

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

WILLIAM J. ROTCH GOTHIC COTTAGE

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: William J. Rotch Gothic Cottage

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 19 Irving Street

Not for publication:

City/Town: New Bedford

Vicinity:

State: Massachusetts County: Bristol Code: 005

Zip Code: 02740

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local: ___

Public-State: ___

Public-Federal: ___

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: ___

Site: ___

Structure: ___

Object: ___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

1

Noncontributing

1 buildings

___ sites

___ structures

___ objects

1 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ____ Entered in the National Register
- ____ Determined eligible for the National Register
- ____ Determined not eligible for the National Register
- ____ Removed from the National Register
- ____ Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: DOMESTIC

Sub: Single Dwelling

Current: DOMESTIC

Sub: Single Dwelling

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Mid-19th Century: Gothic Revival

MATERIALS

Foundation: STONE

Walls: WOOD

Roof: WOOD

Other: GLASS, BRICK

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.*Setting and Location*

The William J. Rotch House is located at 19 Irving Street, at the southwest corner of Maple Street, on a parcel of land in the City of New Bedford, Massachusetts. When constructed in the later 1840s, the Rotch House was set back from Orchard Street fronted by a curving carriage drive, and surrounded by landscaped grounds reflecting a Picturesque or naturalistic character. When the building was moved back on its site in 1908, it assumed its current address. Irving Street was cut through and Maple Street extended. It is now located on approximately a third of an acre of the original Rotch land bounded today by Irving, Maple and Cottage Streets. The house is now approached from Irving Street by a short stone walkway and no longer has a picturesque country cottage setting. The remaining Rotch land was sold as house lots.¹ The neighborhood in which the nominated house is located is at the top of a hill, overlooking the oldest part of New Bedford and the harbor towards the east. At the time it was constructed the house was well away from the developed portion of New Bedford.

Overview

The Rotch House is a Gothic Revival-style residence built to the plans of New York City architect Alexander Jackson Davis and completed by local builders late in 1846. Its form is that of two interlocking units, a hipped-roof block which is intersected by a taller gabled block with steeply pitched roof, the latter block projecting from the remainder of the façade to form a pavilion. The building was constructed with a heavy wood frame--mortised, tenoned and pegged in traditional fashion-- sheathed on the exterior with fitted horizontal flush boards. Specifications called for well-seasoned spruce for structural elements and pine for sheathing, flooring, and furring purposes; ash, butternut and black walnut were likewise called for finishes in rooms on the primary floor. The roof is covered with cut wood shingles as specified by the architect (not the originals, however), fitted to pine boards covering the roof frame. At the time the building was moved back on its original lot in 1908, it was placed above a new foundation of cut granite and thereby given a modern basement. Interior walls and ceilings are finished with lime-based plaster on sawn lath. Doors and trim are largely constructed of wood, excepting interior cornice work and decorative medallions, which are plaster. Indoor plumbing and central heating were both elements of the original specifications, the latter augmented by coal-burning fireplaces. Mantels for the hearths in the two front parlors and the library were fashioned from gray and black marble. Rooms on both the primary and chamber floors are arranged in symmetrical fashion, the primary floor featuring a center hall around which the rooms were arrayed. The house is two and one-half stories in height with a full basement. Today, despite some changes to the building over time as described below, the house still retains a majority of its exterior and interior features as constructed which make it such a significant and defining example of A. J. Davis' work.

Exterior

The east-facing façade is symmetrically composed and features a prominent central projection, defined by a steeply pitched roof of Gothic precedent and a cantilevered oriel window. This central gabled unit projects forward from the main mass of the house, which consists of a roughly square-shaped block covered by a hipped roof the eaves of which is pierced on the front and side elevations by dormers. At some point between 1867 and 1872 the Rotch family had a pair of Gothic casement windows topped by steep gables cut into the Cottage. The windows allowed badly needed light into the second floor bedrooms. Each front gable and multi-paned window exactly mirror the original Davis gables and windows on the sides of the Cottage. The primary entrance to the Rotch House is recessed within this porch projection, behind the first set of exterior doors,

¹ Ironically the move back placed the Rotch Cottage next to an A. J. Davis house at 7 Irving Street designed in the 1840s but not constructed until the 1860s. The move of the Cottage gave New Bedford two Davis cottages neighboring each other.

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which are headed by a Tudor arch and flanked by rectangular sidelights with diamond-patterned glazing (this diamond-paned glazing is repeated on the majority of the building's windows). Entrance to the interior is gained via a pair of double-leaf doors with narrow, Gothic-tracery glazing, and set within a Tudor arch. There are two of these lancet-like windows in each leaf.

Centered above the Tudor-arched entrance treatment is an oriel window and above it a smaller, Gothic-arched casement window from which projects a small balcony. The gable is trimmed with hand-carved verge boards, consisting of a sinuous curving form that is terminated at the gable apex by a drop pendant and Tudor flower finial, and further defined by round medallions in which are carved quatrefoils. Symmetrical double chimney stacks, constructed of brick with corbelled bases and tops and each with twin terra cotta heads, provide an additional vertical thrust and rise from either side of the steep gable of the pavilion; they are recessed and pierce the hipped roof of the main block. They are not, however, original, and appear to have been rebuilt in a more utilitarian manner than the architect originally conceived, probably near the turn of the century judging from their physical characteristics. On either side of the porch projection, and in keeping with the overall symmetry of the scheme, are flat-roofed verandahs, accented by carved, foliate-inspired cresting at the roofline. Open trelliswork panels support these verandahs. Doors lead from either side of the pavilion onto the verandahs.

Two first-story windows are recessed and set left and right of the central projection. These are fitted with double-casement windows with the same diamond-patterned sash employed throughout. The windows were designed to slide into interior pockets, allowing for ventilation of the house during summer months. Gothic drip molds surmount these windows.

The south elevation is two bays wide and includes a generously-scaled bay window at first story level, which floods the corresponding interior space with light. Six narrow diamond-paned windows, surmounted by narrow drip molds, comprise the fenestration of the bay. To the west of the conservatory bay at the first story level is a double, diamond-paned, rectangular-shaped casement topped by drip molds. The chamber level is punctuated by two dormers; these were later augmented by those added to the façade elevation. The dormers are accented by simple verge boards designed to play off that of the central gable. Carved foliate-like Gothic pendants are set below this verge board, which encircles all four sides of the house. A narrow watertable runs the length of this elevation, above the cut-granite foundation. Below grade, two square-shaped windows admit light into the cellar. The north elevation is similar in conception, with fenestration on the primary story consisting of paired casement windows flanking a small, square-shaped projection with a shallow hipped roof (the pantry).

The west, or rear elevation of the house, fronts on Cottage Street. In 1857 a wing had been attached to the corner of the house but it was removed after the building was moved in 1908, therefore requiring some reworking. The door at the left of this elevation is reached by a flight of five plain wood steps leading to a landing; the base of the staircase is covered with wood latticework. The door and stairs all date to the early twentieth century move, though the opening is spanned by a drip mold. Of the original scheme, three double casements with drip molds are set across the rear elevation to the right of the door. One window lights the kitchen, the other two the library. A non-descript, gable-roofed entrance provides access to the cellar. In addition to the double casement windows, there are single lights set between the casement windows. Four windows admit light to the chamber story. The roofline is articulated by two intersecting gables in which windows are centered.

The current exterior color scheme is as follows: the body of the building is painted an ochre hue, while all the verge boards and cresting trim are painted a cream color. Doors and windows are painted black.

