

Richard Upjohn

St. John in the Wilderness & Richard Upjohn: The Architecture - The Architect

A Presentation by **Dale Peterson, AIA**

Sunday, July 18th at 2pm

this event will be held at the
Church of St. John in the Wilderness
261 Route 344
Copake Falls, NY Admission Free!



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Historical Society**
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PDF version of Slide
Presentation
by Dale Peterson, AIA
held July 18th, 2021
at St. John in the Wilderness
Copake Falls, NY

PDF binder designed by
Peter N. Fritsch

Richard Upjohn: The Architecture and the Architect

July 18, 2021 A talk by Dale Peterson AIA

Hello friends, and welcome to the Church of St John in the Wilderness. This church was described by William Pierson, late professor of history of art and architecture at Williams College, as “a rural masterpiece.” He went on to say that “Of all the Gothic churches of America none is more subtly conceived and more expressive of the religious tone of America in the nineteenth century... As a work of architecture, the building is a masterpiece of distilled grace... In spite of its austerity, the building is elegant in its proportion and infinitely refined in scale.”



Today we’re going to talk about Richard Upjohn, the architect who designed this building in 1851. He was an immigrant, an active Episcopal layman, a talented architect (without the formal training expected today), a man with vast influence, and a savvy businessman who became a leader in the profession of architecture.

Upjohn the energetic immigrant. Richard Upjohn had a remarkable life. He was born in 1802 in rural southwest England, the son of a surveyor. He enjoyed drawing and working with tools. At age seventeen he was apprenticed to a cabinetmaker for five years after which in 1826 he was married and went into business making furniture and parts for buildings: windows, doors, roofing and so on. After two years he decided his prospects would be better in America. He and his wife landed in New York on June 1, 1828, and took a steamer to Albany and a tow boat on the Erie Canal to Manlius, near Syracuse, where he got a helping hand finding work from his brother-in-law. A year later he moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts, where he worked as a carpenter and cabinetmaker. Here he got his first break designing a whole building, a house, in Bangor, Maine. His success on that house was followed by the design of St John’s Church, also in Bangor, his first church.

The successful architect. He went on to Boston, did several projects for the City and for Jonathan Wainwright, the rector of Boston’s Trinity Church. In 1838 Wainwright moved to Trinity Church in New York. Upjohn followed the next year. He began work on renovations to Trinity Church Wall Street, but ultimately the renovations were abandoned and Upjohn designed a new church, which was completed in 1846. That’s the church in lower Manhattan that we all know. His reputation grew and by the mid-1840s had built an office capable of doing work on many projects at a time.

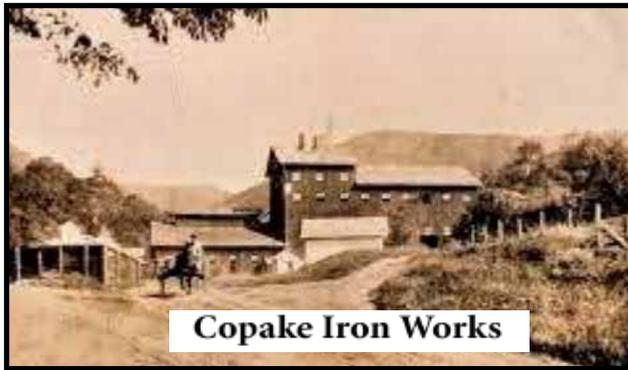


Trinity Church

This brings us to Copake Falls. In 1845, Lemuel Pomeroy and his son established Copake Iron Works and by 1846 they had their first blast from their furnace. Less than five years later, the Pomeroy family donated a portion of the iron work property to be the site of a new Episcopal church. Funds were received from Trinity Church Wall Street to kick start the project. Upjohn became involved with the project through his close connection to Trinity Church.

Copake Iron Works

In 1851, a visit was made to Copake Iron Works by the Upjohn office. Here's a site plan of the Iron Works showing the proposed location of the church. This preliminary drawing is in the Richard Upjohn archives at the New York Public Library. You see the church location sketched in with a pencil (bottom

