fire when possible. On a late September evening, before the stoves were put in place for the winter, Maria stayed writing in her diary for as long as she could; at the end of the entry, she reluctantly wrote, "My pen and light are so poor that I shall have to leave this cold room for the present and join the circle around the fire in the room."¹⁷⁷

In a letter to her husband on April 3, 1844, Maria paints a vivid picture of her sitting room on an early spring afternoon. She writes that Teddy and Mary have exchanged corners of the room: "he is very much engaged in sewing, making patchwork & Mary too says she is making a quilt for Aunt Emily and a muff for Catharine...Em is taking a nap on the settee, Harriet is putting up a quilt, & Franky is visiting Mary in her new corner -- & Unc Sandy is down stairs taking his nap. Thus you see Deary how we are all occupied."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ AIHA, Box 1, Fldr -13

¹⁷⁷ Maria Cole's diary, September 21, 1842 (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr -13)

¹⁷⁸ NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3;

Activities at home included sewing and quilting and playing chess.¹⁷⁹ Lectures at the Lyceum and visiting in the village or welcoming visitors to Cedar Grove were entertainment options as well.¹⁸⁰ For the household at Cedar Grove, reading seems to have been almost a passion. Invoices in the Thomson Family Papers document the dozen or more subscription newspapers and periodicals Alexander Thomson received. Reading, both individually and aloud, seems to have been the primary activity. Maria Cole read to her husband while he worked; Thomas often read in the evening, either to Maria alone or to the family. "I have enjoyed our little assembly around my stove so much while T. read aloud to us that I was unwilling to do anything to interrupt," Maria wrote in her diary on February 25, 1840, while in an entry for March 23, 1843, she notes that she read to Thomas in the studio while he worked and, in the evening, he read to her as she worked: the book in question was a novel entitled *The Tale of Our Neighbors*.¹⁸¹ Other books noted in Maria's diary include *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Gillies History of Ancient Greece*, and several works by Sir Walter Scott. The publication of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* created quite a sensation; Thomas wrote to Maria, "I think it is one of the most beautiful things he has written. I wish I could have read it to you. I should have enjoyed it more."¹⁸² The sharing of these books was a strong bond between the couple.

The Gardens and Landscape

Cedar Grove's gardens were a particular focus for Maria Cole and Harriet Bartow, as well as Uncle Sandy. Much time was spent during the height of the growing season weeding and cultivating in the garden, as is the case for gardeners today. In the late fall and winter, seeds and bulbs for the following year's propagation needed to be collected and preserved. In many cases,

¹⁷⁹ Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole, February 10, 1842 (NYSL,, Box 4, Fldr 2);

¹⁸⁰ Maria Cole's Diary: April 4, 1843 (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr -13)

¹⁸¹ AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 13

¹⁸² Letter from Thomas Cole to Maria Cole, February 12, 1844 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3)

plants themselves were uprooted, potted, and moved indoors for the colder months, to be replanted in the spring. Dahlias were brought in and carnations cultivated in winter; flower beds redesigned and shrubbery planted in the good weather.¹⁸³ In April 1842, Maria described the state of the garden: "Harriet's flower bed has been cut in two so it is now no longer a square bed. We are looking forlorn in the fore yard here at present, but I think by another season there will be an improvement in many particulars...I wish we could help ourselves to some of those beautiful flowers you speak, of [Cole had sent descriptions of the flowers he had seen in Rome] for we have plenty of room now for flowers."¹⁸⁴ Thomas Cole was on the lookout for additions to the Cedar Grove gardens, bringing seeds and plants from a visit to Baltimore in 1840; his trip to Europe in 1841-42 would ultimately prove a boon to the Cedar Grove landscape, as he brought seeds and bulbs home with him, including Sicilian daisies, and contacts in Europe sent Sicilian bulbs, ibiscus [sic], and coronella later.¹⁸⁵

While the flowers seem primarily to have been the domain of the women of the house, Alexander Thomson was responsible for the farming operations, working with hired help, including experienced farmers. The farm at Cedar Grove was an extensive operation and a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this report. Apples and other orchard fruits and grapes were planted extensively, and apples became a source of income, with fruit sent to the City.¹⁸⁶ In the

¹⁸³ Maria Cole's diary: 11/1/1842 waiting for a man "to help me set some shrubry [sic] (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 13); in a letter to Thomas in New York, 10/30/1843, she writes that she has taken up the dalias to put in the cellar (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 8); letter from Maria Cole to Frances Bartow, January 13, 1847, "carnations are the only flowers we have had this winter" (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4);

¹⁸⁴ Letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole, April 18, 1842 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2)

