

## Gift of the Morris Chair

James G.R. Hart



Eighteen hundred seventy-three was the first year of U. S. Grant's difficult second term as president, a year of scandal (Crédit Mobilier, the Whiskey Ring, the ascendancy of the Gilded Age), and severe economic disruption and panic. For many millions of Americans, it was a bleak time. But not for all Americans.

John Lathrop Jerome, our great-grandfather, had broad, hopeful dreams. The promise of the West and Manifest Dynasty, of opportunity, and a desire to give a good example to less fortunate citizens consumed him. He was also engaged to a refined society lady, Lucy Wright Sweetland.

Still, he was not spared disappointment and uncertainty. He needed to prove to his prospective bride and her parents that

he was a man not only of integrity and dreams but also of substance and solid promise. There are suggestions, also, that he had disappointed his father, a Presbyterian minister, by what he considered a careless style of life in college. So, perhaps in the company of his favorite brother, The Reverend Theo C. Jerome, he departed his Clinton, New York home soon after graduating from Hamilton College.

Jerome, nearly 20 years of age, had taken a position as principal of schools and teacher in vibrant, rough Central City, Colorado, in the midst of its mining boom. He stayed there for only two years. But he learned enough about human nature and struggles to lead his staff and students through two disastrous fires, a much publicized and raucous visit from President Grant, and a controversial restructuring of the curriculum. Additionally, contending against the tendency of some parents to send their children to school only part of the year, Jerome increased student attendance.

Despite these accomplishments, in the eyes of some influential people in his life, he was still only an educator. He had little prospect of providing the finer things of life to Lucy. She would not join him yet.

In 1875, Jerome secured an invitation to join the Denver law offices of highly regarded Wright and Sayer. During the break between teaching and the law, Jerome launched an energetic campaign to persuade Lucy to marry him and to trek all across the wilderness of the plains to join him in Colorado.

As part of this effort, he rode out with a friend on a month-long adventure through Colorado's backcountry and its isolated settlements. His stated purpose was to investigate the business opportunities in this quickly opening region. But the only surviving record of that trek is a series of over twenty humorous, romantic letters. The framework of each missal is his retelling of a hair-raising adventure. Along the way, he commented on the

essential goodness of most of the people he met. Jerome indulged his passion for the visual in his descriptions of the magnificence and mystery of the weather and landscapes. At the end of each letter, he wrote an endearment (sometimes in French) and a confession of his love for Lucy.

The letters and his growing success as a young attorney must have had a positive effect. Lucy and Jerome were married in her hometown, Cazenovia, New York, on October 17, 1876 (the year of Colorado's controversial admission into the Union).



*John Jerome with Elizabeth, Cornelia, and Janet.*

In the next handful of years, they assumed important roles in proper society and the growth of Denver. John was among the small dynamic group of young men in the city who founded and built the exclusive Denver and University Clubs. The Jeromes became important members of St. John's Episcopal Cathedral and close friends with its dean H. Martyn Hart (an unrelated Englishman). They raised three exceptional girls: Elizabeth (born 1877), Cornelia (1879) and Janet (1884). Each birth took a heavy toll on Lucy's health. But she was not weak in spirit. Jerome prospered, and she stuck with him, creating a vibrant and enriched ambiance for the family.

Jerome had considerable success in Denver's business and political world. He served as City Attorney in 1880-81. In 1881, he became one of the four founders (called the "Iowa Group") of Colorado Fuel and Iron (CF&I)<sup>1</sup>. This was the only iron foundry of any consequence west of the Mississippi. Over the next few years, it acquired vast regional interests in coal and railroads, both critical to the growth of

Colorado and the West. He served on its board and acted as its principal accountant and attorney till 1902.

Trips, frequently for CF&I, would take him from Denver to Chicago or New York or to towns in Colorado where the company had interests.

In the 1890's, Jerome purchased and operated the Denver Public Warehouse and the Overland Cotton Mill<sup>2</sup> (the only cotton mill west of the Mississippi). On paper he became one of Colorado's richest men, much admired and respected. But he was stretching himself thin.



*John and Lucy Jerome, August 1888*

Through all these years, Jerome and Lucy maintained a highly cultured lifestyle in Denver and on the East Coast. Along the way, they made the proper trip to Europe, and a much more adventuresome voyage to Alaska. Perhaps twice a year, Lucy returned for month-long sojourns in Boston, Cape Cod, and Cazenovia. Sometimes Jerome joined her and the girls.

