

THE EPOCH TIMES

LIFE &

TRADITION

COURTESY OF UWE ROMEIKE

Freedom to Homeschool?

Having sought—and found—asylum in the US so they could freely homeschool, the Romeike family now faces deportation back to Germany



▲ (L–R) Members of the Romeike family: son-in-law Trace, Lydia (25), Josua (23), Damaris (18), Sarah (12), Christian (21), Rebecca (10), Daniel (26), daughter-in-law Hannah, Hannelore, and Uwe. The Romeike family sought asylum in the United States in order to be able to homeschool freely. In early September, they were given four weeks to self-deport back to Germany.

By Annie Holmquist

In 2021, data from the Census Bureau confirmed what many already suspected: Homeschooling had become mainstream. Eleven percent of the American population acknowledged teaching their children at home, likely driven out of the public school system by COVID-19 policies and the revelation of what was really taking place in the classroom.

In all likelihood, you or someone close to you is now in this homeschooling demographic. But would you remain in it if the government suddenly began fining you and threatening to take custody

of your children because you chose to homeschool?

That’s a question faced by Uwe and Hannelore Romeike in Germany in 2006. The persecution they endured for homeschooling their children grew so strong that they finally sought asylum in the United States, living here peacefully for the past 15 years. Now, the entire family is about to be deported, and this sudden news has the Romeikes wondering what they will experience if forced to return to Germany, as they are still homeschooling their three youngest children.

In the early 2000s, the Romeikes were living normal lives. Mr. Romeike supported his growing family as a music

instructor, while his wife took care of their four children, sending the older ones off to school every morning.

But then the couple began noticing a change in Daniel, their eldest son. Once very outgoing, he withdrew, which they soon learned was due to the bullying he was experiencing from his peers at school.

Hearing about homeschooling, the couple decided to try it, pulling their three oldest children, ages 9, 8, and 6, out of public school at the beginning of the 2006–2007 school year. The couple knew that homeschooling was illegal in Germany but had heard fines were

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With fines mounting and the loss of their children threatened, the Romeikes realized it was time to leave their homeland.

CULTURE

Miss NTD Pageant Inspires Viewers to Rediscover Beauty

Newly crowned Miss NTD, runners-up share their concept of beauty

By Catherine Yang

For Cynthia Sun, being crowned Miss NTD came as something completely unexpected.

“I’ve never worn heels for so long in my life!” the 24-year-old from Hous-

ton, Texas, said.

Ms. Sun is a human rights advocate, social issues researcher, spokesperson with the Falun Dafa Information Center, and a recent transplant to New York. Drawn to the mission of reviving traditional culture, she joined the inaugural

NTD Global Chinese Beauty Pageant and made it to the final round before ultimately being crowned the winner on Sept. 30, 2023.

NTD stands for New Tang Dynasty, referencing the golden age of ancient Chinese civilization. The network, a sister media outlet of The Epoch Times, hosts a series of competitions as part of its mission to support traditional Chinese culture. As such, the pageant focuses on not just outer beauty but also character, specifically the following five virtues: morality, righteousness, propriety, benevolence, and faithfulness.

It was this focus that drew Ms. Sun to join the beauty pageant in the first place.

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SAMIRA BOUAOU/THE EPOCH TIMES



▲ Cynthia Sun was crowned Miss NTD at NTD’s inaugural Global Chinese Beauty Pageant in Purchase, N.Y., on Sept. 30, 2023.



A Life-Changing Bestseller



Zhuan Falun expounds on the profound principles of Truthfulness, Compassion, and Tolerance. It focuses on a long-forgotten term called “cultivation” and the importance of moral character on one’s path to spiritual perfection. The book is the main text of the spiritual practice Falun Dafa. It was a national bestseller in China in the 1990s, and has since been translated into more than 40 languages. Find out why it has captured the hearts and minds of tens of millions of people in more than 100 countries worldwide.

“What made Falun Gong stand out from other qigong exercises and meditation practices was a moral system—compassion, truthfulness, and forbearance—unmistakably Buddhist in origin.

Arthur Waldron
LAUDER PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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▲ Miss NTD Cynthia Sun, surrounded by runners-up at NTD's inaugural Global Chinese Beauty Pageant in Purchase, N.Y., on Sept. 30, 2023.

CULTURE

Miss NTD Pageant Inspires Viewers to Rediscover Beauty

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“I was intrigued by the mission part of it, which was to revive and rejoice in the traditional values of being a traditional Chinese woman,” she said.

Voice for the Voiceless

Ms. Sun works in government advocacy, speaking out for people being persecuted for their faith in communist China. As Miss NTD, she hopes to amplify the voices of those believers who live under oppression.

“I’ve met so many people individually who have told me their stories from being persecuted for their faith,” she said. “It’s a meaningful and fulfilling opportunity to be able to share their voices with the world. Give voice to the voiceless, that’s what we always say.”

China has been a communist coun-

try for less than a century; before that, it had a legacy of 5,000 years of unbroken recorded history. It was once called the “Land of the Divine” and the “Celestial Empire,” as the Chinese believed that their culture was a gift from the heavens. Although predominantly ethnically Han, China was a diverse state with 50-some ethnic minorities. The overarching belief across different groups and dynasties was the central tenet of living in harmony with heaven, earth, and mankind.

But since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in 1949, the ruling regime has launched numerous violent campaigns to eradicate Chinese traditional culture and history. Even today, Uyghur Muslims, house Christians, and practitioners of Falun Dafa (also known as Falun Gong) are persecuted for their faith. The human

rights abuses against believers range from slander and imprisonment to torture and live organ harvesting.

As an advocate who raises awareness about such issues, Ms. Sun said she will make use of her crowning as Miss NTD and her full year of reign to shed more light on the human rights abuses taking place in China, many of which the CCP has long tried to keep hidden.

Concepts of Beauty

For Ms. Sun, inner beauty and confidence are intrinsically connected.

“I really believe that if we can showcase our inner beauty, self-confidence, groundedness, and knowing of who we are—if we translate that and spread that message to everyone else—I feel a lot of people will be able to ground themselves more firmly in their cultures, their heritage, their

background, their family,” she said. “That’ll make for a much more prosperous and successful society.”

Belle Meng, second runner-up and Best in Fitness Wear awardee, said that her concept of beauty stemmed from Creation. Traditional cultures from around the world all hold that humankind was created by God and that their cultures were gifts from the divine, she explained.

“Their various expressions of beauty—like aesthetic beauty, benevolence, kindness—these were the earliest expressions of honoring the divine, expressing our faith toward God,” Ms Meng said.