¹⁸⁵ Letter from Thomas Cole to Maria Cole, November 3, 1843 (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 8); letter from Thomas Cole to Maria Cole, November 22, 1840 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2); Letters from Thomas Cole to Maria Cole, March 8, 1844 and August 18, 1844 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3)

¹⁸⁶ Letters from Maria Thomson Bartow (May 15, 1829: TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 4) and Maria Cole (December 23, 1841: NYSL,, Box 4, Fldr 2) mention Alexander Thomson adding grape vines and grafting fruit trees; a

letter requesting to lease the little cottage in March 1839, W.R. Rodgers thanks Thomson for the shipment of apples some months earlier and apologizes for not yet sending payment (probably an ongoing problem adding to Alexander Thomson's financial woes), and, in the first week of November 1843, Maria writes to Thomas that "Unc S has just sent off the apples ...to the City."¹⁸⁷ Even Thomas, who did not involve himself directly in the business of the farm, noted an article in the newspapers stating "that they are about sending apples to China, wrapped in paper, perhaps it will be a good market soon."¹⁸⁸

Other crops grown for the family's use include onions and potatoes; these were also sent to relatives in New York and may have been sold as cash crops as well.¹⁸⁹ Based on Alexander Thomson's estate inventory, grains and hay were cultivated and livestock included horses, cows, pigs, oxen, and beef cattle, as well as chickens and other fowl. After his last illness and death, Thomas Cole noted in his journal, "The gardens and orchards, for weeks past, have shown evidences that their master's hand is no longer here," as the gardens are full of weeds and grape-vines trail on the grounds.¹⁹⁰ Hired farmers and seasonal help maintained the farming operation after Uncle Sandy's death.

Catskill and New York City

Much has been written about Thomas Cole's sense of intellectual and social isolation when in Catskill, particularly during the winter months. It is equally true, however, that he was desperately lonely when apart from his wife and children. Most of his trips to New York were relatively short and, for the eight-nine months

n invoice dated April 4, 1820 lists 5 chestnut, 6 cherry, 28 peach, 5 apple, and 24 pear trees purchased by Alexander Thompson.

¹⁸⁷ Letter from W.R. Rodgers to Alexander Thomson, March 8, 1839 (NYSL Thomson Family Papers); letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole, November 3, 1843 (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 8)

¹⁸⁸ Letter from Thomas Cole to Maria Cole, March 3, 1845 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 4);

¹⁸⁹ Letter from Sarah Cole to Thomas Cole, October 23, 1844 (NYSL, Box, Fldr 3); Letter from Mr. Spencer, August 16, 1842 (NYSL, Thomson Family Papers)

¹⁹⁰ Noble, pg. 275-6

of the year when the boats were able to travel freely on the Hudson, communication and travel between Catskill and New York was quick and relatively inexpensive. Travelers embarked at midnight (or later) and were at their destination by mid-morning, and there were several boats each day.

During the winter months, however, travel between Catskill and New York was difficult. For example, Thomas came home for Christmas during the winter of 1843-4, which he spent in New York without the family. In a letter to Maria after his return, he describes his journey to New York, walking to Hudson and crossing the frozen river on foot (a journey of about five miles), hoping to catch the train. There were none running, however, that would carry him to the Housatonic Railroad, and he would have had to hire a private coach to Chatham, staying the night there, and catch a train the following day to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where most of the day would then be spent waiting for the New York train. Instead, he took the Albany stage to Poughkeepsie, leaving Hudson at about 4:00pm and arriving at 2:00am: the river was open from Poughkeepsie south, and he was able to catch a boat shortly after arriving, getting to the City at 10:30am.¹⁹¹ It is easy to see why there was such a sense of isolation in Catskill during the winter months, and why the first boat of the season merited attention in letters and journal entries in Catskill.¹⁹²

Most of the family's necessities were purchased in the Village of Catskill, including oysters, lamb, beef, mutton, turkeys, flour, salt, and other staples.¹⁹³ During his many trips to New York, however, Thomas also shopped for the family, buying goods that were not available or were more expensive in Catskill. Cole could purchase items in the City and then either bring them home himself or send them via the boat if he was staying in New York for a longer period. Among the items Thomas purchased in New York were molasses, sugar, tea, and

¹⁹¹ Letter from Thomas Cole to Maria Cole, January 3, 1844 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3)

¹⁹² Maria Cole's diary, entry for March 29, 1837, (AIHA, Box 1, Fldr 13)