In her journal, Lucy often complained about the heat and dust that assaulted her as she endured that long train ride back to Denver. And its treeless, gritty, striving energy tested her. More frequently in the West, she suffered from exhaustion and headaches. Lucy's heart still looked to the East while Jerome's faced west. Opportunity and

the beauty of the Rocky Mountains, where he loved to hunt, fish, and ride, captured him.

About 1896, the Jerome's began taking week or month-long vacations up the scenic canyon of the North Fork of the South Platte River, southwest of Denver. This area had been inaccessible to city dwellers till narrow gauge railroads, on their way to the rich interior mines, opened it. John and Lucy favored the tiny town then called Buffalo. It was one of about six communities in the foothills where Denver's upper crust recreated during the summers. The bustling, rough community fed Denver's relentless demand for cattle, ice and lumber. It also served as the base camp for construction of Cheeseman Dam, which stored a majority of Denver's vital water. It was completely another world, separated from Denver by the treacherous river canyon, almost the only means of access.

Jerome fell in love with the area. Lucy seems to have come to terms with it. The girls flourished. They all rode horses, enjoyed painting and photography, played music, and gathered with their friends for dances, hikes and tea. Horseback riding and roaming the hills, streams, and meadows on foot continued as passions for John.

By 1900, one hill in particular had caught the family's interest. It sat, like a protected island, between the river and Buffalo Creek. They rented a cottage there for several seasons. John referred to it as Christmas Hill, remembering a Christmas Hill or Knob in Clinton, where he had spent much time as a youth. The name stuck.

It was customary at that time for captains of industry and men of substance to build ostentatious mansions or gentlemen's retreats. John C. Osgood, president of CF&I and one of Jerome's closest associates, build Cleveholm in 1901-02. It is nestled at the foot of imposing McClure Pass, in a beautiful valley along the Crystal River, miles from the nearest town (Glenwood Springs) and Denver. Strategically, it sat near rich coal and marble deposits. He erected the sumptuous Tudor manor house up the hill from another of his creations, Redstone, a CF&I company town and the center of his coke-producing operations. For his many powerful guests, it also served to showplace his new sociological experiment in employee acculturation, benefits and control.





*Lucy Jerome with Cornelia, Katherine Hood, Janet, and Elizabeth*

In contrast, Jerome determined to build in the verdant, wild foothills, closer to Denver. After years of searching, he finally found a stunning site on the east-west ridge of Christmas Hill.

In order to own the desired home site, however, Jerome had to buy all the holdings in the Buffalo area of another successful Denver businessman, James Bailey. The purchase was finalized in early 1901. Plans for the home, to be called La Hacienda, began immediately.

He would not build it in the traditional English Tudor or garish French provincial style. It must be in appearance more reminiscent of the homes in the

Adirondacks that he and Lucy loved: comfortable, casual, open, cedar-shingle clad, with enclosed porches and windows to take advantage of the stunning views. It must combine, he thought, the refinement of the East and the wide-open feel of the West. To his delight, Lucy warmed to the idea. It would be her sanctuary, surrounded by a natural moat.

Junius Sterner, the well-known architect to Denver's wealthy elite, was engaged to design the main home, probably the servants' quarters, and a nearby home for Jerome's beloved younger sister, Irene Jerome Hood and her husband. An accomplished local builder, John Q.A. Farthing, was employed to supervise construction of these buildings plus outbuildings: a substantial barn, bunkhouse, guest house, and ice house.

In 1902, perhaps on one of many trips back to Auburn, New York, John purchased the majority of the furnishings. Among them were William Morris wallpaper from England, wall hangings, lamps and bric-a-brac in the art nouveau style, Willow pattern British plates, and ornate silverware. The showpiece was an inventory of about thirty-five pieces of furniture, produced by Gustav Stickley, who had just opened his shop in Syracuse. The order contained this Morris chair, desks, couches, a grandfather clock, and more.

The furnishings arrived by train in mid-1902. It must have been a noisy spectacle as the three narrow gauge freight cars wound their chugging way through the steep, twisting canyon. After the family and friends installed the furniture, they made a huge bonfire of the wooden crates.

The gala opening took place in July 1902. Most prominent among those who signed the guestbook was a distant cousin, William Travers Jerome. He was District Attorney of New York City and the much lionized buster of the corrupt Tammany Hall machine. There is no indication of whether John C. Osgood was invited or attended.