“We are all children of God, we were created by God, and from God we have received these wonderful, virtuous qualities as well.

“One’s inner beauty, like the focus of this competition ... is, for me, an expression of faith. Maybe this is a foreign idea to some people, but I think ... a person’s expression can be pure and kind, and they can adhere to a high moral standard, have a calm heart, and even connect with the divine, receiving lessons from God. This has to do with your faith. I think all believers have this sense.”

Vicky Zhao, first runner-up and Best in Dancing awardee, said she hopes that the kindness shared by everyone through the pageant will continue to spread.

“I think true beauty ... is a manifestation of human nature,” Ms. Zhao said. “[Your] original human nature is very pure, full of compassion, and that just really comes from inside and naturally spreads to the outside. I think that compassion is energy that can pass [from one to another].”

Universal Standard

Pageant judge Gabriel Georgiou, a celebrity stylist, said the focus on traditional values was why he agreed to join the judging panel.

External beauty is still important, several judges said, because it’s emblematic of one taking care of oneself and being considerate of others, and it’s affected by how one carries oneself.

Mr. Georgiou said that the judges also looked at the energy, confidence, grace, talent, eloquence, and charisma of all the contestants.

Pageant judge Showyen Liu, CFO of tech company Gan Jing World, said the inner beauty of all the young women really came out through “their wisdom, their talent, their poise, their intellect.”

Ms. Liu said she was proud of the newly crowned Miss NTD, Ms. Sun, who, as a Chinese American, possessed all of the qualities that traditional Chinese young women should have.

“Not only is she beautiful, she’s poised, she’s smart, she’s wise, and she’s kind,” she said.

Pageant judge Alison Chen, an assistant professor of dance at Fei Tian College, said that over the course of



▲ Contestants wait backstage at the inaugural NTD Global Chinese Beauty Pageant in Purchase, N.Y., on Sept. 30, 2023.



▲ Second runner-up Belle Meng.

the week, the young women grew in leaps and bounds.

“They’re actually very supportive of each other,” Ms. Chen said. Although it was a competition, they helped each other, supported each other, cheered each other on, and celebrated for each other.

“That was something that was very, very precious, and very much in line with the meaning of the pageant ...

advocating these traditional values of kindness and selflessness,” she said. “They’ve enlightened to and they’re actually able to embrace this part of the culture, what it means to be a selfless woman and a caring woman, so I’m very proud of them.”

Ancient Chinese women would have been reserved, even bashful, but elegant, and carry an intrinsic sort of charm, Ms. Chen said. The pageant was held by an American company in the West, so the outward expression of the same values would be more confident and charismatic, she explained.

“I think that kind of criteria, it’s not bound by Eastern or Western, it’s a universal sort of outlook on what is beautiful,” she said.

A Beautiful Reminder

Sitting in the audience was Amanda DeBrau, co-host of the podcast Mindset Artistry and a certified life coach. The return to traditional values was a moving reminder for her.

“I thought it was very magical, ... they brought a beautiful essence,” Ms. DeBrau said. “It made me think about how I view beauty and how diverse and versatile it can be, transcendent

and very universal, and how it can tie to tradition and culture and how beautiful that is, especially in the world today.

“We need more beauty, more love, and more humanity in the things that we touch and experience in this life, in this world.”

Ms. DeBrau said that although she and the pageant contestants come from different cultures, she saw that the values underpinning beauty were culturally universal and felt inspired to connect with her own culture deeply.

“Looking at beauty [is] more than just physical appearance, understanding that it’s internal, it’s about service, it’s about the bigger picture—humanity,” she said.

EET staff member Eva Fu and NTD contributed to this report.

Freedom to Homeschool?

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minimal and felt they could manage. Unbeknownst to them, Germany was stepping up its assault on homeschooling.

“Within a few short days, the principal showed up, then it went to the mayor, and then ... they sent the police to take our kids,” Mr. Romeike said. “Germans ... go by the books, and when you are not following the rules, they do everything they can—they send the authority to make you follow.”

Over time, pressure from the authorities began to take a toll on the family. A retired teacher was assigned to their home for five hours every day—they incidentally won him over, and he became a supporter of their cause. The emotional drain was also a factor, and their oldest daughter, Lydia, suffered nightmares for years after being dragged off to school by the authorities.

Fines began coming daily—one for each parent and each child—leaving Mr. Romeike with a heavy heart every time he went to the mailbox.

“They tried to financially crush you,

and then, fathers were jailed and custody [of the children] taken,” he said.

Through it all, however, the Romeikes felt the peace of God.

“He really carried us through this time,” Mr. Romeike said.

By the time the family appeared in court to plead their case, their reasons for homeschooling had evolved. No longer was it just about their children being bullied; now it was about what the schools were teaching their children.

“We assumed they would teach the same things ... we had gone through, and we had learned,” Mrs. Romeike said. “They change it and make it worse every few years.

“We took our first look into the books—that was scary. It opened our eyes.”

With fines mounting and the loss of their children threatened, the Romeikes realized it was time to leave their homeland. After discovering that finances and language barriers prevented them from moving to another European country, they set their sights on the United States, seeking asylum with the help of attorneys from the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA).

Wanting to help other homeschooling European families dealing with persecution, the Romeikes agreed to let their pursuit of asylum become a test case to set a precedent. Their case went all the way to the Supreme Court in 2013 but was denied a hearing. Shortly af-

ter, however, they were given an order of supervision, allowing them to live peacefully and work in the United States for the past decade with annual checks at the immigration office.

Sadly, that attempt to help other persecuted homeschoolers now seems to be coming back to bite them. Had they thought of themselves alone, they likely would have quietly slipped into

the country under the radar, enjoying permanent asylum. But in early September, they were suddenly given four weeks to ready their papers to return to Germany; they can’t help but wonder if the high-profile nature of their case has made them a target in the highly politicized world of immigration.

“It’s still not all about us,” Mrs. Romeike said, speaking of this unexpected turn. “We want to be helping other families as well.”

The possibility of returning to Germany—now with two more children, two in-laws, and a newborn grandson—leaves the Romeikes with many question marks. For the youngest children, Sarah (12) and Rebecca (10), both U.S. citizens, it means potentially going through the same trauma their

older siblings experienced before they were born, as Germany hasn’t relaxed its homeschool laws. For 18-year-old Damaris, returning to Germany raises the likelihood of being forced to finish her senior year at a German high school, a difficulty since she knows subjects such as American history rather than German history.

“I don’t even have third-grade German,” she said. “I don’t have that grammar that I need [to succeed].”