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Interior: Plan and Finishes; Heating and Ventilating Systems

Davis's interior plan for the Rotch Cottage consisted of a symmetrical center hall plan with rooms flanking the hall on either side at both the primary and chamber levels. Bay projections provide the only relief from the otherwise self-contained plan, while the porch and verandah allowed for direct and convenient communication between the interior and exterior. Four major rooms occupy the ground floor, while upstairs there are four chambers flanking the hall and a fifth chamber occupying the space above the recessed entrance porch. On the primary level an octagonal-shaped entrance vestibule leads forward into the stair hall, situated between the two rear rooms of the double-pile plan. Rooms communicate with one another and the vestibule and stair halls. On the left, when facing west toward the back of the house, is the living room, lighted by the conservatory bay, and directly behind it the library. On the opposite side of the hall are the dining room and behind it the kitchen, these two rooms separated by a pantry area. Above are the bed chambers.

Finishes are, in the words of architectural historian William Pierson, "extremely simple though elegant and light in scale." On the primary floor the six-paneled doors are cased with molded architraves headed by Gothic drip molds, and the cornices delicately-scaled and terminated by a crenelated molding. The panels of the doors in the front portion of the house, most of which are of the six-paneled variety, are embellished with cusped and four-centered Tudor arches. First floor rooms have louvered shutters which can slide into pockets allowing them to disappear. Baseboards are heavy in their profiles. There are fireplaces in the living room, library and dining room on the first floor. Mantels are of gray marble and of a typical Gothic Revival type. Surrounding the hearths are wooden, Tudor arches painted white.

The following descriptive information is quoted from the HABS documentation for the Rotch house, compiled by Harley McKee in September, 1961:

Stairways: The main stairway is in the hall between the two rear rooms; it is open, and returns from a landing (with headroom under the landing). There are 18 risers. The newel is turned, of mahogany. The handrail is simple, with simple turned balusters.

A small enclosed winding stairway, about a central round post, leads from the second to the third floor. A steep enclosed flight gives access to a small attic.

Formerly there was a small service stairway, now removed.

Flooring: Pine boards, 3" to 5", on the third floor appear original. The second floor has modern narrow maple finish flooring. On the first floor are modern oak parquetry and some rubber tile. First floor framing has 3" to 10" joists, 16" on centers, and 8" X 8" girders.

Walls and ceiling finish: Plaster on wood lath, painted. Attic floor joists are 2" X 8", 30" on centers; across these are wood furring strips, to which sawn lath are nailed, parallel to joists. Other lath and plaster are to be seen in third floor storage spaces, along with sawn 2" X 4" studding.

Doorways and doors: First and second story doors are six-panel (three vertical panels over three vertical panels). Panels of the front room doors of the first floor are moulded, with trefoil heads. The doors appear original.

Trim: First floor—Heavy wood moulding around doors and windows. There is a full label moulding over door openings. Plaster cornice, a Gothic cavetto moulding with billets in the angle with the ceiling. Heavy moulded baseboard. Interior shutters. Cabinets in the library with alcove. This all appears original. A wood paneled ceiling in the bay window appears to date from c. 1928.

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Second floor—Narrow, but thick wood trim, something like a polygonal colonette, at the door openings; a very simple label moulding is placed over these openings. Wide baseboards (with moulding in the hall, plain in other rooms). Small wood cornice, a Gothic cavetto.

Hardware: Two butts, each door. Brass knobs, mortise locks. Some windows have cast iron fasteners, perhaps original.

Lighting: Modern electric fixtures.

Heating: Originally a fireplace in each principal room, with marble mantels, some gray and some black. Marble hearths. These appear to be original. A modern central heating system is used now.

Directly in front of the rear façade is a driveway entered from Maple Street. A flat board wooden gate partially screens the 1928 garage. The garage was designed by the architect, William Tallman to be unobtrusive and is a non-contributing feature to this nomination. The garage is painted the same ochre as the Rotch Cottage.

Today the William J. Rotch House is still a private residence, as it has been for its entire existence, and is not open to the public. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1976 as a contributing resource in the County Street Historic District.

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The William J. Rotch House is an outstanding example of American Gothic Revival-style residential architecture and distinctly representative of the work of the very significant New York City architect Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892), among the style's more prolific practitioners in the pre-Civil War period and a leading early interpreter of this mode for domestic applications. Executed near the height of Davis' productive career and during the years in which he shared an informal professional association with the landscape architect and author-tastemaker Andrew Jackson Downing, the building was completed in 1846 for William J. Rotch, and subsequently received national attention by its inclusion in Downing's seminal 1850 publication, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, for which Davis lent drafting assistance and designs. The publication and eventual dissemination and popularity of Downing's *Country Houses* became a watershed event in the evolution of American domestic architecture, and today cultural historians recognize the book's significant consequences for the shaping of popular taste in the pre-Civil War period. In scale, the Rotch house is representative of a sub-type referred to by Davis and Downing as a "cottage-villa," while its form and decorative program highlight Davis' interpretation of the Gothic Revival style near the peak of his popularity as a designer in the United States. Davis' design for the Rotch's New Bedford residence is a variation of a center-gable house which he himself distilled from English architectural sources, and which Downing popularized in *Country Houses* and an earlier work *Cottage Residences*, 1842, which likewise received contributions from Davis. The Rotch House is the successful embodiment of these two men's shared conception of the domestic Gothic Revival and therefore strongly reminiscent of their productive association.²

The Rotch House is being nominated for National Historic Landmark designation as an excellent example of A. J. Davis' experiments in the Gothic Cottage mode constructed for one of the most important families in the history of New Bedford industry and as a defining and widely recognized illustration of the Gothic Revival style. Although not constructed exactly to Davis' plan, probably due to the needs and taste of the Rotch family, the house still illustrates the national significance of Alexander Jackson Davis as one of the most important American architects of the nineteenth century. Davis played a highly innovative role in the evolution of the Gothic Revival style for residential purposes, with many of his designs displaying variations of the style. The Rotch cottage, with the unusual treatment of the front gable which pushes the entrance forward into the porch differs from the very few remaining Gothic Revival cottages designed by Davis during his career that maintain good integrity. Three other houses by Davis in this style and listed on the National Register of Historic Places (the John B. Angier House in Medford, Massachusetts; Cottage Lawn in Oneida, New York; and the Henry Delamater House in Rhinebeck, New York) are different enough in their use of the Gothic Revival stylistic elements and materials that they could be further evaluated for their role in the body of Davis' work. In addition, this house illustrates the importance of Davis' informal association with Andrew Jackson Downing in the shaping of national taste in the antebellum period. The Rotch Cottage in New Bedford first illustrated and widely disseminated in Downing's *Country Houses*, today is a defining example of the Gothic Cottage style as one of the most reproduced images, both in drawing and photograph, of the Gothic Revival style. For example, sources as widely used as Marcus Whiffen's *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles*; John C. Poppeliers, S. Allen Chambers, Jr., and Nancy B. Schwartz's *What Style is It? A Guide to American Architecture* for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, William B. Pierson, Jr.'s *American Buildings and Their Architects: Technology and the Picturesque, the Corporate and the Early Gothic Styles*, and the *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* edited by Adolf K. Placzek all use the Rotch Cottage as an example of

² It is likewise complemented by a second New Bedford work by Davis of note, the former First Congregational Church, a Gothic Revival design which Davis collaborated on with his brief sometime partner, Russell Warren, in 1835.