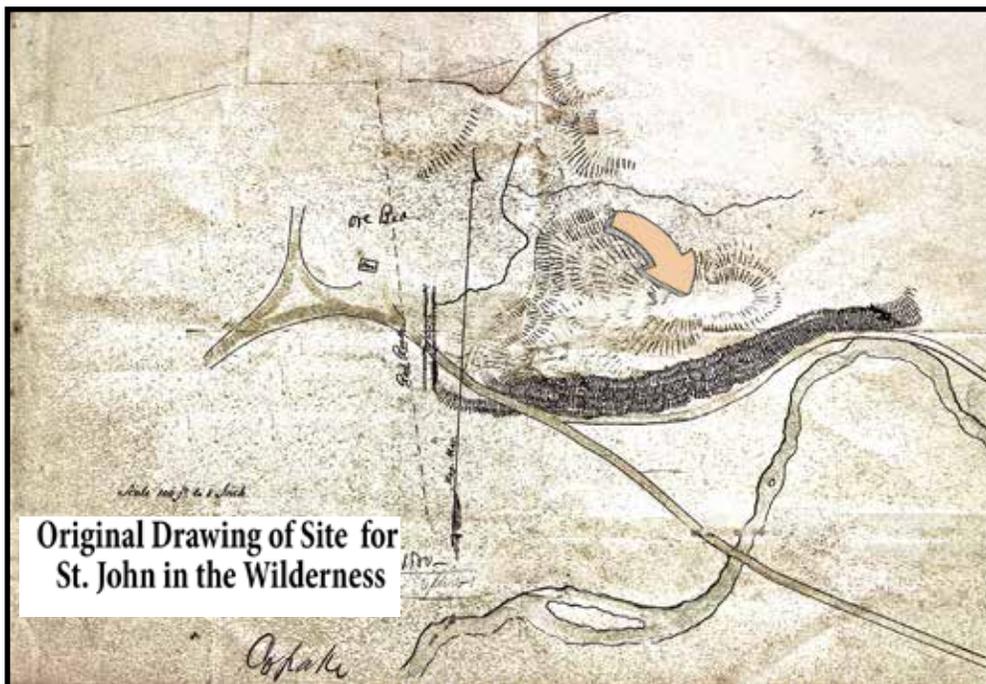


left). You'll recognize Bash Bish Creek at the bottom of the page and the Ore Bed at the top. Although this was drawn in 1851 you can recognize locations of roads and a line indicating the railroad line. I'm going to zoom in so you can see a lightly penciled rectangle showing the proposed location of the church here at the top of the hill.



Trinity Church, Manhattan

So the site was decided, but what about the design of the church? Upjohn had become very well known for the many churches he had designed, including the church in Bangor; Trinity Church Wall Street, Church of the Ascension in Greenpoint, Brooklyn; and many others. All of these were Gothic Revival in style. This wasn't just a matter of personal taste – just liking the way Gothic looked.

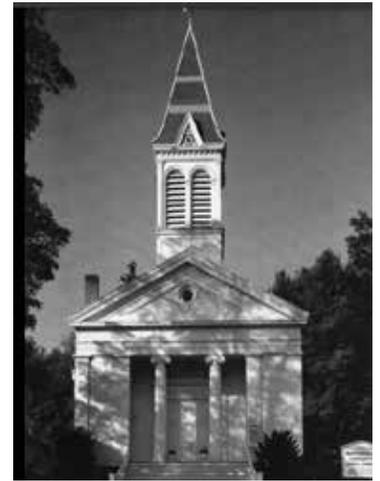


For Upjohn, an active Episcopal layman, Gothic represented tradition, authority and respect for hierarchy in the church. (This is contrast with the Second Great Awakening, a Protestant religious revival movement in the early 1800s, famous for its large camp meetings with enthusiastic preaching and calls for individual salvation.