“It’s a very weird thought to me to think that I don’t belong here,” Damaris continued. “I don’t think I would feel the same kinship as I do with the American people here.”

Nevertheless, the family isn’t despairing. In fact, when they’ve faced possible deportation in the past years, they are the ones who end up comforting their upset American friends, and they do so because they have repeatedly seen God provide for them and answer prayers.

“Jesus promised that if we do the right thing, we will be persecuted,” Mrs. Romeike explained, but “he has promised he will go with us through it.”

“We are very much believing that God fights on our behalf, and even if

there’s no way, God makes a way,” Mrs. Romeike continued, noting that her search of the Scriptures has taught her that God takes the side of foreigners and strangers.

“It’s already like a wall of prayers is going up around us,” she said. “We are covered by peace.”

Their experience has taught them to value homeschooling.

“Love homeschooling,” Damaris said, citing the way it strengthens the family bond, while removing the drama and depression that many of her public school friends seem to deal with, as some of the things she most values about this schooling choice.

The family encourages Americans to continue fighting for the freedom to homeschool, being wary of the many little regulations that the government is constantly trying to slip into law to undermine that freedom. After all, Mrs. Romeike explains, parents are the ones responsible for their children, not the schools. And for parents who are unable to homeschool, she reminds them to saturate their children with truth.

“You have to repeat the truth more often than [the schools] repeat the lie,” she said.

Attorneys and elected representatives are currently working on the family’s case. For those who wish to support the Romeikes, HSLDA has set up a petition and is seeking 100,000 signa-

tures to send to the Biden administration. H.R. 5423 is also making its way through Congress, seeking to “grant the Romeikes permanent status as legal residents,” and HSLDA requests that concerned citizens contact their representatives and ask them to support this bill.

Annie Holmquist is a cultural commentator hailing from America’s heartland who loves classic books, architecture, music, and values. Her writings can be found at Annie’s Attic on Substack.



▲ Sarah and Josua Romeike.



▲ Alexander Hamilton wrote a stirring account of Hurricane San Augustin at St. Croix in 1772. “The Shipwreck,” 1772, by Claude-Joseph Vernet. National Gallery of Art, Washington.

HISTORY

Alexander Hamilton and the Hurricane

How the brilliant teen first came to public notice

By Dustin Bass

Alexander Hamilton was born a bastard and grew up an orphan. Some might say that he didn’t get a fair shake at the start. He was born in Nevis, a very small island that was part of the British West Indies. He was born on Jan. 11, 1755. Or 1757. There isn’t an official record of his birth. His father, James Hamilton, had left the family early in his childhood, and only a few years before his mother,

Rachel Faucette, died.

By the time he reached adolescence, Hamilton was working as a clerk about 150 miles from Nevis in St. Croix. At the time, this island was a Danish possession. Hamilton, possessing no formal education, educated himself and cultivated a gift for prose, even poetry. The social storms of his life had tossed him but never capsized him. When a physical storm tore through St. Croix on Aug. 31, 1772, he would unwittingly capitalize on its destructive power.

The Preacher

Several months before the storm ever formed, a friendship had developed in St. Croix between Hamilton and the Ulster Scot Presbyterian minister Hugh Knox. The 39-year-old preacher, who had studied at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), had brought with him a passion for the Bible, as well as other books. Knox, apparently noting Hamilton’s literary talents, made his personal library available to the teenager.

In addition to serving as a preacher, Knox was a journalist and a stand-by

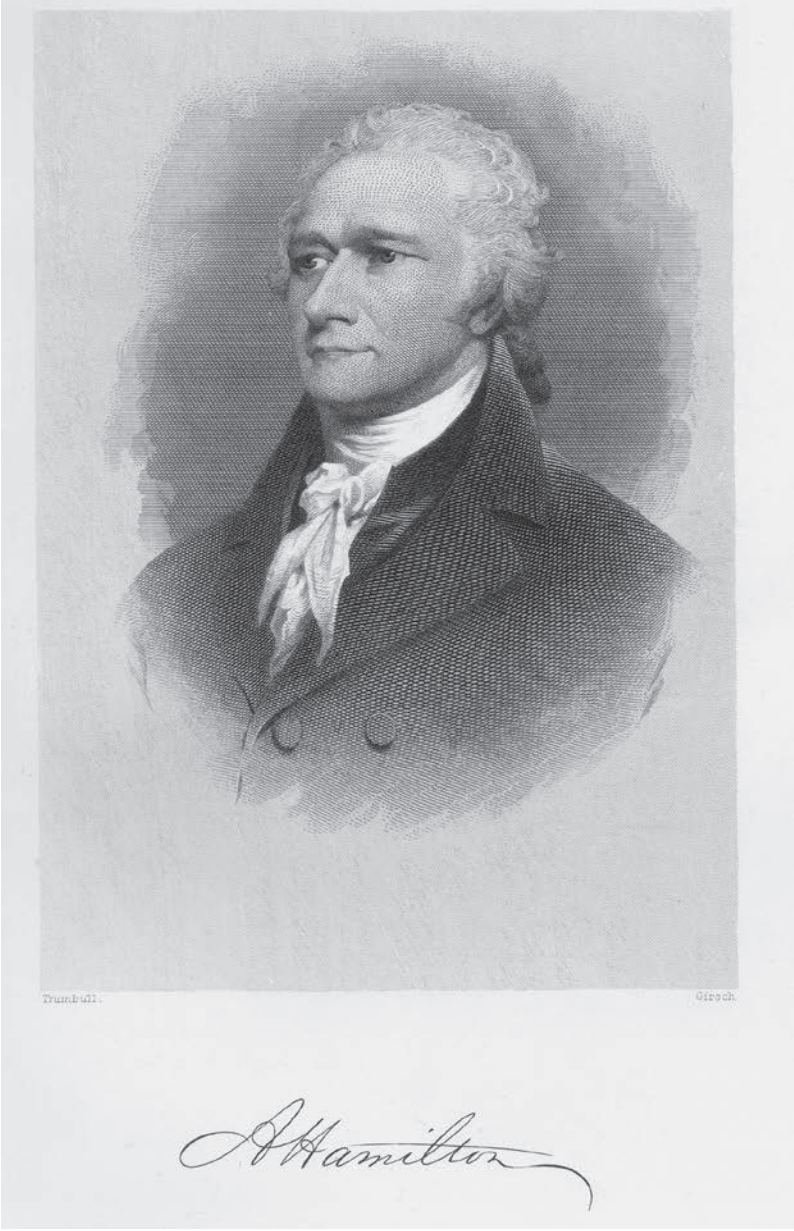
editor of the local Royal Danish American Gazette. Hamilton was a parishioner of Knox’s church and a sometime contributor to the newspaper. But a piece that wasn’t meant for the newspaper initiated Hamilton’s social and political momentum.