¹⁹³ *The Crayon*, Vo. XII, No. 1, Spring 1980, pg. 6

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coffee; wine and champagne were also bought in New York and shipped to Catskill.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Letters from Thomas Cole in New York to Maria Cole, November 22, 1840, and December 5, 1843 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 2); letter from Maria Cole to Thomas Cole, April 3, 1844 (NYSL, Box 4, Fldr 3); order for wine and champagne, dated December 6, 1836 (NYSL, Thomson Family Papers);

Appendix I: Slaves and the Thomson Family

The abolition of slavery in New York State was a long and somewhat convoluted process. After failed attempts in 1785 and 1788, legislation to emancipate New York slaves, the New York State Manumission Act of 1799, passed, although the final period of emancipation was not set until July 4, 1827. The Manumission Act declared that all children born to slave women after July 4, 1799 would be freed: males at the age of 28 and females at 25. Those in bondage on July 4, 1799 would remain slaves, although their status was changed to indentured servants. In reaction to the high number of kidnappings and sale of slaves from New York in the South, the legislature again acted, in 1817, specifying that all slaves, including those born before July 4, 1799, would be emancipated although the final date for emancipation was not until July 4, 1827. Many slaveholders, however, freed their slaves before that date, and John Alexander Thomson appears to be one of them.

Census records indicate that Alexander Thomson owned one slave in 1810 and two at the time of the village census in 1817. A hand-written, unsourced document in the Thomson Family Papers at Thomas Cole National Historic Site provides the names of Alexander's six slaves owned in 1820: George, John, Josephus, Robert, William, and James.¹⁹⁵ The 1820 census, however, lists no slaves at Cedar Grove. Interestingly, the census does contain a listing for Josephus Thomson, a free black man aged 55 or older, living in Catskill. Given the common practice of freed slaves to adopt the surname of their former owners, it seems most likely that Josephus Thomson is Alexander's former slave, now a free man. At some point during the years 1817-1820, Alexander Thomson appears to have freed his slaves. It is unclear whether the young free black man living at Cedar Grove in 1820 is one of Thomson's former slaves who remained as a hired hand; since the listing of slave names does not include any

¹⁹⁵ TCNHS, Box 7, Fldr 15

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women, the former status of the two free black women at Cedar Grove is also unknown.

Thomas Thomson must have approved the freeing of his brother's slaves, for practical if not humanitarian reasons. In 1816, Thomas wrote, "I am not so much surprised at Mary's bad luck in owning slaves. She had either forgot or disregarded my advice on this head, which was to own no more rather to sell what she had and depend upon hiring."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Letter from Thomas Thomson, November 1, 1816, NYSL, Thomson Family Papers

Appendix II: Letters from Maria Bartow Cole

The following three letters, written across a span of fourteen years, were sent by Maria Bartow Cole to her sisters. They give a lively overview of her life at each stage: the first, as a teenager still attending school; the second, as a newlywed accompanying her husband and Mr. and Mrs. Asher B. Durand on a sketching trip to the Adirondacks; and the third, as the anxious mother of two sick children (Mary and Emily) left at home while she and her son Teddy accompanied Thomas to New York. The spellings have been left as they are in the letters but are not notated as such as there are many non-traditional or archaic spellings.

Letter 1:

To Miss Harriet Bartow/Broome

Catskill June the 27th 1831

I can easily imagine, My Dear Dick and I sincerely sympathise with you in the solitary hours you must spend but never mind Sister D. it wont be long. You must read all you can and that will be some entertainment for you; I have been going to write ever since they came down, but some thing as usual has happened to prevent. They arrived here just before tea time and a shower rather unexpectedly too, for we thought the mud would prevent them. Mother has been very well indeed. Mrs Doty came here the next day, and staid until last night. Mrs. Cook Henriet and Harriot called here on Friday just as they were going to take tea in the pantry. They insisted on their coming in and partaking with them. So when I came from school there I found them; they looked as pretty and sweet as usual. They enquired and spoke of you several times, soon after they left June Tappan called here for a few minutes. {GH?} how I should like for Lot and I to take a trip out and see you. She is I believe going to write

