

# TUXEDO PARK

Lives, Legacies, Legends



Chiu Yin Hempel  
Foreword by Francis Morrone



*William Kent house.*

with the colors of the woods. The variations of light and shade on the shingles were similar to the effect of light on the bark of the trees.” Sheldon called the Travis Van Buren house “the most original house by Mr. Bruce Price, and in some respects, the most original in the country... This originality consists partly in the effect of the portal, with its strong lights and shades”. Another cottage – Chanler house – was said by Frank Lloyd Wright’s biographers to have inspired the great modern architect.

Indeed, Price’s genius exemplified the best of American architectural innovations in the 1880s. Sheldon argued that architects at that time had become more confident and were able to pay less attention to period styles

originated in Europe. Confidence combined with lighter obligations to the past and more flexible uses of historical systems produced variety and fresh forms. Sheldon went further to suggest that the taste of clients – many of them newly rich – was not well developed. Until American taste matured, he argued, it was the duty of the architect to know, explain, and deliver the beautiful. However, if, in 1885, Price was at the forefront of this creative surge, sadly, Graybill concluded: “[His] later houses lacked the fire and primeval character which his earlier houses had established as the character of Tuxedo Park.”

In the first phase of Tuxedo Park’s development, the collaboration of Bruce Price and Ernest Bowditch achieved an

important legacy: Picturesque houses married to a naturalistic, romantic landscape – a quintessential country village where structure was in harmony with nature, and on a scale that had never before been attempted.

### *The Client’s Hand*

I.M. Pei, renowned American architect, had said in respect to his design for the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. that if a building gained the approbation of history, at least forty percent of the credit should go to the client. How much credit should go to Lorillard for the picturesque design of Tuxedo Park? Emily Post, either for reasons of honesty or out of politeness, thought it was a great deal.

She wrote in her 1911 article, “Tuxedo Park: An American Rural Community” published in *The Century* magazine: “Mr. Lorillard ordered houses the way some people might order boots. He talked rapidly and thought twice as fast as he talked, and he wished his orders carried out at a speed that equaled the sum of both. Once, just as he was leaving Mr. Price’s office, he called back: ‘By the way, make it four cottages more, instead of two. Show me the plans tomorrow, and break ground for them next Monday.’ If, when he saw the plans, he did not like them, he insisted upon new sketches being made then and there, before his eyes, rejecting them or accepting them from a few penciled lines. He always knew what he wanted, never forgot a detail of a



*Travis Van Buren house.*



*A fancy dress party organized by James L. Breese.*

organized in honor of John Elliot Cowdin. The guest list included the most influential men in New York's intellectual and artistic world: Painters J. Alden Weir, John Twachtman, Carroll Beckwith, Robert Reid, and Willard Metcalf; architects Stanford White, Whitney Warren, William Mead, and Charles McKim; electrical pioneer Nicola Tesla; Charles Dana Gibson; Augustus Saint-Gaudens; and Edward Simmons. Also present were Breese's Tuxedo Park neighbors: Henry W. Poor, John Greenough, Henry Mortimer, and William Astor Chanler, among others. Breese wrote Gibson before the dinner that "hell is going to be let loose ... but don't tell anybody

about it". After a thirteen-course dinner (not counting sorbet, glace, and café) accompanied by the finest champagnes, sixteen-year-old Susie Johnson emerged from a huge flakey, brown-crustied pie to perform a sprightly dance. Some reports said the girl was dressed in filmy black gauze, while the newspaper *World* insisted that she was "covered only by the ceiling". Johnson was joined by other young women who kept the guests amused.

Breese was an organizer and court photographer of the Bradley Martin Ball, a fancy dress gala in 1897 that reputedly cost \$400,000. He was a great deal of fun in Tuxedo, too. He invented tobogganing

on trays down the stairs of the Tuxedo Club until one day a lady showed too much of the lace under her skirt and the hilarity was put to an abrupt end.

Perhaps Tuxedo society was too dull, too constricting for a free spirit like Breese, or Breese was too flamboyant for Tuxedo. Shortly after the notorious dinner, he moved to Southampton, where he

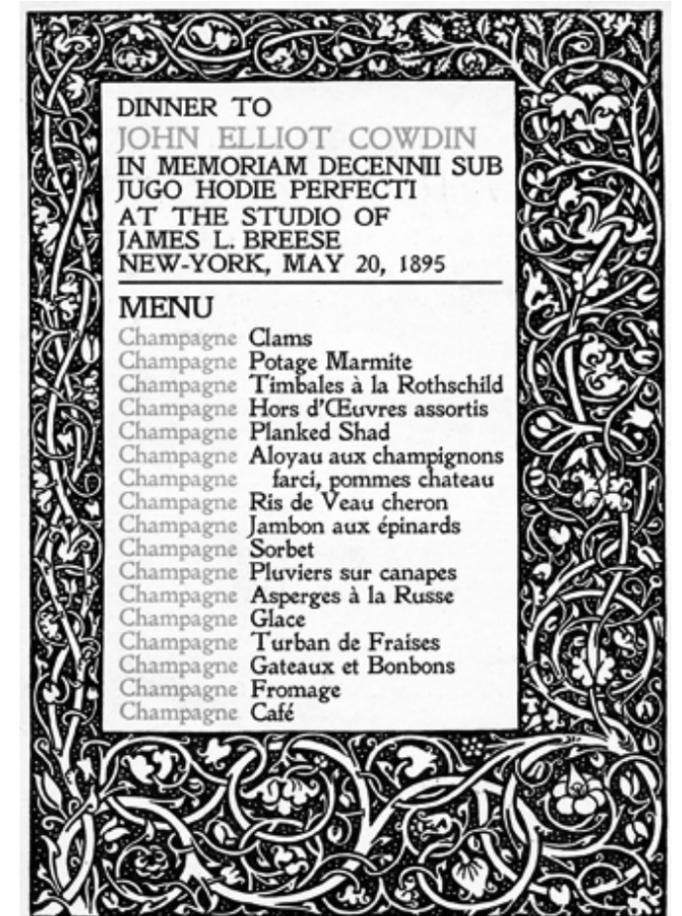
had his long-time friend Stanford White design a 32-room mansion. "The Orchard" remained Breese's home until his death. His Tuxedo house was sold in 1900.

In Southampton, Breese lived life to the fullest. He entertained lavishly. He and his wife were frequently mentioned in society columns as keen participants in motoring, yachting, golfing, horseback paper

**John Elliot Cowdin.**

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|-----------------------|------------------------|
| James L. Breese.      | Henry W. Poor.         |
| Robert Bacon.         | Henry C. Mortimer.     |
| Stanford White.       | Charles F. McKim.      |
| William T. Lawson.    | Augustus St. Gaudens.  |
| Rene La Montagne.     | John Ames Mitchell.    |
| Thomas L. Manson, Jr. | Cooper Hewitt.         |
| James Barnes.         | Robert Reid.           |
| R. Suydam Grant.      | Willard Metcalf.       |
| Alfred Q. Collins.    | Edward Simmons.        |
| W. Rutherford Mead.   | Henry W. McVickar.     |
| J. Carroll Beckwith.  | John Greenough.        |
| J. Alden Weir.        | John D. Cheever.       |
| J. Kennedy Tod.       | Henry E. Howland.      |
| George E. Perkins.    | William Astor Chanler. |
| John H. Twachtman.    | Charles Dana Gibson.   |
| Whitney Warren.       | Nicola Tesla.          |

*Pie Girl Dinner guest list.*



*Pie Girl Dinner menu.*