Words After the Storm

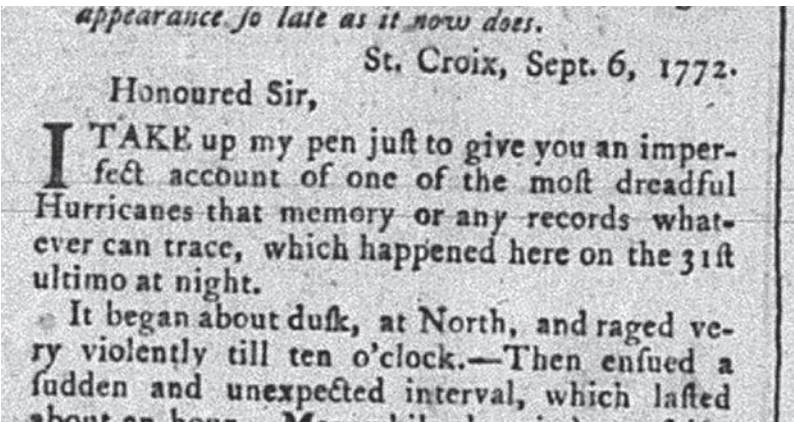
In the Dutch Church of St. Croix, Knox stood before his bedraggled congregation in hopes of inspiring the locals to trust in God in spite of the recent bedevilment of their island. A week prior, Hur-

ALL IMAGES IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES



▲ Alexander Hamilton, circa 1785. Engraving by Girsch.



▲ Detail of account by Alexander Hamilton of Hurricane San Augustin in 1772. Library of Congress.

vain mortal! Check thy ill timed joy. Art thou so selfish to exult because thy lot is happy in a season of universal woe? Hast thou no feelings for the miseries of thy fellow-creatures?”

The powerful, almost accusatory rhetoric, was never written for public consumption. It was written to his father, who was living in St. Kitts, an island connected to Nevis. It seems as though Hamilton isn’t merely addressing the recent storm, but also the man who had abandoned him; his older brother, James; and his mother.

In the letter, Hamilton references a mother and child suffering together with the image of a father noticeably absent: “See tender infancy pinched with hunger and hanging on the mothers knee for food! See the unhappy mothers anxiety. Her poverty denies relief, her breast heaves with pangs of maternal pity, her heart is bursting, the tears gush down her cheeks. Oh sighs of woe! Oh distress unspeakable! My heart bleeds, but I have no power to solace!”

The passion behind this letter is hard to pin solely on a destructive storm and biblical inspiration. His call for assistance and compassion conjures an image of a preacher imploring a congregation of wealthy sinners, though it’s directed at one man. “O ye, who revel in affluence, see the afflictions of humanity and bestow your superfluity to ease them. Say not, we have suffered also, and thence withhold your compassion. What are you[r] sufferings compared to those?”

The San Augustin Hurricane seems to have had a near-galvanizing effect, creating a storm-like eruption in Hamilton, which allowed him to roar and crash through the lines of his letter.

Printing the Letter

When Knox read the letter, he was undoubtedly pleased with Hamilton’s powerful prose that read like a sermon perhaps he himself would have preached. He thought so highly of the letter that he asked the teenager if he could print it in the newspaper. Hamilton demurred for several weeks, perhaps for very personal reasons, before relenting. Knox noted at the beginning of the printed version that “The Author’s modesty in long refusing to submit it to Publick (sic) view, is the reason of its making its appearance so late as it now does.”

The published letter quickly garnered much attention among the business class in St. Croix. They immediately noticed a talent that shouldn’t be wasted on a clerk’s stool. The businessmen, along with Knox, who may have been his primary sponsor, collected enough funds to send Hamilton to King’s College (now Columbia University) the following year. Hamilton thrived in school, and when the revolution broke out, he became Gen. George Washington’s aide-de-camp, often writing Washington’s letters. When the war ended, he became a statesman, and not only assisted in writing the Constitution, but also led the charge to convince Americans (New Yorkers specifically) to adopt the new Constitution through the 85 Federalist Papers, of which he wrote 51. He was the first Secretary of the Treasury, and is also credited with assisting Washington in his famous 1796 Farewell Address.

Dustin Bass is an author and co-host of *The Sons of History* podcast. He also writes two weekly series for *The Epoch Times*: *Profiles in History* and *This Week in History*.

BOOK REVIEW

A Worthy Guide to Christian Art

With the right author, a thousand words paint a picture

By Lorraine Ferrier

They say “a picture paints a thousand words”—traditional art certainly does. But can a thousand words paint a picture of the lost language of art? American author and retired art curator Mary Elizabeth Podles hopes so.

Since 2012, she’s written “A Thousand Words,” a 1,000-word art column for Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity. Her recently published book, “A Thousand Words: Reflections on Art and Christianity,” features the first 62 articles of her column along with 13 new essays.

In each of the 62 articles, Ms. Podles explores an object of religious art in terms of “how an artist listens to the voice of Christ and conveys the spoken message to us, whether through a language of symbolism which we no longer understand, through references to older art or to contemporary events, or simply through the formal means available to him as an artist.”

She’s set herself the formidable task of learning the lost language of art, to integrate it back into religion and into life.

Recovering Hidden Treasures

Traditional artworks are awash with messages that most of us can no longer understand. Like hieroglyphics, the rich language of visual art is hidden in plain sight, just waiting for experts, such as Ms. Podles, to excavate it.

In the book, she acts as our art transla-

tor, guiding us 1,000 words at a time, in the largely lost language of art. We learn this language through icons, sculptures, architecture, paintings, and a variety of objects, including a throne, a fountain, and an astronomical clock.

These objects of religious art are “artifacts embedded in a culture of instruction, prayer, and, above all, the liturgy,” she says in the foreword of her book.

Steeped in Tradition

Throughout the book, we learn how traditional artists worked—not in isolation, but within a long-held tradition of art. “No art exists in a vacuum,” she declares in her first essay, titled “The Ancient World 1st–4th Centuries.” “The cross-fertilization of eastern and western Christian art is a theme that will recur throughout the centuries to come,” she notes in her “Byzan-

tium 5th–6th Centuries” essay.