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the Gothic Revival style.³

The house and associated acreage were gifts from William Rotch, Jr., William J. Rotch's grandfather and third generation patriarch of the Rotch family. The family was largely responsible for establishing the whaling industry in New Bedford, arguably the most important whaling port in the world at that time. By the time William J. Rotch's son, Morgan Rotch, moved into the Cottage New Bedford had entered a second period of great wealth from the textile industry. In the 1920s when writer and historian Henry Crapo II owned the Cottage, New Bedford's textile industry era was coming to an end. When John Morgan Bullard and his wife, Catherine Crapo Bullard lived in the Cottage, New Bedford's remaining elite were abandoning the city for the nearby suburbs. John Kilburn Bullard, their grandson, who was instrumental in the historic preservation movement that saved New Bedford, in turn restored the Cottage and made it his home. The extent of the documentation and the survival of the Rotch Cottage house are the result of family members caring for and writing about the cottage—Rotch's to Crapo's to Bullard's. Each family insured the integrity of A. J. Davis' design. The Rotch House, incidentally, served as the residence of three New Bedford mayors and a United States Congressman.

Alexander Jackson Davis: Biographical Overview

Alexander Jackson Davis maintained a notable position in American architectural practice during a period roughly spanning the Jacksonian era to the Civil War. Emerging from the New York cultural scene of the 1830s, Davis established himself as an architect of national visibility, working first in the prevailing Greek Revival fashion and subsequently with the various Romantic-Picturesque styles of the day. Davis' professional association with Ithiel Town (1784-1844) and his more informal relationship with Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852) were both of considerable consequence in the ongoing evolution of American architecture during the nineteenth century and helped place the designer at the forefront of his field in the antebellum period. Gifted with considerable artistic talent and a seemingly instinctive feel for design, yet at times a caustic and irascible personality, Davis left a discernable imprint on the American architectural scene during the productive years of his professional career. "Imaginative, innovative, and influential," to borrow the words of the preeminent Davis scholar Jane Davies, "Alexander J. Davis was an extraordinary figure in American architecture in the rapidly changing and confusing period between Charles Bulfinch and Henry Hobson Richardson."⁴

Prior to his fruitful alliance with A. J. Downing, and his own efforts to adapt the Gothic and other Picturesque styles to the dwellings of the republic's burgeoning middle and upper classes, Davis enjoyed a position as junior partner of Ithiel Town in the architectural firm of Town & Davis (1829-35).⁵ From this partnership emerged what is generally recognized as the first fully developed architectural office formed in the United States, credited with numerous advances in the field.⁶ Davis matured professionally under the influence of the older Town, establishing himself among the leading interpreters of the Greek Revival style during their

³ Dr. Richard Guy Wilson, Architectural Historian, University of Virginia, has confirmed the importance of the Rotch Cottage in the body of Davis' work and as a defining example of Gothic Revival since it is the most widely used illustration of its style.

⁴ Jane Davies, "Alexander J. Davis, Creative American Architect," in *Alexander Jackson Davis: American Architect 1803-1892*, ed. Amelia Peck (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 9.

⁵ The first Town and Davis association lasted from February 1829 to May 1835. On May 1, 1832, James H. Dakin, a talented draftsman who earlier apprenticed in the office under Davis beginning in 1829, became a full associate in the firm. The firm was known as Town, Davis, and Dakin from May 1832 until November 1833. Town and Davis were also briefly associated from 1842-43.

⁶ The definitive volume on the Town and Davis association remains Roger Hale Newtown's *Town and Davis, Architects, Pioneers in American Revivalist Architecture, 1812-1870, including a glimpse of their times and their contemporaries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).

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association.⁷ It was Davis's talented drafting hand that gave shape to many of Town & Davis' commissions, much as it would later help articulate Downing's vision for a new rural architectural paradigm. A versatile artist and designer, Davis distinguished himself as one of the preeminent draftsman of the period, capable of giving form to potent and well-conceived conceptions.

Davis was born in New York City in 1803 and spent portions of his youth in New Jersey and central New York. After finishing formal schooling at the age of sixteen, Davis moved south to Alexandria, Virginia, where he worked with his half-brother Samuel as a typesetter for the *Alexandria Gazette*. The building activity in Utica and Auburn, New York and in Washington, D.C., as pointed out by Jane Davies, enacted a profound influence on Davis' young and impressionable mind, and according to the designer himself helped form the direction of his professional aspirations.⁸ In 1823 Davis returned to New York City and enrolled at the Antiques School where he "applied himself to perspective, the grammar of his art,"⁹ and developed the command of pen and watercolor that became a signature of his practice. Through commissions gained for drawings of public buildings and a brief apprenticeship in the office of architect Josiah R. Brady (c. 1760-1831), the young designer became "gradually initiated into some of the first principles of his art."¹⁰ By 1827 Davis had opened an office at Wall Street, providing drawings for the city's builders and perspective views for publishers.¹¹ Shortly thereafter he was approached by Town, who offered to form a professional association with the younger man, an offer which Davis readily accepted.

Davis' professional partnership with Town, which corresponded with the widespread acceptance of the new Greek architectural fashion in New York City, allowed him the opportunity to broaden his proficiency as a designer, or "architectural composer," the title he used to describe his vocation.¹² The association of Town, an established and successful architect and engineer, and Davis, a precocious draftsman and architectural delineator, marks one of the early landmarks in the history of American architectural practice. Town shared with Davis his enthusiasm for the forms of Greek antiquity, gleaned from the remarkable collection of architectural books and folios he maintained,¹³ and instilled in his younger associate a sense of professionalism that lent definition to Davis' forming ideals. As an experienced builder practiced in structural engineering, Town likewise offered his partner, described by architect James Gallier, Sr. (1798-1868) as "no mechanic, but a good draftsman" with "much taste as an artist,"¹⁴ the wisdom of sound building fundamentals that Davis, inexperienced in the building trade, lacked. The Town & Davis partnership gave

⁷ Few sources capture the full breadth of talent active during the Greek Revival period as effectively as Talbot Hamlin's *Greek Revival Architecture in America; being an account of important trends in American architecture and American life prior to the War Between the States* rep. (London: Oxford University Press, 1944; repr., New York: Dover, 1964). See also Roger Kennedy, *Greek Revival America* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1989).

⁸ Davies, "Davis," 17-18. Davies quotes from the architect's own *Principal Works of Alex J. Davis*, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in which Davis states that his "Mind formed for Architecture at Utica and Auburn, while at school; and at Alexandria, and Washington, D.C."

⁹ William Dunlap, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (New York: George P. Scott and Co., 1834), 2: 408-411. Writing in the third person, Davis provided this sketch of his career up to 1833. Fragments of the architect's drafts for Dunlap survive in the various New York City Davis collections, including a full, undated manuscript held by the New-York Historical Society (NYHS hereafter).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Davis used the phrase architectural composer on his business cards, such as those maintained in Box A-F in the A. J. Davis Collection at the Avery Architectural Library at Columbia University (Avery hereafter), and likewise in his listing in the New York City directory.

¹³ For a period account of Town's New Haven home and library see Lydia Sigourney, "Residence of Ithiel Town, Esq.," *Ladies Companion* 10 (January 1839): 123-26.

¹⁴ James Gallier, Jr., *Autobiography of James Gallier, Architect* (Paris: E. Briere, 1864).

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concrete form to the professional architectural office and helped lend definition to the new parameters of a field then struggling to assert its validity.