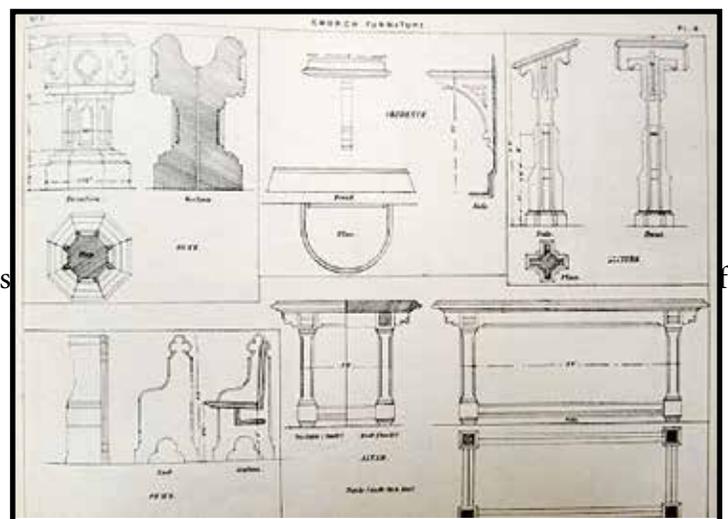
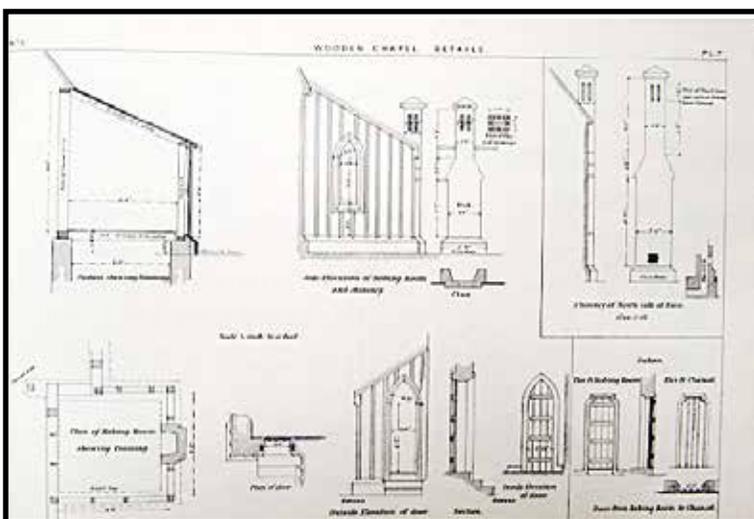
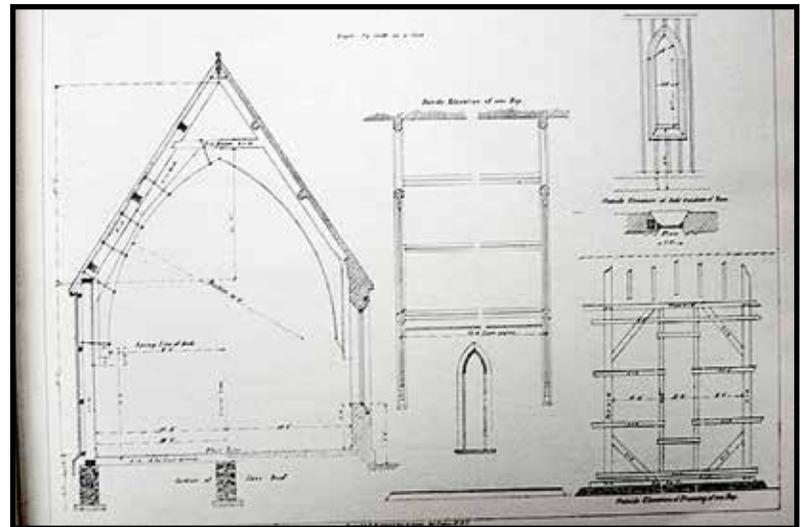
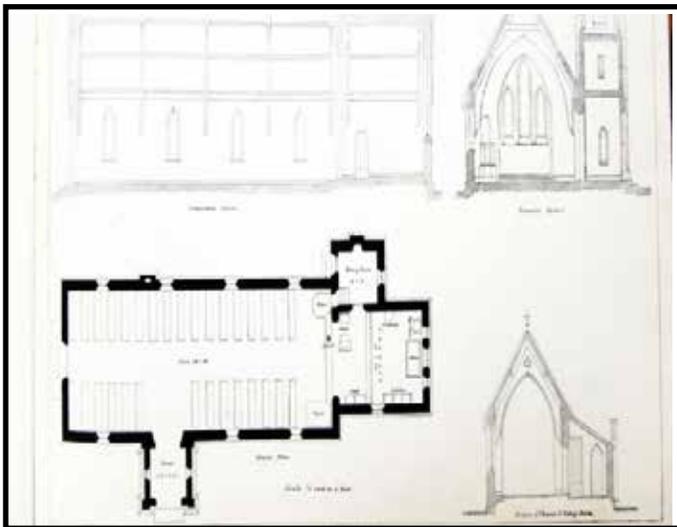
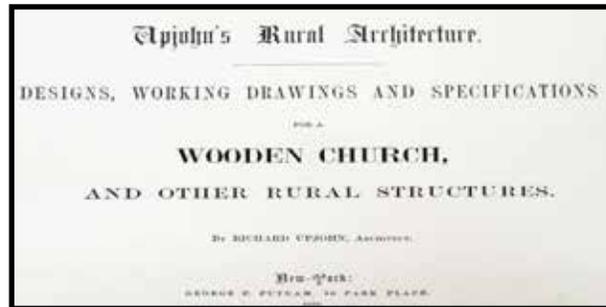
For these churches, and for courthouses and other public buildings, the

Greek Revival brought to mind individual responsibility and the democracy of Ancient Greece.) Here's an example of Greek Revival at the nearby Martindale Community Gothic Church.