For example, in the introduction, in which Ms. Podles examines Rembrandt’s etching “Christ Preaching” (“La Petite Tombe”), she wrote:

“So Rembrandt the etcher draws upon his knowledge of older art, his knowledge of the Bible, his observation of the expression of inner psychology in the human face, and perhaps his own personal struggles, to create this image of the Word and its power, and to make us hear it speak.”

We read later in the book how Michelangelo carved his David based on the elements of the Colossus of Constantine from ancient Rome. The master’s David, of course, influenced artists for centuries to come.

Readers may be familiar with some art motifs, such as the lily representing purity. But Ms. Podles points out subtle symbols, such as the Pantheon’s dome, which when inverted forms a circle, the centuries-old symbol of heaven.

Ms. Podles also discusses how, throughout the ages, there’s been unease with the

PUBLIC DOMAIN



▲ “Christ Preaching” (“La Petite Tombe”), circa 1657, by Rembrandt van Rijn. Etching, engraving, and drypoint (first of two states); 6 1/4 inches by 8 1/4 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

concept of the pictorial image in religion, a topic still hotly debated today. For example, she notes in her essay “The Gospel Book of St. Augustine” that Pope St. Gregory (540–604) “famously defended the worthiness of religious art, asserting that pictures were effective in transmitting the faith to nonbelievers and in explaining Scripture to the unlettered.”

Then, in her overview of the “Byzantium

ricane San Augustin had roared through the Caribbean Islands, leveling homes and buildings, flooding streets and villages, leaving many destitute and some dead. Knox described the hurricane as “the most dreadful known among these islands, since their first settlement.”

The words in his sermon were piercing. He began by noting the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3 in writing, “The wise man has told us that there is ‘a time and season for every purpose under the Heaven.’” The words from Knox were a direct reflection of the storm, but they also seemed a direct reflection of Hamilton’s life.

Knox stated that God had “marked out, in a very especial manner, the duty of two particular seasons”: prosperity and adversity. The season of prosperity was a call to “be joyful.” “The day of adversity; the evil and troublous day; the day of want, fear, danger, or affliction, calls for another, and a very different duty. In the day of adversity, we are called to consider!”

As Hamilton listened to Knox’s sermon, he must have considered his own adversities, of which there had been plenty. He indeed had taken time to consider and forced himself to rise

Inspired by Sermon and Storm

Possibly inspired by Knox’s sermon, Hamilton went home that same day and wrote his “imperfect account of one of the most dreadful Hurricanes that memory or any records whatever can trace, which happened here on the 31st ultimo at night.”

It began about dusk, at North, and raged very violently till ten o’clock.—Then ensued a sudden and unexpected interval, which lasted about an hour.

he ties together nearly all the elements of the storm and its destruction in one sentence, writing, “The roaring of the sea and wind, fiery meteors flying about it in the air, the prodigious glare of almost perpetual lightning, the crash of the falling houses, and the ear-piercing shrieks of the distressed, were sufficient to strike astonishment into Angels.”

Concluding this impressive sentence with a Christian symbol, his second paragraph is in some ways a reflection of Knox’s sermonic references to the Book of Psalms. It’s as if Hamilton is channeling a Davidic form in his prose with the lamenting verse: “Where now, oh! vile worm, is all thy boasted fortitude and resolution? What is become of thine arrogance and self sufficiency?” and then following with praise-like resolve in declaring, “He who gave the winds to blow, and the lightnings to rage—even him have I always loved and served.”

As the letter comes to a close, Hamilton seems to make a direct correlation between Knox’s theme, stating with apostolic overtures: “Yet hold, Oh

Redux 13th–15th Centuries,” she highlights how, centuries later, Byzantine theologians were weary of visual art due to its pagan association. The iconoclasm came soon after, banning and destroying religious images. Ms. Podles says that “eventually a compelling argument emerged: ‘If God in His mercy could decide to reveal Himself to mortal eyes in the human nature of Christ, why should He not also be willing to manifest Himself in visible images?’”

A Great Art Companion

A thousand words may sound a lot but it’s not, especially when, in these 1,000-word essays, Ms. Podles has had to give explanatory terms before getting anywhere near the meat of the article. Writers know well the idiom “an easy read is a hard write,” and Ms. Podles must have worked hard to keep the word count tight, without compromising each article’s readability. Her gift for writing succinct one-page summaries of often complex art historical periods in the art-era introductions whets the reader’s appetite for the thousand-word essays to come while offering neat

standalone articles for anyone wanting to get the gist of an art era.

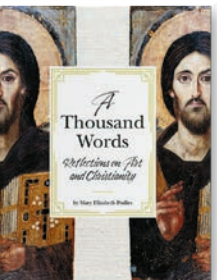
Readers need to be aware that there’s a little repetition of content because the book is a collection of essays taken from a bimonthly column. For example, Ms. Podles wrote about “The Ghent Altarpiece” in three parts and needed to remind her Touchstone readers of some facts each time.

“A Thousand Words: Reflections on Art and Christianity” is a great guidebook and companion to Christian art and is as much about world history and humanity as it is about art history. World history lovers will delight in reading about the societal and cultural shifts that impacted visual art and its traditions. This is a book that will appeal to anyone who wants to see beyond the surface beauty of objects of religious art and understand more about the morals, virtues, and religious messages conveyed within them.

What makes this book special is that Ms. Podles’s essays seem to form part of her spiritual practice, with each artwork that she studies acting as a call to

prayer, deepening her faith.

Just as an art conservator faithfully restores a work of art to its former beauty, Ms. Podles hopes to restore visual arts literacy—a thousand words at a time. When we become fluent in the language of traditional art, we can wholly see the art as the artist intended.



‘A THOUSAND WORDS: REFLECTIONS ON ART AND CHRISTIANITY’

By Mary Elizabeth Podles
St. James Press
Sept. 1, 2023
Hardcover
204 pages

CULTURE

Shakespeare in the Barn

Homespun performances of the Bard’s plays brings together art, community, and true recreation

By Walker Larson

I sit in the dark, my back against the rough wooden wall of the barn, knees pulled in close in the cramped space, sweat running down my shoulders, trying to stifle the sound of my creaking stool. The air is stuffy and humid enough to swim in.

Through a seam between the planks of the stage wing, I can see the audience: a varied assembly of all ages, their faces bright and expectant, turned toward the light, their eyes riveted to the stage, which lies just a few feet from where I am concealed.

From the other side of the curtain my castmate struts upon the stage, the stage I built with my own hands.

“I thank my stars, I am happy!” he crows. “I will be strange, stout, in yellow stockings, and cross-gartered, even with the swiftness of putting on!”