By the late-1830s, following his association with Town and a brief partnership with the New England builder and architect Russell Warren, Davis was working predominately in the Picturesque vein, and in 1838 first came in contact with Downing. During the next decade, Davis would aid Downing in his efforts to popularize the various Picturesque styles for domestic applications while fielding commissions for projects, many located within the Hudson River Valley corridor. Davis lent Downing advice and drafting services while profiting considerably from the success of Downing's books, which recommended Davis services, among others, to prospective clients. During the 1830s Davis also produced his own book, *Rural Residences*,¹⁵ a sparsely distributed folio of designs that in many ways foreshadowed Downing's better-known and widely influential works. While Davis worked with the various styles then popular among the Romantic eclectic architects of the day, he showed a particular affinity for the Gothic Revival, helping to champion its application for the nation's domestic architecture. Davis' design for "Lyndhurst," 1864-67, which evolved from an earlier villa of his design ("Knoll," 1838-42), perhaps as well as any residential building erected in the United States during the period highlights the design principles and complexities of the Gothic Revival style. It remains one of the landmark works of the American Gothic Revival and a masterpiece of the native Romantic tradition. In addition to larger villas, Davis likewise produced designs for countless more modestly scaled Picturesque cottages, among them the Delameter House in Rhinebeck, 1844, an outstanding example of the "Carpenter Gothic" aesthetic.

The 1840s and 1850s were decades of great productivity for Davis, as he fielded numerous projects both in New York, particularly the Hudson Valley, as well as for clients as far afield as Virginia and North Carolina. It was during this period that Davis aided Llewellyn Haskell in his vision for a planned Picturesque suburb complete with Romantic architecture and landscaping, Llewellyn Park in South Orange, New Jersey, attempting to bring to full fruition the rural ideal he shared with Downing. By the conclusion of the Civil War, however, Davis' presence on the American architectural scene had all but faded. Although he lived into the 1890s and maintained a professional office well into his life, his once-productive career gave way to limited commissions as his work and design principles fell into obsolescence. Davis died in 1892.

The Emergence of the Domestic Gothic Revival in the United States; Davis and the Gothic Revival

Although the Gothic Revival appeared spasmodically in the United States for domestic applications in architect-designed work at the end of the eighteenth century, it was not until the 1830s that the style had gained any footing nationally, though at that time it remained largely a design mode popular among a small group of professional architects and the client base who engaged their services. By the decade of the 1840s, however, the style began to emerge as a recognized alternative to the prevailing Neoclassical mode, the Greek Revival style, due in large measure to the increasing influence of architectural information provided in publications such as those authored by Downing, and the efforts of professional architects like Davis, who drew from English architectural precedents as a point of departure for design. The association of Davis and Downing would ultimately prove of considerable importance in the emergence of the Gothic Revival as an appealing and acceptable alternative for the American home builder. While Davis had proved an innovator in the use of Gothic forms and design vocabulary for residential work in America, and had been the first to offer Gothic designs in a published form -- albeit limited -- it was Downing who successfully brought the style to the forefront of American culture in his books and his position as editor of the periodical the *Horticulturist*.

¹⁵ Davis, *Rural Residences, Etc., Consisting of Designs, Original and Selected, for Cottages, Farm-houses, Villas, and Village Churches: With Brief Explanations, Estimates, and a Specification of Materials, Construction, Etc.* (New York: 1837).

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During the eighteenth century in America, Gothic design vocabulary was at times used in an “applied” manner, i.e. details grafted onto otherwise classically-inspired Georgian buildings, in the so-called “Gothick” manner. Ornamentation of Gothic derivation, most notably the pointed arch window, was quoted by building tradesmen from period English builder’s guides then popular, such as those authored by Batty Langley, which were employed by builders in America. This trend towards an “applied Gothic” was particularly evident in ecclesiastical design, whereby Gothic detailing was grafted onto an otherwise classically-inspired Late Georgian or Federal-style meetinghouses of the typical Wren-Gibbs type. Not until the very end of the century, however, did the Gothic Revival style appear in a more authentic manner in the realm of domestic design, and even then it was a brief prelude for a fashion that remained four decades distant. As early as 1799, Benjamin H. Latrobe had worked with Gothic design vocabulary for Sedgeley, outside of Philadelphia, a villa which architectural historian William H. Pierson acknowledged as perhaps the first instance in which Gothic Revival forms were utilized for an American residence in an “architectural” and not an “applied” manner.¹⁶ Latrobe followed this commission with “Dorsey’s Gothic Mansion,” (1809) which further developed Gothic motives. However these designs remained largely anomalous to concurrent trends in native domestic design, and served merely as reference points for the first appearance of the Gothic Revival style as a major mode of design in the United States.

Alexander J. Davis played a role -- to what extent might well be debated-- in one of the first fully developed and identified essays on the Gothic Revival for domestic purposes in America, the design of Robert Gilmore III’s Glen Ellen, a villa outside of Baltimore, Maryland, commissioned in direct response to Gilmore’s visit to author Sir Walter Scott’s Gothic Revival villa Abbotsford, in Scotland. The commission, fielded by Davis and his senior partner Ithiel Town, is discussed by Pierson and therefore will only be mentioned in passing here.¹⁷ Though the firm of Town & Davis is acknowledged with advancing important works in the prevailing Greek Revival manner, the office’s efforts likewise included important explorations of the Gothic Revival style, among them Glen Ellen, the design of the New York University building with partner James H. Dakin, and an unidentified Gothic cottage-villa for J. W. Moulton in South Brooklyn.¹⁸ Likewise, Town had already proved himself an important innovator in the emergence of a more “authentic” interpretation of the Gothic Revival with his design for Trinity Church in New Haven, Connecticut, 1814-17, on the Green near two other buildings of his design (NHL as New Haven Green Historic District, 1970). During the second half of the 1830s, following his amicable split from Town in the spring of 1835, Davis began to devote himself increasingly to Gothic Revival design, and during those final years of the decade offered designs of seminal importance to the emergence of the style.

Beginning in late 1838, Davis and Downing initiated an informal but fruitful association that left a significant imprint on the direction of American residential design and architectural fashion at the mid-point of the nineteenth century. Davis assisted Downing, a nurseryman and horticulturist by training and a native and life-long resident of the Hudson River hamlet of Newburgh, on the publication of the latter’s books. Unable to translate his designs into a suitable form for publication, Downing turned to Davis, among the preeminent American architectural draftsman of that era, for illustrations which Davis rendered directly onto wood blocks in preparation for engraving. Three of Downing’s four books, *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, 1841, *Cottage Residences*, 1842, and *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 1850, melded

¹⁶ William H. Pierson, *American Buildings and Their Architects: Technology and the Picturesque: Vol. 2. The Corporate and Early Gothic Styles* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 287-90.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 292-95.

¹⁸ Davies, “Works and Projects,” in *Davis*, 105-108. This is a chronologically arranged list which contains the majority of Davis’ documented projects both executed and proposed, and is an invaluable tool to researchers; Pierson, *American Buildings*, 287.

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the Romantic attitudes toward residential architecture and landscape design then forming in America and helped carry these ideas into the mainstream cultural currents. They likewise represented the shift in American architectural publications from builder's guides to pattern books-- the former highly technical, minutiae oriented, and geared towards building tradesman -- thereby placing more information in the hands of prospective home builders. Downing's ideas were widely disseminated and embraced and gained him significant fame at home and abroad. The two men's association began following a visit by Downing to Blithewood, a "Bracketed" style house which Davis designed for his friend and supportive patron Robert Donaldson from an existing Federal-style residence, and which enjoyed a striking Hudson River setting that was among Downing's favorites. Downing was traveling the Hudson River corridor gathering information on domestic architecture and landscape design at the time, in anticipation of publishing a book on the subject. Donaldson, after entertaining Downing at his estate, recommended Davis to Downing as someone equally interested in the state of domestic architecture in the United States. That began the men's association, which bridged the decade of the 1840s. Sometime around 1850, around the time of the publication of *Country Houses*, Downing proposed a full professional association, an offer declined by Davis, and during a subsequent trip to England took into partnership Calvert Vaux, which brought to an end the Davis-Downing relationship.¹⁹ Vaux was soon joined by F.C. Withers, both of whom emerged as important architects of the Picturesque in America.