In 1903, John incorporated the La Hacienda properties as The Buffalo Park Association. The Articles of Incorporation make its central purpose quite clear. They read, in part:

*Be it further known that the business of The Buffalo Park Association is intended to be made subordinate to the recreation and refreshment of its stockholders and their friends, and its chief purpose shall be the encouragement of such diversions and occupations as the following:*

*Sitting in the sun.  
 Sitting in the shade.  
 Angling for trout.  
 Riding Broncos.  
 The noble game of Bridge.  
 Ping-Pong.  
 Sitting around the bon fire.  
 Playing the Banjo.  
 Singing.  
 Wading in the Brook.  
 Sleeping in the Hammock.  
 Making love.  
 Eating Green Apples.  
 Star-gazing.  
 Playing Truant.  
 Knitting in the Sun.  
 Drinking High-Balls.  
 Climbing Mountains.  
 Telling Fish Stories.  
 Building Castles in Spain.  
 Fender Fishing.  
 Hunting the Snark.  
 Going to bed after Mid-Night.  
 Rising Betimes.  
 Reading Detective Stories.  
 Wearing old Shoes.  
 Making Mud Pies.  
 Gathering wild Flowers.  
 Taking Photographs.  
 Going in Swimming.  
 Four o'clock tea.  
 Hunting Indians, Bears and Chipmunks.  
 Skating on the Pond.  
 Sketching.  
 Dancing in the Barn.  
 Doing what you Please.*

*The Association will strive for the suppression of*

*Telephones.  
 Tickers.  
 Nerves.  
 Creditors.*

*Banks.  
Newspapers.  
Dressmakers.  
Teachers and all Improvement Societies.*

*It will seek to promote idleness; will contribute to the comfort of tramps, and afford facilities for siestas and dissipation and the companionship of old books and old friends.*

*It will ever pray for safety from injury to the stockholders and their friends by wreck or other disaster while traveling the slow and perilous South Park Railway.*

*It will also endeavor by all lawful means to accomplish the death of reporters, reformers, gossips and politicians who are ever discovered on its domains.<sup>3</sup>*

Lucy, the girls, and close family had a hand in proclaiming these goals. They demonstrate a humor and love of life uncharacteristic of the mantra of the Gilded Age, but typical of this circle of friends.

Tragedy struck in 1903. Jerome's relationship with Osgood had soured. Jerome was bankrupted when the Rockefeller-Gould industrial empire absorbed CF&I. A coal strike that same year caused the shutdown of the Overland Cotton Mill. Jerome had promised his employees that he would provide them with coal during the strike. But because CF&I went into unsympathetic hands, coal was no longer available. The mill had to shut down. John L. Jerome died shortly thereafter.

Despite these tragedies (and largely because of the mettle and dedication of the family) the house, its furnishings, and the purposes of the Association have persisted through five generations. La Hacienda has been the sanctuary Lucy yearned for and the gentleman's retreat Jerome envisioned.

Many family members over five generations have dedicated time and assets to the preservation of the buildings and furnishings. Special recognition should be accorded to the following, ordered by generation:

1. John's widow Lucy, and Jerome's sister Irene and her husband;
2. Their daughter Elizabeth and her husband Richard H. Hart (who wrote the document);
3. The families of their daughter Margot Hart, their son John Lathop Jerome Hart, their son Stephen H. and daughter-in-law Lorna Rogers Hart; and
4. Stephen and Lorna's sons Richard and James side-by-side with their wives Jane and Barbara respectively.

Finally, we are deeply grateful to John Toomey and the staff of the Toomey Gallery, who (as our agents for the disposition of all the Stickley furniture) have been patient, creative, knowledgeable, and wise. It was they who suggested this gift to the Craftsman Farms Foundation.

It gives the Jerome-Hart family great pleasure to pass on to the Stickley Museum at Craftsman Farms this Gustav Stickley Morris Chair. It occupied a keystone and beloved place in La Hacienda, witness to all that went on there. Our hope is that many people will see and appreciate it for its quality, artistry, and provenance.



*Stephen H. Hart with grandson Stephen H. Hart, II in the Morris Chair.*



*Stephen H. Hart in 1988.*

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<sup>1</sup> The towering stacks of CF&I, now known as Evraz Pueblo, “a specialty product mini-mill”, can still be seen as one approaches Pueblo from any direction.

<sup>2</sup> The main buildings of the old Overland Cotton Mill, along the Platte River southwest of Denver, have been preserved by, and are now home to, Hercules Industries. The mill is on the National Historic Preservation list.

<sup>3</sup> The complete document, including minutes of corporate meetings, and many more papers, are on file in the Stephen H. Hart Library at the Colorado State History Museum, named History Colorado, in Denver.