A tide of laughter sweeps and swells and rocks the audience.

My eyes meet those of the others backstage, and, wordless, we grin.

Our friend on stage at this moment is, of course, Malvolio, and this is, of course, Shakespeare’s “Twelfth Night”—in a barn.

A Newfound Tradition

For the past several summers, I’ve acted in amateur productions of Shakespeare’s plays, staged inside my parents’ barn loft. When they purchased the property, this space was little more than a storage area for old lumber, chicken wire, five-gallon buckets filled with who knows what, and a battered basketball hoop. In hopes of creating a gathering space, a place where events could be held and culture and community nourished, we cleared and cleaned the loft. Learning the necessary

skills as we went, we ran electrical, built a stage and wings, put in a storage closet, and installed a bar.

Each year, a few more oddments are added, a few more improvements made: better stage lighting, chandeliers hanging from a bale conveyor high overhead, string lights strung from beam to beam, a soundboard, an opening with a door cut into the wing (in this case, to serve as Malvolio’s prison cell window). This is a collective labor of love. The talents and time of each are donated to a project that has grown alongside its participants with the passage of the years.

None of the actors, directors, or crew are professionals. We donate our time, and most years we are lucky to break even. A few of us acted in high school or college, but many had virtually no drama experience before our first production in the barn (“A Midsummer Night’s Dream” in 2017). Yet—dare I say it—the quality of performance continues to improve and rivals even professional shows. These are not just my own, biased words, but the comments of many audience members. And the numbers speak for themselves: The 2023 season saw a record turnout, with three sold-out shows over a weekend. We don’t advertise at all—all our publicity comes from word of mouth.

Authentic Culture

What draws people to these homespun performances? As I said, the actors aren’t professionals, the stage is small, and the barn has no air conditioning. Yet still, people are drawn to it. In the coming together of family, friends, and strangers to experience a work of art—live, raw, authentic, unpolished—I believe that everyone, both on the stage and off, is able to quench a thirst for truly humane cultural experi-

ences in a society where such experiences have grown scarce.

There is something profoundly real about these shows. If a rainstorm comes—as one did this year—and pelts the tin roof of the barn, some of the dialogue will be drowned out. If an actor forgets lines, there will be an awkward pause. Yet, if anything, these elements only add to the authenticity and intimacy of this artistic and cultural expression in a society so deeply sold out to artificiality, convenience, and slick packaging.

Many of us are starved for culture—and by “culture,” I do not mean the commercial products of pop-culture, homogenous, cheapened, and mass produced on the coasts and sold all over the country to be “consumed” for the profit of the entertainment industry (as though true leisure could ever be compatible with commercial “industry”). Nor do I mean the “high” culture guarded by the connoisseurs, dissected by the critics, catalogued by the institutes and universities. Shakespeare is not for the elite. He belongs to everyone. In his own day, the performances of his works were hardly considered high-brow—they were popular entertainment for people of all classes and professions. To love and understand Shakespeare, you need only be human and willing to raise your gaze to the nobler things of life.

This is not pop culture, nor is it snobbery. What happens for three magical nights each year in a barn settled in a valley between farm fields and forest ridges in Wisconsin is what we might call “authentic folk culture,” ordinary people enjoying art and community and true recreation. Ordinary people producing things of value for one another, rather than passively consuming the solitary stimulation offered by the television or cell phone.

What we are doing is, in some sense, profoundly ordinary. Yet it is precisely the ordinary that has become more and more rare. And just the fact that something is ordinary doesn’t mean it isn’t in some sense exceptional—even sacred.

Recreation has the word “create” in it for a reason. It is not mere consumption, even on the part of the audience in our little theater—one of the joys of live theater is that it is a give-and-take between a living audience and living performers. The audience has a significant role to play—their tears, their laughter, their applause, their attention are what give the whole thing

meaning, and the actors on stage respond to it in real-time. No two performances are the same. No two audiences are the same. This is human. For we are not machines, but living, breathing creatures with hearts. And the best of this type of art is always a mutual giving—a giving from the heart.

Friendship and Camaraderie

The best theatrical performances are an exercise in friendship, that “reciprocal goodwill” of Aristotle: actors give of their talents in a remarkably vulnerable way for the enjoyment and edification of the audience, while the audience gives their attention and appreciation to the actors in return. This “theatrical friendship” can take on an even deeper level when actor and audience member know each other outside of the context of the theater. The people on stage in our barn are not Juilliard-educated actors—they are the friends and neighbors of many of the audience members, which allows them to bring a special personal touch to their performance—a certain species of love, even.

But even more profound than the relationship between actor and audience is the relationship between actor and actor. Every year, the bonds between actors solidify a little more. Acting with others creates a unique kind of camaraderie—on stage, each actor depends on the others and must come to trust the others to know their part and play their role. Acting your best is a gift not just to the audience but also to your castmates. Everyone has something key to contribute; everyone is essential in coming together to create a beautiful work of art that is bigger than any one person. It is a deeply collaborative process.

Outside of the performances themselves, you spend many hours together in rehearsals. Over time, you come to know the rhythms of one another’s behaviors on and off stage. Your shared experiences in pursuit of a common worthwhile goal deepen your friendship in a way that simply spending undirected time together cannot.

Flourishing

The last line is spoken. The last song sung. I take a deep breath. The triumph of a successful performance floods me.

I see the faces of my fellow actors, and in their eyes, there is more than, perhaps, even Shakespeare could articulate.

We come on stage for bows, linking hands. The applause fades. And we are no longer dukes or pirates, jesters or magicians. This is no longer some faraway part of the globe, but a hay loft. We step off the stage into the crowd of people who were our audience and are our friends.

As I look over this crowd of bright faces congratulating one another under the crisscrossing beams and rows of yellow bulbs, with a diamond moon cutting through the window in the clerestory, near the peak of the barn, I am reminded of the words of Odysseus as he surveys the feast of the Phaeacians in Book 9 of “The Odyssey”:

“Lord Alcinous, my most worshipful prince, it is indeed a lovely thing to hear a bard such as yours, with a voice like the gods’. I myself feel that there is nothing more delightful than when the festive mood reigns in a whole people’s hearts and the banqueters listen to a minstrel from their seats in the hall, while the tables before them are laden with bread and meat, and a steward carries round the wine he has drawn from the bowl and fills their cups. This, to my way of thinking, is something very like perfection.”

If Western civilization is to be saved, it will be saved, in part, by such quiet acts of culture as this, when human beings come together face-to-face to celebrate what we have been given—in our cultural heritage, in our landscapes, in our communities, in each other.