The William J. Rotch House is representative of a form which Davis frequently employed for domestic interpretations of the Gothic style, utilizing as it does a façade highlighted by a steeply pitched and centrally-placed intersecting gable. Davis explored this form frequently beginning in the later 1830s, in various scales and utilizing both masonry and frame construction techniques. A variation of this form, though nonetheless similar, featured a slightly asymmetrical placement of the intersecting gable, as with Cottage Lawn in Oneida, New York, a Gothic Revival cottage-villa dating to 1849-50. Notwithstanding this and other slight variations, the symmetrical treatment, with the front-facing gable sometimes projecting from the remainder of the façade elevation to form a pavilion, remained a preeminent design theme of Davis' work in the Gothic Revival manner. In more modest form, at a cottage scale, was the board-and-batten gatehouse which he designed for Donaldson's Blithewood estate and which was offered as a plate in *Rural Residences*; more elaborated examples included the Rotch House and the E. Reull Smith House in Skaneateles, New York (1850), another example of the cottage-villa sub-type.²⁰ Another well-known example, also of frame construction sheathed in a board-and-batten fashion like the Donaldson gatehouse, was the Delamater House in Rhinebeck, New York, 1844, among the best-known examples of American Gothic Revival domestic architecture along with the Rotch house.

The choice of the term "cottage-villa" as used by both Davis and Downing indicates various aspects of the building's form, plan and scale. The building's plan is symmetrical, therefore more in line with smaller Gothic cottages, the limited scale of which often called for such an arrangement, and therefore not in keeping with more complex plans of the type often used for larger villas. The façade elevation is likewise decidedly symmetrical, and hardly in keeping with the complex irregularities common to villas like Kenwood, Lyndhurst, or the Harrel House in Bridgeport, Connecticut.²¹ However the overall size of the interior, the nature of the rooms and their function, and the quality of the details all mark it as the home of a middle-class family, thereby elevating it above the cottage, the latter often conceived for the laborer or mechanic. In *Country Houses*

¹⁹ Francis R. Kowsky, *Country, Park and City: The Architecture and Life of Calvert Vaux* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 12-13.

²⁰ Other examples of this theme by Davis include Henry Sheldon's Millbrook, Tarrytown, New York, 1838-40; the Vanderburgh House in Rhinebeck, New York, 1841; and the Wood House in Mt. Kisco, New York, 1846. All of these are no longer extant.

²¹ An exception to the irregularity common to larger Davis-designed villas was Malbone in Newport, Rhode Island (1849), which featured a symmetrical façade and floor plans.

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Downing identified three major house types, the cottage, the farmhouse, and the villa, with the cottage-villa representing a hybrid incorporating aspects of both.

Background to the Building Campaign: The Rotch Family and New Bedford

The Rotch family had maintained a prominent position in New Bedford since 1765. In that year, William's great-great grandfather Joseph had emigrated from Nantucket and purchased a ten-acre lot which eventually became the center of New Bedford's whaling industry. In 1767 the firm of Joseph Rotch & Sons built the first whale boat in the town, the *Dartmouth*, which later became one of the three ships to participate in the Boston Tea Party. William's great-grandfather, William, a member of the Society of Friends, was convinced enough of a future for the whaling industry to attempt carrying it on during the Revolution; he was tried twice for treason as a result of his efforts. When it became impossible to send ships out of New Bedford, Rotch established a whaling port in Dunkirk, France. Rotch maintained associations with leaders of the French Revolution, and defended the rights of Quakers before the French Assembly. After revolution swept France, the family came home to New Bedford. William and his son, William Rotch Jr., then went on to establish a family empire based on whale oil, candles, and bone.

William J. Rotch's father, Joseph, a son of William Rotch, Jr., did not usually please the more conservative members of the family. John M. Bullard, writing in the twentieth century, had a difficult time describing Joseph:

"Joseph Rotch, the beautiful, one of the handsomest men ever born, Joseph Rotch, the bad or at least weak, if you can judge by the comments of the worthy members of the Rodman family and their descendants, Joseph Rotch, the very loving and human husband and father, if you can judge from his own letters; it is hard to write of Joseph Rotch."²² Joseph Rotch married Anne Smith, a member of the Society of Friends, at a time when the rest of the family was typically Unitarians. The third son in a family of four to survive childhood, William J. Rotch was born in May 1819.

William J. Rotch was twenty-six in 1845 and his wife, Emily, was twenty-four. They had one child, William, born in 1844. A second son, Charles W. M. Rotch, named for his grandfather, the whaling merchant Charles W. Morgan, had died that January. Emily Rotch may have wanted to leave the house they were then living in at 109 Elm Street, which had not been built for them and which did not hold fond memories.

William Rotch Jr. advanced his grandson the money necessary to build the house, in the Rotch tradition of helping children and grandchildren with finances. He may have received the money as a gift rather than a proper loan since his Journal entry is somewhat cryptic; not until April 1857 did he enter the transaction. Under the heading "Profit and Loss" he noted "for cash advanced by William Rotch, Jr. in 1846 to build my house on Orchard Street and charged to me in his Book of Family Accounts not considered to be cash January 31, 1857 - \$6,000."²³

The Rotch House: Design and Construction

In choosing Alexander Jackson Davis to draft plans and specifications for his new house, William J. Rotch chose a practitioner approaching the height of his popularity and visibility as an architect of national prominence, and among those whose services were most often sought for Gothic Revival domestic designs in the antebellum period. Davis' services had been recommended to Rotch by his brother-in-law Joseph Angier, whose father John B. Angier had contracted with the architect previously: Davis collaborated with the elder Angier and Downing on the design of a Gothic Revival cottage of the center-gable type built in Medford,

²² John Morgan Bullard, *The Rotches* (Milford, NH: The Cabinet Press, 1947), 98.

²³ Rotch, *Journal A*, 529.

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Massachusetts, in 1842. John Angier, incidentally, was a relative of Downing's wife Caroline.²⁴ Though it's not known, Rotch may have met Davis in 1835 when he collaborated with Russell Warren on the new Gothic Revival Congregational Church in New Bedford. It has been suggested that William and Emily Rotch viewed Gothic Revival houses on a honeymoon trip up the Hudson River and subsequently had become enamored with this style.

The first correspondence between Rotch and Davis is a letter to the architect dated 16 April 1845, in which Rotch explains his intentions to build a house, and that Angier has suggested his services. "Please inform me at your earliest convenience," Rotch continued, "your terms for a plan, specifications, working drawings and also how soon you could visit me in New Bedford."²⁵ Davis replied asking for further details, though his half of the correspondence is unfortunately not available (dates when he responded to Rotch were found either in Davis' Day Book or by references in Rotch's own letters). On April 26 Rotch replied "I should like you to come on here as soon as you can conveniently do so and when you are on the spot we can decide upon the best place for a house." He then added, "I like the Gothic Cottage style best and if the reduced Villa in style of Mr. Rathbone can be brought within my limit – should like something of that kind very much."²⁶ The Rathbone villa to which Rotch referred was Kenwood, an imposing Gothic pile located south of Albany, which was included, somewhat ironically, in Downing's *Cottage Residences*. Kenwood was more in the villa mode, complex in its plan and massing, and likely not distillable, in Davis's opinion, to a lesser scale.