But churches which came to Upjohn for church design generally expected Gothic Revival. And there were lots of churches waiting in line. Large city churches were each unique, with design from scratch. But for literally thousands of small rural churches there wasn't the time or money for a custom design. To meet this need, Upjohn developed a standard design which was published in 1852 in *Rural Architecture*, his pattern book, which featured plans, elevations and details for all church furniture.

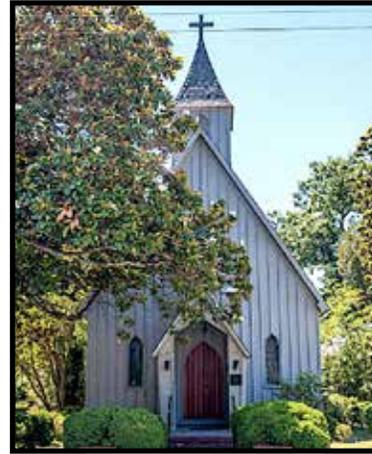


Martindale Community Gothic Church

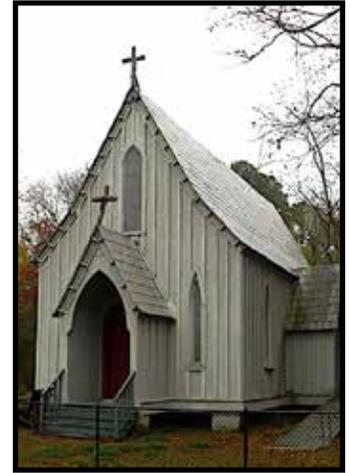


Here at St John in the Wilderness the design is straight from the Rural Architecture pattern book. Take a look at this plan again (*previous page*). It is exactly what we have here in Copake Falls, except for the location of the narthex, or church entrance.

But what sets St John apart from many other Upjohn rural churches was the direct involvement of Upjohn's New York office. A member of his staff visited the area, studied the site and sketched the proposed location of the church.



Halifax NC



Forkland AL

Other Upjohn Churches made from his pattern book;

Halifax NC

Forkland AL

Monie ND

Sundlersville MD

St Thomas Amenia Union

St Paul's Kinderhook



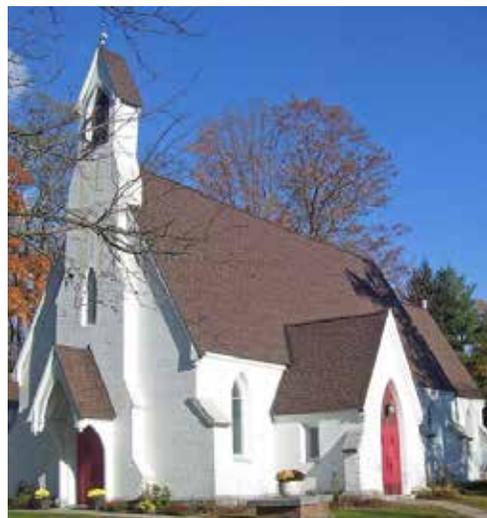
Monie ND



St Paul's Kinderhook

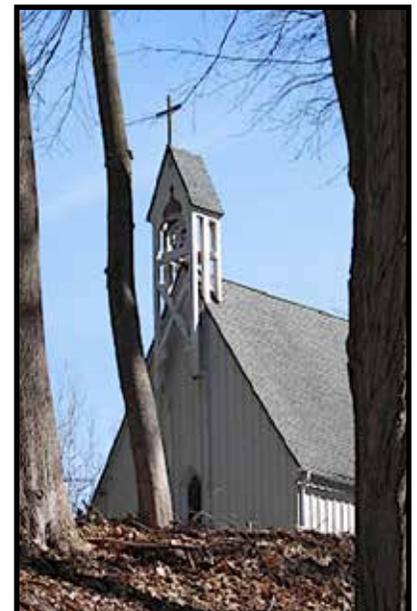


**Saint Andrew's Episcopal Chapel,
Sudlersville, MD**



St Thomas Amenia Union

Through construction, the Upjohn office stayed involved. They furnished bills of material and, most important, maintained control over the design of the bell tower which Pierson calls "among the most subtly composed to be found in the small Gothic Revival churches of America." The Church of St John in the Wilderness, though similar to many other pattern book churches across the country is unique because it is truly a product of Upjohn and his office.