Not unlike fixing up an old barn or putting on an even older play, the work of cultural restoration will be a humble work of many unnoticed people. It will be a collaborative labor of love, with each person performing his or her unique task, adding a piece to the whole, generation after generation, to build something worthwhile. Something joyful. Something lasting. Something luminous.

Walker Larson teaches literature at a private academy in Wisconsin, where he resides with his wife and daughter. He holds a Master’s in English literature and language, and his writing has appeared in *The Hemingway Review*, *Intellectual Takeout*, and his *Substack*, “The Hazelnut.”



MICHAEL ROSKOTEN/SHUTTERSTOCK

“
Thus the eternal God,
our Lord, gives victory
to those who follow
His way over apparent
impossibilities.”
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS (1451-1506),
ITALIAN EXPLORER

HOW DID CHRISTOPHER
COLUMBUS FINANCE HIS
JOURNEY TO
AMERICA?
HE USED HIS DISCOVER CARD.

DUJAREV MIKHAIL/SHUTTERSTOCK

FOR KIDS ONLY

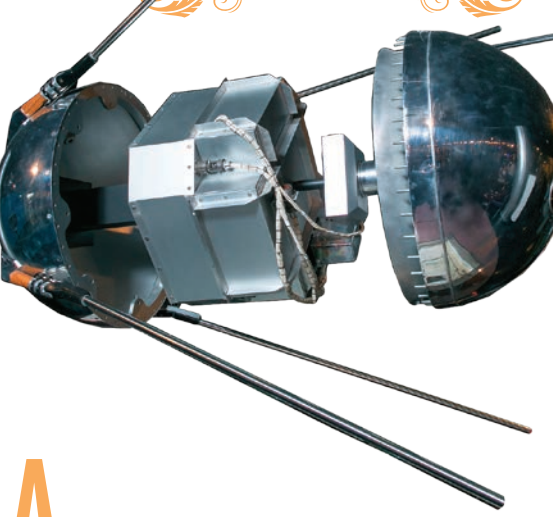
THE EPOCH TIMES

Week 40, 2023

Columbus (excerpt)
By Joaquin Miller
They sailed and sailed, as winds might blow,
Until at last the blanch'd mate said;
“Why, now, not even God would know
Should I and all my men fall dead.
These very winds forget their way,
For God from these dread seas is gone.
Now speak, brave Admiral, and say—”
He said: “Sail on! and on!”
They sailed, they sailed, then spoke his mate:
“This mad sea shows his teeth to-night,
He curls his lip, he lies in wait,
With lifted teeth as if to bite!
Brave Admiral, say but one word;
What shall we do when hope is gone?”
The words leaped as a leaping sword:
“Sail on! sail on! and on!”
Then, pale and worn, he kept his deck,
And thro’ the darkness peered that night.
Ah, darkest night! and then a speck,—
A light! a light! a light! a light!
It grew—a star-lit flag unfurled!
It grew to be Time’s burst of dawn;
He gained a world! he gave that world
Its watch-word: “On! and on!”

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

This Week in History



PUBLIC DOMAIN

A SATELLITE IS LAUNCHED

On Oct. 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched the world’s first manmade satellite into space. Named “Sputnik 1,” meaning “fellow traveler,” the satellite weighed 184 pounds and had a diameter of 22 inches. At certain times of the day, it could be seen from Earth using binoculars. As expected, Sputnik didn’t last terribly long. It burned up in the atmosphere in January 1958. The achievement marked the beginning of the “Space Age.”

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

By Aidan Danza

CHICKEN CALLS

THE EGG SONG
Some (but not all) chickens will vocalize loudly after laying an egg. It will be a loud (sometimes very loud) cluck-cluck-cluck-cluck-cl-SQUAWK! The egg song’s purpose is to announce the laying of an egg. Not all chickens will announce their laying.

THE IMMINENT DANGER ALARM (aka Ground Predator Alarm)
Chickens utter a call very similar to the egg song when they see imminent danger or a ground predator. It’s a call for help, and should be heeded. It’s a very quick continuous clucking, with a few squawks mixed in, like the egg song, but more panicked. Usually more than one chicken will take up the alarm. Hens are quite defenseless against predators, so you need to run out and help them when you hear this sound.

THE AERIAL PREDATOR ALARM
Hens will react differently to aerial predators than they will to ground predators. When they see anything they perceive to be an aerial predator, they will utter a quiet, high-pitched whine that’s like the creaking of a door. Then, the flock will dart for cover quietly. This doesn’t mean that a hawk is in the yard, but that it has flown over. You should check your flock if you hear this noise.

TIDBITTING
Tidbitting is a quiet “tuk-tuk-tuk” sound meant to announce that a hen has found something interesting, usually food, usually causing the other hens to run to her to investigate. This sound isn’t cause for alarm.

WHINING
Only some chickens whine, but when they do, it’s very persistent. Usually, they are asking for something, be it food, water, or to be let out of the run. It’s usually very loud; a long whine, followed by progressively shorter ones.

There’s something profoundly real and human about a homespun Shakespeare production.



BIBA KAYEWICH

AMAZING ESCAPES!

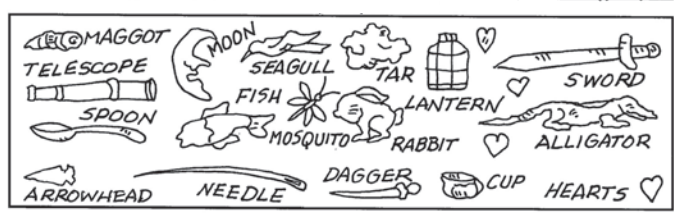
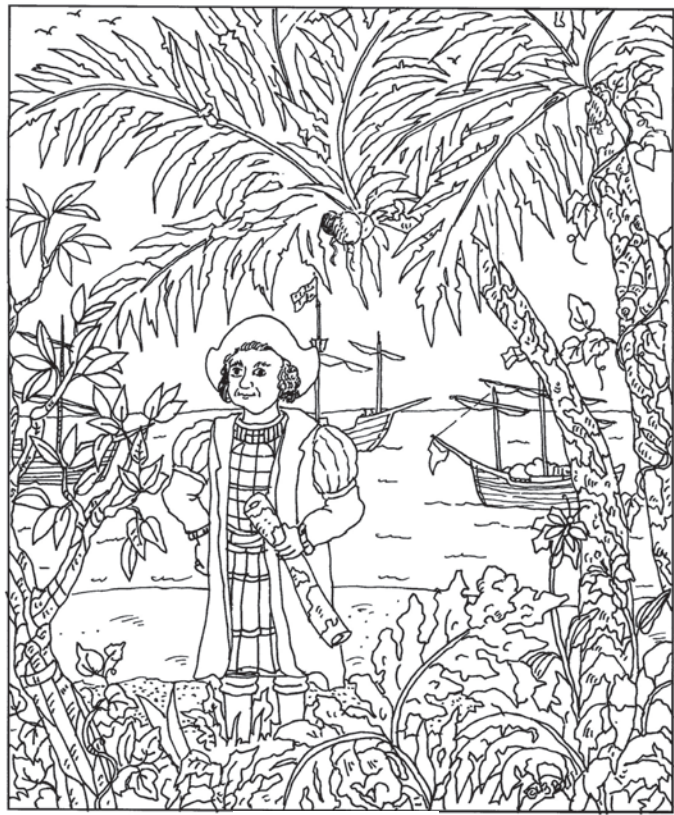
START