Early in May Davis visited New Bedford, a trip he noted in his Day book:

May 8	New Bedford 7 1/2 ar[rived] at Charles W. Morgan's 10.	W. J. Rotch
9	and lady. Left New Bedford for Milton with Mr. R. ar[rived] at 7	
10	Rev. Mr. Joseph Angier's – Miss Anna Rotch. Went to Boston Mrs. R's gig with W. Cambridge to Medford, Dined	
11	with John Angier, then to New York ar[rived] 6 a.m. ²⁷	

Davis and the Rotches undoubtedly discussed how large the house should be, the interior layout of rooms and chambers, finances, and the siting of the house; they undoubtedly also walked over the proposed site on the Orchard Street land, as "connexion [sic] with site," as he termed it, was an important theme in Davis's, and later Downing's, work. Rotch then asked Davis to proceed with the plans and a building schedule. Back in his New York City office Davis drew up plans for the Rotch house. In his day book on May 20 he detailed the course of his work:

Plans for Cottage for William J. Rotch, New Bedford, Massachusetts.

1	Plan Basement	2. Principal floor
3.	2 floor	4. Attic
5.	Front Elevation	6. Rear west
7.	South end	8. Section east and west
9.	Section north and south	\$100.00

²⁴ See David Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste: Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-50* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 76-77.

²⁵ Rotch to Davis, 16 April 1845, A. J. Davis Papers, Joseph Down Manuscript Collection, H. F. du Pont Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware (hereafter cited as Winterthur).

²⁶ Rotch to Davis, April 26, 1845, Winterthur.

²⁷ Davis, *Day Book Vol.1*, A. J. Davis Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, 278 (hereafter cited as NYPL).

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Working Drawings

- A. Cottage window, inch to foot scale A2
- B. Plan elevation and section oriel window
- C. Bay window, plans and inside elements
- D. Section
- E. Doors, front door
- F. Folding and other door
- G. Cornice Umbrage
- H. Tudor flower
- I. Sash full size at bottom
- J. Ditto

\$50.00

Total \$150.00²⁸

Concurrently William J. Rotch was acquiring the land upon which the house would be constructed. On May 28, 1845, his grandfather, William Rotch, Jr. deeded him “for one dollar and love and good will to be paid a lot of land situated in New Bedford, South of Arnold Street and West of Orchard Street.”²⁹ The land, then well away from development, enjoyed a decidedly rural feel. By May 31 the plans and drawings had arrived in New Bedford and the family read over them. William J. Rotch sent his immediate reaction to Davis.

I have reviewed the plans, drawings, etc., and they all seem perfect. I have seen some of our carpenters and they are to estimate upon the building. If it costs too much I shall let you know. In looking over the plans, it has occurred to me that the shutters to the windows cannot be closed when the windows are open. This is rather an objection in summer when you want your windows open and your shutters closed. I know that perfection is not always attainable in the world, but we like to get as near to it as possible particularly in our houses. Now is there any way of remedying this imperfection? Would it spoil the windows to have the sash, as now drawn divided in the middle and slide up or down or could the whole sash be made to slide up or sideways like folding doors, in such a way as to admit the shutters being closed when the window is open? The hall is drawn 12 feet wide instead of 9 as we talked of when here. Was that necessary to the proportions of the building or could the building be made 45 feet instead of 48 without injury? Will it do to make the Privy on the Porch as we thought of doing or must it go farther off. I like the look of the house very much and it has taken captive the hearts of all beholders. If it looks as well when we get it up as it does not neither you or I will be unwilling to look at it. By the way, if that ‘Tudor Flower’ on the umbrage costs too much here, could it not be bought in New York and sent on. When I get the estimate of the carpenters I shall write you.³⁰

On June 9 Rotch again wrote to Davis in his New York office, at which time he informed the architect that the drawings had been inspected by local carpenters who were “rather frightened at the carving of the Tudor flower and vergeboard.” Rotch then suggested again having this work done in New York. Next he noted “our carpenters are very much pleased with your plans, etc. Having never had anything of the kind to work by before. All is plain sailing for them.” The letter closed with still another question about the windows and

²⁸ Davis, *Day Book*, 280, NYPL.

²⁹ Bristol County Registry of Deeds, New Bedford, Massachusetts, Deed Entry Book 11, pg. 366, William Rotch Jr., to William James Rotch.

³⁰ Rotch to Davis, May 31, 1845, A. J. Davis Papers, New York Historical Society (hereafter cited as NYHS).

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shutters, which continued not to work as Rotch desired.³¹

By July 7 when Rotch wrote again his estimates were more or less in: "I think I shall get the house built for six thousand dollars."³² After further conversations with his carpenters, he had decided to have at least some of the decorative work done in New York. He also questioned Davis about costs for locks, bolts and inside window trim if procured out-of-state. In New York Davis was concerned with another possible New Bedford commission; on July 17 he noted writing to Joshua Richmond and at the end of July made another flying visit to New Bedford.

1845

July	29	took leave for New Bedford at 12
	30	Called on Mr. Rotch, Mr. Richmond, Mr. Anthony & family
	"	Richmond, Rotch, Edward R. Anthony, Marine Bank New Bedford
	31	Morning to Newport ³³

During his talks with the Richmond and Anthony families arrangements were made for Davis to draw preliminary plans for them. In August he noted designs for two houses; the Richmond House was later built by Joshua Richmond's son and located on Irving Street. By the end of summer 1845, Rotch had decided on workmen for the house and work may have been underway clearing trees from the site and laying the foundation. Rotch kept meticulous accounts and therefore it is possible to determine some of the contractors associated with the project. Payments for the house were first made in April 1846 and continued through March 1847. Tax records for the year 1847 credit William J. Rotch with an "unfinished house and land on Orchard Street" valued at \$9,000.³⁴ Later in the same year, the first figure was replaced by a pencil notation for \$14,000.

William J. Rotch hired A. A. Greene & Company, which consisted of August A. Greene, Oliver M. Brownell and Moses H. Bliss, to execute the carpentry contract for the house. Greene, the senior partner, was originally from Rhode Island where he apprenticed as a carpenter. After several years working in the Providence area, he came to New Bedford in 1831 to build the Joseph Grinnell house, built to the designs of Russell Warren, later a brief partner of Davis. After completing that project, Greene went on to execute a second Warren design, the William Rotch Rodman house. The second member of the firm, Oliver Brownell, later became a city official, leaving Moses H. Bliss to operate the business alone. William J. Rotch was evidently pleased with Bliss since he contracted with him for subsequent projects.

The difficult carving which had caught the attention of New Bedford craftsmen was done in New York City by John Gallier, who received \$50.50 for his work. This payment likely included the "Tudor flower" and the verge boards. Some of the carving was done locally by Henry M. Smith, who was listed in the 1845 New Bedford Directory as a "Ship and house carver and keeper of the Clark's Point Lighthouse." Smith was a craftsman who specialized in figureheads and other work for whale ships. Marble for the mantles was shipped to New Bedford from Philadelphia and glass for the windows procured in Boston. Joseph Allen was paid for stonework and Gibbs, Taber and Frederick Underwood are noted as masons receiving payments of \$1,350 and \$150 in "extra work." Mark B. Palmer and Lemuel Kollack furnished the kitchen range; painting and glazing were handled by John Wright, who presented a bill for \$489.94.

³¹ Rotch to Davis, June 9, 1845, NYHS.

³² Rotch to Davis, July 7, 1845, NYHS.

³³ Davis, *Day Book*, 280, NYPL.