The design of the church may be Gothic, but this is not the stone Gothic cathedral of medieval tradition. Like many other board and batten churches by Upjohn – or at least based on his pattern book – Church of St John the Wilderness in Copake Falls created a new form based on long-established American building practice. Pierson writes “Upjohn created something without precedence in this country, something which by its very uniqueness was expressive of a new and changing America.

The Immigrant.

We’ve talked today about Richard Upjohn, the energetic immigrant who achieved great success through hard work and talent, like so many immigrants of our own time.

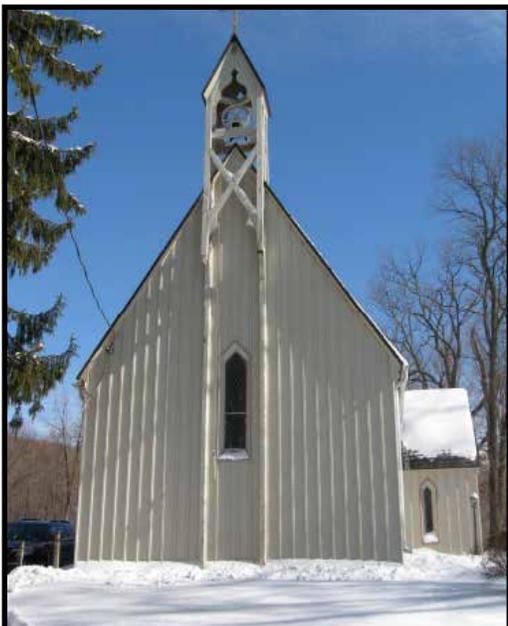
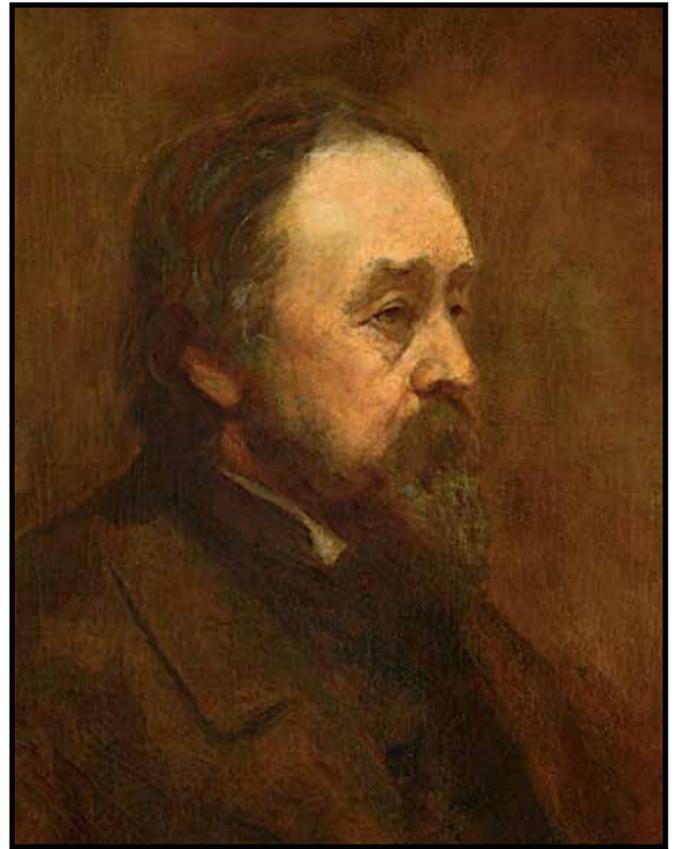
The renowned architect and churchman. We’ve talked about Richard Upjohn, the talented architect who designed outstanding churches and other buildings across the country, including St John in the Wilderness, where we are seated today, almost 170 years after its completion.

Upjohn as a leader in the profession of architecture.

Richard Upjohn had great talents as a leader in the business side of architecture too. He built a large talented staff to keep up with the volume of his work. And he was a leader in the profession of architecture. In 1857 thirteen prominent architects met in Upjohn’s office next door to Trinity Church to form the American Institute of Architects, of which he was president for twenty years.

As an emeritus member I’m proud to use the initials AIA after my name.

Dale Peterson, AIA



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