you one of her good long letters as soon as she can collect something I heard her say she would have to go in the street to collect some scandal before she wrote [illegible insert] have been thinking of you this after noon for we have had a most tremendous shower, by appearance I thought you had a heavier one there, which I thought would make you feel somewhat blue. You must know Lot and I went down to Sunday school this morning, where we learnt that Mr. Salmon was going to preach this morning. He accordingly did and after Church the T;s invited us to go home and take dinner with them, we at first both declined but being dressed in black and it being so very warm I told her she had better stay and I came home, just as we were going to dine the shower came up which prevented every one of us from going to Church if there was any, and I think it very probable there was after the heaviest of it was over. So there Charlotte is yet and is like to be until the mud is in a measure dried. I think it not unprobable she has gone to your J_____’s meeting to night. The moon takes a peep out of the Clouds once and a while, how lovely it shone some part of last evening. I looked at it, and made my usual exclamation: I wonder if any one is looking at that moon and thinking of me, yes I said Dick is and thinking of some of us. Thursday being St. John it was celebrated here and an address delivered by the Prentiss(?) and a most excellent it was too. Lot f. and myself mingled in the crowd with B.F. and Miss. Palmer and then if ever we did regret the absence of a beaux, there were a great many Masons, our side of the Church and all of the slips being taking [?] by them. After the address, we called at the Cooks, Mrs. Mac. Kindries(SP?), the store, and Mrs. Greens. After which we returned home with a pretty good appetite, I can assure you, for it was then 4 O’Clock and we had not tasted a mouthful since breakfast. We just hapned to miss everyones dinner. But to prevent any mistaking idea on you I will tell you, it was not our intention to dine any where but home. The Steam boat that conveyed the free Mason’s down came to the first dock in the Creek, which is by Judge Cooks, it was decorated with greens, on board there was a dinner prepared for

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the ladies, Mrs Griggs mad one of the party, therefore we did not see her. They have all gone to bed [illegible] Julia which is in Uncles room but she is now coming. Enough of such writing so Good Night.

Pleasant dreams to you Maria

Ps M.D.V.L. was her when [smudge] had a fine time notwithstanding the rain

You must not expect Mother this week

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Letter 2:

Addressed to Miss Emily C. Bartow, Catskill, Greene Cty, N York

The foot of Scroon Lake, June the 24, 1837

My Dear Sisters,

As we have arrived at our journeys end or at head quarters, I with conscience writing my promised letter although I have been absent only three days. I was very sorry not to see Mary Anne [name? Lonch? Pouch? Louch?] for you must have been to disappointed to return home without her. I thought of you all afternoon. Our passage to Albany was not very pleasant for it rained most of the time, it fortunately stoped a little before landing. We found Mr. & Mrs. Durand impatiently awaiting our arrival. As the Cars for Saratoga were not to leave until the next morning, we contented ourselves with the hope of fairer weather for traviling. In the evening we attended one of Catlins Lecture which was directly opposite the Mansion House. It was extremely interesting, Catlin is an Artist that has been among the different Indian Tribes between the Misippy and the Rocky Mountains for seven years for the purpose of getting information respecting their manners and customs, Sc, Sc. He showed a great many portraits of different Tribes, with an account of each & their different dr[e]sses. Some of them were realy splendid but I must leave the rest to tell you when I return. I was both amased and delighted.

Thursday morning promised fairer weather as we had hoped. We met Mr. Woodruff in the street, promised to call on our return. At ten OClock took our

seats in the Cars for Schenectady where we changed Cars for Saratoga arrived there at half-past two. It appeared delightful to me there while we staid, the grounds are laid out handsomely & the Houses & every thing around appeared so perfectly neat. We had only time to walk to the Spring to take a glass of Congress water before dinner. It would not take long however to see every thing that is remarcable there, [illegible] has done a great deal for the place. There was very little company there. We left there soon after dinner in an open baroushe for Lake George. The roads were not very fine, a good deal eat up by the late rains & the distance 27 miles. So we did not reach Caldwell's until 9 O'Clock, & pretty well tired as you may suppose after traviling 60 miles in eleven hours. I saw very little of Schenectady as we were there only long enough to change Cars. The route from Albany there is very uninteresting, indeed, I was thankful that there was a Mail Coach to pass over [illegible]. & from S. to Saratoga was but little better. I saw some beautiful flowers growing on the bank and in the swamps we passed by, I longed to possess some of them but of course could not. From Saratoga to Lake G. was much more interesting, Glens Falls is a much more remarkable place than I expected to see. [There is?] at present an emense body of water there, which dashes over the rocks in the grandest maner I ever saw. It was twilight when we passed Bloody point D. Col. Williams Neck: I don't know when I have had such a fit of romance siece me. I felt all the Horrors of the Scene as if it might actually have then been passing. I will Scarcely say that have seen Lake G. for I have by no means had a favorable view of it. We left at 1 O'Clock in the morning after we arrived there. & the Atmosphere was such as to see nothing there to advantage. The road to Scroon was full of interest. The country I cannot describe, it is filled with little mountains, with now & then a fine peak of a lofty distant one. The land is a good deal cleared in part [written over – something "the houses that are" built?] but very little cultivation. But Scroon is delightfull notwithstanding the hazy atmosphere. So far it has certainly been most unfortunate for us. Our quarters

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are as comfortable as we could wish for in any place, and altogether more commodious than I anticipated. Our Land Lord has been a School Master most of his life I believe, & a real Ichabod Crane he is too. Our Land Lady a real industrious woman the head maniger I imagine a Good deal wuch a woman as Mr. [sic] Thorp only altogether neater.