³⁴ City of New Bedford, Massachusetts, Assessor's Office, Tax Records, *Valuation School District Number 4*, 1846, William James Rotch.

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Davis was paid for the construction documents in 1847, as indicated by the following notation:

New Bedford – March 3rd, Month 1847 House on Orchard Street
For 1 Barrel fish oil of Jabez Delano 14.75
A.J. Davis Plans and Balance Account 150.00³⁵

Differences exist between the Rotch house as represented in the Davis rendering, and as discussed by Downing, and as it was actually built. The most obvious difference is in the choice of material, wood, instead of masonry as Davis desired. William J. Rotch did not want to use stone and stated this clearly in two of his letters. This dislike of stone may have been because of added expense or it may have been an aesthetic decision. Another obvious change, when contrasting Davis' façade view with the actual building, are the absence of the exterior set of doors, likely added as heat -- and therefore cost-- efficient. This rendering likewise shows a carved balustrade-like band of circular ornament two-thirds of the way up the hipped roof, apparently never built. Detracting somewhat from the vertical thrust of the Davis scheme are the pair of chimney stacks, which were apparently rebuilt and lack the grace and attention to detail inherent in much of Davis' better work. Many of these discrepancies should be considered in the context of the drawing upon which the comparisons are being drawn: the watercolor carries a date of 1838 and the project with Rotch wasn't initiated until May 1845. It is clear Davis had already been working with similar variations of this theme, but it may have been Rotch who viewed this particular rendering, perhaps with some encouragement from the architect, and chose it as the model for his new residence, with some variation reflecting his own personal preference and taste. The "seductive" nature and highly finished quality of the drawing suggest it may have been prepared for exhibition or otherwise prepared to entice prospective clients examining the architect's portfolio.

Davis, Downing, the Rotch House, and the Popularization of the Gothic Revival Cottage-Villa

The association of Davis and Downing in the proliferation of the Gothic Revival mode for domestic architecture in the United States has long been recognized by cultural historians as having significant consequences for the shaping of popular taste in the pre-Civil War period. Davis' innovations in this mode of design, the professional reputation and visibility he gained beginning with his association with Ithiel Town in New York City, and his ability as a draftsman were all qualities making him a considerable asset to the young but highly motivated Downing. While historians such as David Schuyler continue to attempt to deconstruct the dynamic of their association, there can be little doubt as to the profound influence of Downing's books, which at the very least benefited significantly from Davis' work on the wood blocks, his suggestions, and the inclusion of his designs. Notwithstanding the influence of the work of Davis and other architects, Downing's publications formed perhaps the decisive factor in the acceptance of the Gothic Revival in the broader currents of American society.

Aside from authoring three books which in large measure addressed the condition and direction of native domestic architecture, Andrew Jackson Downing likewise edited the influential magazine, *The Horticulturist*, which played a similar role in attempting to shape taste in domestic architecture, among other topics. A brief article featuring the Rotch House appeared in the November 1849 issue, slightly before the publication of *Country Houses*, a critique authored by someone portrayed as "Jeffreys of New York," possibly Downing himself.

Here is something that I like – A sensible house, and in very good taste: embodying in the main, the essentials of good house arrangement, as far as it goes, and adapted to the purposes for which it was intended – an unpretending, quiet cottage of the first class. Still it is not complete.³⁶

³⁵ Rotch, *Journal A*, 16.

³⁶ *The Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste*, "Critique of November Horticulturist by Jeffreys of New York," vol. 4, January 1850.

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The author went on to observe that he felt the hipped roof cut into the second floor bedrooms entirely too much and that the dormers did not let in enough light. He also called attention to the balustrade that Rotch did not build, calling it “entirely useless, and on, or off, is a matter of fancy only.” He also felt the plan too cramped, a criticism that Rotch came to agree with a few years later.

In January 1850 the Cottage was featured in the *Boston Cultivator*. Accompanying a view of the façade elevation of the house and a floor plan was a description credited to *The Horticulturist*:

“Our frontispiece presents an elevation of a substantial and ornamental cottage villa built at New Bedford, for the residence of Wm. J. Rotch, Esq. From the designs of Mr. Davis, architect of New York. It is a pleasing specimen of the Rural Gothic cottage: and we offer it as a study to those about building cottages in the country. It is in general plan, modeled after the cottage of English rural landscape, in a style, which harmonizes well with picturesque scenery.

...This dwelling is built in brick and stone, and the ornaments are carved in a heavy and solid manner, and with the attention to correctness of detail which marks all Mr. Davis’s designs.”³⁷

Yet the pieces in the *Cultivator* and *Horticulturist* were but the prelude to the Rotch house’s inclusion in Downing’s *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850), a watershed event in the evolution of American domestic architecture. The house was featured in Design XXIII, referred to as “A Cottage-Villa in the Rural Gothic Style,” and it was indicated that the design depicted “the front elevation and plans of the residence of William J. Rotch, Esq., of New Bedford, Mass., built from the plans of Mr. Davis.”³⁸ Downing likewise offered the following description among other commentary on the house’s physical characteristics, though some of his observations, in this instance the parapet, were made in advance of changes to the scheme as first proposed:

The body of the house is nearly square, and the elevation is a successful illustration of the manner in which a form usually uninteresting, can be so treated as to be highly picturesque. There is, indeed, a combination of the aspiring lines of the roof with the horizontal lines of the verandah, which expresses picturesqueness and domesticity very successfully. The high, pointed gable of the central and highest part of this design has a bold and spirited effect, which would be out of keeping with the cottage-like modesty of the drooping, hipped roof, were it not for the equally bold manner in which the chimney-tops spring upwards.* Altogether, then, we should say that the character expressed by the exterior of this design is that of a man or family of domestic tastes, but with strong aspirations after something higher than social pleasures.

- * The parapet of this villa surrounds a narrow walk on the roof—entered from the side of the central ridge – which commands a view of the harbor of New Bedford.

The inclusion of the Rotch House in *Country Houses*, albeit in an earlier form and not as finally constructed, once again placed Davis’ work in front of countless prospective clients and house builders. It likewise represented a continuation of the two men’s efforts to promote the Gothic Revival style for domestic applications, particularly in rural contexts. Along with their collaboration on the Angier cottage in Medford, the two men had also worked together on the design of an earlier center-gable Gothic House, though not of the projecting pavilion type, “A Cottage in the English or Rural Gothic Style,” which nonetheless included many of the design features of the later Rotch house. This house was included as

³⁷ *Boston Cultivator*, January 12, 1850.

³⁸ Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1850).

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Design II in *Cottage Residences* and, according to David Schuyler, was perhaps the most copied of the plates offered therein.³⁹ This design and the Rotch house, both offered in published form by Downing, were therefore representative of the two men's attempts to legitimize the domestic Gothic as an accepted mode of design in the United States. Following the publication of *Country Houses* Davis was nearing the height of his popularity, which had been partially bolstered by his representation by Downing. Within the larger cultural currents, Davis's interpretation of the Rural Gothic, as it was termed, was transmitted to the masses in published form, thereby offering itself to prospective house builder and builder-architect alike.

Subsequent History: Changes and Ownership Chronology

By 1857 the Rotch House received an addition, which is noted in William J. Rotch's journals for the years 1857-58, which detail a series of payments to craftsmen for the addition. The largest payments were to Moses Bliss, one of the men who contracted for the original project, who by the 1850s was in business alone. This addition was made in the form of a small service area at the right, rear corner of the building, which was subsequently detached when the house was moved. No architect was associated with this work.