USE THE FOUR NUMBERS IN THE CORNERS, AND THE OPERANDS (+, -, AND X) to build an equation to get the solution in the middle. There may be more than one “unique” solution but, there may also be “equivalent” solutions. For example: 6 + (7 X 3) +1 = 28 and 1+ (7 X 3) + 6 = 28

1 10
16
1 8
+ - x ÷
Solution For Easy 1
1 - 1 - 8 + 01

10 18
10
4 17
+ - x ÷
Solution For Medium 1
81 - 7 + (01 - 1)

10 25
73
6 18
+ - x ÷
Solution For Hard 1
92 + 9 + (01 - 81)
01 - 92 - 9 + 81



HIDDEN TREASURES by Liz Ball
www.HiddenPicturePuzzles.com

WORD SEARCH: Happy Columbus Day!

A	T	L	A	N	T	I	C	H	M	A	R	I	A
D	B	N	A	Z	O	R	E	S	J	O	V	A	S
I	A	M	E	R	I	C	A	Q	O	Y	V	R	S
R	T	P	I	N	T	A	N	C	G	J	A	O	A
A	I	P	L	C	R	R	S	O	A	W	G	B	A
L	V	T	A	V	E	I	A	M	E	M	Q	E	E
C	E	Z	N	S	D	G	L	P	A	A	C	X	L
V	U	I	D	A	I	G	V	A	F	I	A	P	L
S	H	B	F	I	T	I	A	S	A	C	P	L	A
P	A	E	A	L	A	N	D	S	R	A	T	O	V
A	I	R	L	O	L	G	O	K	I	N	A	R	C
I	T	I	L	R	I	R	R	I	N	D	I	E	S
N	I	A	S	A	M	E	N	G	Z	N	N	F	W
I	N	D	I	A	N	S	E	U	R	O	P	E	A

Admiral	Iberia	Sansalvador
America	Indians	Seafaring
Asia	Indies	Seamen
Atlantic	Isabella	Spain
Azores	Italian	Traderoute
Bahamas	Jamaica	Voyage
Captain	Landfall	
Compass	Maria	
Cuba	Native	
Discover	Niña	
Europe	Pinta	
Explore	Rigging	
Haiti	Sailor	

KEVIN BURKE/GETTY IMAGES



Longwood's exterior stands out for its Italianate-style double and triple veranda columns, over-
gging bracketed cornices, a multi-arch-window cupola topped with a Moorish onion-style dome, and
ander minaret tower. Library of Congress.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF PILGRIMAGE GARDEN CLUB UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED



Of the 32 rooms originally planned for the mansion, only nine rooms on the first floor were com-
ed. The mansion's construction was interrupted and then halted because of the Civil War. With
large openings or entrances, Longwood was designed to maximize cross-ventilation airflow during
altering Mississippi summers. Hot air rises into the vast six-story space that ends in the dramatic
ola and dome.



▲ A portrait in a lavish, gilded frame of the mansion's original matron, Julia Nutt, is the focal point of Longwood's master bedroom. Atop the mahogany veneered Empire-style dresser owned by the Nutt family, is an intricately inlaid Japanese curio box. Small photographs are of Longwood's original owner, Haller Nutt, who died in 1864, before the Civil War ended, and of Julia Nutt in her mourning attire.



▲ Central in the dining room is the func-
tional punkah over the formal dining table. The large, decorative wooden fan suspended from the ceiling could be moved backward and forward by pulling on a cord. The punkah was inspired by fans made of cloth that were once commonplace in India. The dining room's exterior double-door and tall win-
dows also allowed for additional airflow during an era when air conditioning didn't exist.

LARGER THAN LIFE: Architecture Through the Ages

Longwood: A Southern Mansion With a Unique Style

By Deena Bouknight

American homes prior to the Civil War (1861-1865) were predominantly characterized by Georgian, Neoclassical, and Greek Revival styles—not so for a Natchez, Mississippi-area mansion called Longwood. While it does display some of the era's popular architectural styles, distinctiveness is apparent in the mansion's interior and exterior design elements.

Longwood's looming presence among oaks dripping with Spanish moss is primarily noteworthy for being America's largest existing octagonal-style residential structure, with its remarkable eight-sided floorplan and centerpiece cupola and dome. Although Natchez boasts several ornately decorated dwellings, Longwood stands out with its Oriental Revival style that combines both Italianate and Moorish characteristics.

According to curators at the Historic Natchez Foundation, Italianate aspects are particularly evident in the arched openings, and sawn millwork, including balustrades, brackets, arcaded frontispieces (decorative façade), spandrels (triangular shapes in the curve of an arch), and crestings (an ornamental ridge at the top of a wall). The onion-shaped dome and tall minaret are distinctly Moorish in design.

While it seems that Philadelphia architect Samuel Sloan's 1859 project was seemingly a hodgepodge of ideas, Longwood illustrates an exotic and eclectic phase of architectural romanticism that flourished from the early- to mid-19th century.



▲ On one of the mansion's four symmetrical two-story verandas, each facing different directions, are tri-column corners featuring classic Corinthian scroll-and-leaf design. These fluted columns on pedestals represent only three of the numerous columns on the home's exterior; they provide not only support but ornamentation.

Longwood is America's largest existing octagonal-style residential structure.

A 30-plus-year writer-journalist, Deena C. Bouknight works from her Western North Carolina mountain cottage and has contributed articles on food culture, travel, people, and more to local, regional, national, and international publications. She has written three novels, including the only historical fiction about the East Coast's worst earthquake. Her website is DeenaBouknightWriting.com



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