It is three days since I commenced writing this, however I will go on with my description. The house fronts the West. The prospect is limited on all sides being apparently sorrouded by very high hills almost mountains. The woods remind me a good deal of Broome though there is a much greater variety of trees. I never saw so many different ones together in my life. The Lake lies about half a mile back from the house. From a little hill very near the house we can have a very fine view of it. I have been on it twice, the first time I went up it three miles. But the Atmosphere has been so hazy ever sinse we came we have scarcely been able to see the distance at all. From all that we can learn, the high mountain that T. scetshed when here before must be the one of 5000 that is now spoken of, it is some 10 miles from here. & difficult of axcess. If [torn] should clear up soon which we are all earnestly hoping it [tear] do most likely T. & Mr. D. will explore it. As soon as the weather will permit we are going to sail through the lake which is 9 miles in extent. Our gentlemen are improving their time as well as they can. They have scetched some very pretty near views but have been almost devoured by musketoes, gnats & sand flies. You would think Mr. D. had the measles. Mr. D. has not been very well but is getting much better. We have rambled a good deal but not to any great distance. We find plenty of Strawberrys., by the way our fair[sic] is real country. I cannot begin to describe the variety we are treated too. I think I never ate fresh fish before, the Lake Trout is so much finer than any thing I ever saw off the fish skink[??] I cannot tell when we shall leave here, we shall probably not be home until the 5 or 6th. It is doubtfull whether Mr. & Mrs. D. will stop at C. they think now that they had

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better not. We attended no church on Sunday as the nearest is 17 [?] miles. It is a wild and quiet here as you can imagine. We have had an invitation taking tea out tomorrow afternoon much to the annoyance of our Gentlemen but we shall accept it. I must leave the rest to tell you when I return. I shall then have much more to tell I hope than I have now. Give my love to all which will include yourselves of course. I believe to be your affectionate Sister Maria

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Letter 3:

15 Bank Street. March 14th 1845

Dear Het.

I am almost distracted to hear from my babies, so write to me else you will see me posting home. I intended to have given you a strict charge to write this week. And do write me truly, for I want to know precisely how they are and have been.

The rain is pouring down here today in torrents. I hear that you have had a good deal of snow at Catskill. It snowed all the night what we left. We found very little in the City, however, but plenty of mud instead. The fog was so dense that soon after Pokupsie the boat laid too until near morning. So that we did not reach the City until 11 O'Clock. I had a miserable night of it, a cold hard bed and very little sleep. Thed got along very well & he seems perfectly happy to think that he is in the City. The first opportunity after we arrived that he got, he sent out a penny for candy (for which he said he was real candy hungry) & another for a couple of pipes to blow bubbles while he stays here, then David is to have them if they survive so long. Sarah left this morning in the 10 Clock train. I have not been in the Street since I came down. I should have gone last evening to see Mrs. Noble if Sarah had not been going to leave this morning & now tis raining today I feel quite disappointed. I have finished Theds jacket & it has been a real job & if you have not written before you get this, I want you to answer it by the first mail if its only a dozen lines & if the children have been unwell atall don't fail to tell me for I shall be a great deal more contented to

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know just how it is than to think that you are keeping back part. Emmi looked so pale when I left her I know that she was not quite well then & Mary too was so hoarse.

I am writing up in the new painting room, T is painting the skye of his sea piece. How does Church get along: I suppose you have had some company before this. Has Cousin Mary visited you yet, give my love to her tell her I am sorry to lose(?) her visit. How does long Lake flourish? Sarah has given me her Pettishforam(?) & another plant.

I intend to go out & make some calls as soon as it clears off. Don't let the Baby eat too much snow & do be careful what she does eat. Kiss them both for me & tell Mary she must be a good little girl. I will write again soon. Give my love to all & believe me your affectionate sister. Maria.

Tell Julia that the Gaslains (?) have moved their music store so we dropped the letter in the P.O. Theddy says tell Sister Mary that he has seen a very handsome little Tub he thinks of buying for her. But perhaps he may see something else that he likes better. Tell her that her Papa sends her & the Baby a kiss & love to all the rest. If you have an [damage} you had better say to the Cooks and Howleys that T. would rather they would not say much or any thing about the sketches that he has been making this winter.

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