In 1872 the Rotches left the Orchard Street residence for a house on County Street. William Wallace Crapo, later a United States Congressman, his wife Sarah, and two sons, Henry Howland and Stanford, rented the Rotch House from 1872 until 1880. Henry Howland Crapo emerged as a gifted watercolorist and captured the house as it looked in the 1870s in a series of twelve paintings, which are in the collection of Winterthur. One depicts the exterior of the house, a view of the façade in what appears to be summertime. The next eight in the series are interior paintings, and the last three are of the grounds and stable.

Although the Crapos asked William J. Rotch to sell them the house, he refused, wishing it to remain in the family. In 1879 the Crapos were given notice that they would have to leave; before leaving Sarah Tappan Crapo wrote a poem describing the room which had been her favorite, the oriel room.

My Oriel Window

Nine times before this oriel, I have seen
 The winter fold his snowy mantel round
 The Earth; while like a gentle timid bride
 She silence kept, waiting her lord's approach
 And the glad bridegroom countless diamonds hung
 O'er slender twigs in lace like tracery
 Hung high against the heaven's pure sapphire blue;
 Fit bridal veil for nature's covenant.
 And I have watched their first born – wayward Spring
 Touch tree and shrub with faint prismatic hues,
 Stirring the misty tree tops with awakening life.
 And in the summer's wealth of light and song
 My boys and I have watched and seen
 The constant oriole seek his own old nest
 In the tall tree top; where he swung and sung
 In mellow tones of sweet content and joy,
 Nine times the Summer's splendor softly changed
 To Autumn glory, and the great globed maple
 Gave forth such heat and color, the whole house
 Grew warm and bright, bathed in the golden glow.

³⁹ Schuyler, *Apostle*, 67-69.

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And every day in all these nine glad years
From the same window, I have seen the gate
Swing to and fro by loving hands, and friendly
Coming feet have changed to precious jewels
Every well worn stone along the pathway
And I fain would come even like the faithful bird
Forever back to this same well loved nest.
It may not be. The Oriel closes now;

And ne'er again shall I with eager hands
Turn back the diamond panes, view from this nook
The varied beauty of the seasons change, nor see
The dear familiar forms glide up the winding path,
Then blame me not – if for awhile I grieve.

But I will seek another resting place
Some other windows looking toward the dawn:
And if its casements do not open upon
Such splendid pageantry of Nature's march,
Yet the bright sun and fragrant breeze will come,
And you my friends, will surely come, and make
For me, another oriel, all radiant
With friendships aureole, where my heart will sing
The Oriole's song of sweet content and joy.⁴⁰

Following their marriage in December 1879, Morgan and Josephine Grinnell Rotch moved to Orchard Street. While William J. Rotch's professional life had been primarily spent with New Bedford's first great industry, whaling, Morgan Rotch became a part of the second industry to make the city a national byword – textiles. He also carried on the insurance business with the firm of Rotch & Potter.

By January 1903 the Rotches had decided to divide much of the estate into building lots. As New Bedford grew the value of land in the Orchard Street area had risen dramatically. Orchard Street was no longer part on the outskirts of development as it had been when young William J. Rotch first built his residence. In 1908 the house was moved back on the lot to its current location, and the 1857 addition removed and renovated as a separate house, which Morgan and Josephine Rotch kept as rental property. The alterations to this now-detached house were designed by Nat Cannon Smith, a New Bedford architect who studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

Following Morgan Rotch's death in January 1910, Josephine Rotch continued to reside in the Rotch House. When her daughter, Emily Morgan Rotch, married Thomas Charles Knowles in April 1910, they moved into the house. Their daughter, Louise, was born there and according to John Morgan Bullard's manuscript history was the last child to be born there. During World War I, Clara Morgan Rotch, William James Rotch's widow, and her unmarried daughter, Mary, moved back to the house. By 1919 both Clara Morgan Rotch and her daughter, Mary, had died. Afterwards Josephine Rotch rented the Rotch House to a series of families, between 1919 and 1928. In January 1928 Josephine Rotch sold Henry Crapo the house, his childhood home, for \$25,000.

In May 1928 Crapo undertook work on the house, under the guidance of architect William Tallman. According

⁴⁰ Sarah Tappan Crapo, "My Oriel Window," Crapo/Bullard Family Papers.

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to John M. Bullard's manuscript the work included "new decoration and some structural alterations. The chief of these was placing an inside bathroom between the room with the Oriel window and the northwest bedroom."⁴¹ Also removed were the steps that had led from a door (still in place) at the west end of the front hall to the ground. Most of the work, however, involved locating bathrooms and cutting doors to allow upstairs rooms to function as servants' quarters. A sprinkler system was also added.

Mr. Bullard described interior decorative changes. "There was, at least during the Morgan Rotch days, wall-to-wall carpeting in most of the rooms which was supplanted in summer by straw matting. A parquet wood floor was laid in the library and another in the front hall, probably when the house was moved. Mr. Crapo laid a linoleum floor in the two front downstairs rooms and hall. This has been much criticized but from a look at the floor of the little closets in the corner of the front hall I believe he copied as nearly as he could what had been the original floor. He installed an Italian fountain in the alcove in the front parlor where the piano had stood which the young Rotches had gathered around in the 1860s to sing hymns before going to vespers at the Unitarian Church. Josephine Rotch had also had a fountain in this alcove during her occupancy and may have been the first to turn it into the conservatory it was designed to be."⁴² Fortunately for historians, Mr. Crapo kept a running inventory of expenses incurred during this period of change.

Conclusion

The William J. Rotch House is an outstanding and highly intact Gothic Revival residence, its design authored by one of the leading lights of American architecture at the mid-point of the nineteenth century, Alexander Jackson Davis. Though Davis's influence in the American architectural field diminished considerably in the post-Civil War period, he nonetheless proved himself an important and skilled practitioner in the antebellum period, and contributed in a perceptible fashion to the forging of the Greek Revival style and later Picturesque design modes. The house might well be considered among the architect's crowning achievements of this particular interpretation of the Gothic Revival, being as it is among the more developed examples of Davis' work with the center-gable form which he explored in both cottage and larger cottage-villa examples. It is also highly significant for the frequency with which it was used as an illustration to define the style.

⁴¹ Bullard, "Account," 15.

⁴² Bullard, "Account," pg. 16.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
 Previously Listed in the National Register. (contributing resource in County Street H.D., 1976)
 Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
 Designated a National Historic Landmark.
 Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #HABS- Mass. No. 678; 3-NEBED, 12-
 Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State Agency
 Federal Agency
 Local Government
 University
 Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreeage of Property: Less than an acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	19	339020	4610320

Verbal Boundary Description:

(Bristol County Registry of Deeds, Book 1766, Page 910).

Beginning at the northeast corner thereof at the intersection of Maple Street and Irving Street; thence running Southerly by said Irving Street, one hundred twenty-three and 3/10 (123.3) feet, more or less, to land now or formerly of Ellen Crawford; thence running Westerly by said Clifford land, ninety-five and 91/100 (95.91) feet, more or less, to land now or formerly of James A. Collins, et. al.; thence running Northerly by said Collins land to the northeast corner thereof; thence running in a straight line by other land now or formerly of Josephine G. Rotch to the southeast corner of land now or formerly of Ruth E. Jennings; thence running Northerly by said Jennings land to said Maple Street, said Westerly bound measuring in all one hundred twenty five and 81/100 (125.81) feet, more or less; thence running Easterly by said Maple Street, ninety-five and 4/10 (95.4) feet, more or less to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes the house that has historically been a part of the original William J. Rotch property and still maintains integrity.

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DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
February 17, 2006