The Pixies of Pendarvis:
History, Performance, and Queerness
in Twentieth-Century Small-Town Wisconsin

By

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For Mom and Dad

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Acknowledgements

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A place belongs forever to whoever claims it the hardest, remembers it most obsessively, wrenches it from itself, shapes it, renders it, loves it so radically that he remakes it in his own image

Joan Didion

An old man and his son, called Trenwith, who lived near Bosprenis, went out one mid-summer eve, about midnight, and watched until they saw the "Smae People" bringing up the shining ore. It is said they were possessed of some secret by which they could communicate with the fairy people….An agreement of some kind was come to. The old man and his son took the "pitch," and in a short time realised much wealth.

Robert Hunt, *Cornish Legends*

Introduction:

The Fairy People

Wisconsin's Driftless Area is a region of contradictions. Its topography of rolling hills and deep valleys makes for a beautiful and mesmerizing landscape. It is a landscape that appears to meld opposites – hill and valley – into one. Beyond topography, the uniting force of this peculiar landscape has historically brought together architects and dairymen, writers and farmers, and – the subject of this text – "fairies" and miners. Throughout much of the twentieth century, this unique corner of Southwestern Wisconsin has nurtured artists, actors, architects, and authors – many of them queer, many of them "fairies" – alongside the iconic dairy barns and corn fields most think of when they imagine rural and small-town Wisconsin. What follows is, in large part, the story of that unexpected coexistence as told through the lives of two of those remarkable queer men: Robert Neal and Edgar Hellum of Mineral Point. To begin that story, however, we must begin with the landscape.

In the opening paragraph of his 1960 novel, *The Hills Stand Watch*, the prolific and renowned mid-century Wisconsin author August Derleth provides readers with an impressive description of the region immediately surrounding the town of Mineral Point, Wisconsin. Set in the lead region of the Wisconsin Territory, the novel opens in 1844 with the return of the Cornish merchant David Pengellen along with his newly minted bride, a Yankee from Providence, Rhode Island named Candace. The stagecoach bearing the newlyweds to their new home in Mineral Point is on its way north from the regional hub of Galena, Illinois, and west from the nearby town of Platteville as it crests the ridge above their destination near the close of day.

> The afternoon of the October day was approaching the hour of sundown and twilight, and already the distances were lost in a pale, lavender haze. Along the ridge a stage moved

> steadily in a generally northeasterly direction, at a pace which suggested that its goal was not far distant, though no dwelling was in sight in all that wild country of hills and valleys. Still visible along the horizon to the southwest rose the Platte and Belmont Mounds, passed more than an hour ago – twin, rounded hills standing forth like dark, grave sentinels in a land of silence and strangeness, dominating the face of the earth at that place. An illusion of level land lay between the blue peaks and the ridge road, a tranquil country of high plateau and deep valleys, but at this hour the valleys were lost in the last sunlight lying in a soft pink and copper haze along their slopes…. In the ravines nearby, sunlight lay pooled and warm; a kind of shimmering, colorful and mystic, filled the air, but beyond, in the deep, wooded valleys between the ridges, the first dusk already flowered where sunlight and day were withdrawn. [1]

Derleth's description of Wisconsin's Driftless Area would be familiar to anyone who has visited there. In contrast to much of the rest of the state, a landscape shaped by the grinding ebb and flow of glaciers, the Driftless is a region defined by its rhythmic movement of hills and valleys. During the last ice age, as glaciers moved across what is now the state of Wisconsin, they scraped soil, rocks, and even top layers of bedrock from where the material had been deposited by thousands of years of sedimentation and volcanic action and deposited it elsewhere. This pattern of destruction and (re)creation left much of Wisconsin a mix of flat prairie landscape, small hills and moraines, pothole lakes, and exposed bedrock. In the Driftless, however, the glaciers were absent, so there was no scraping away of earth, called drift, and depositing it elsewhere. Instead, water in liquid form, often run-off from melting glaciers, was the primary geological force, leaving behind it the rhythmic pattern of "high plateau and deep valley."

In addition to its scenic topography, the geological patterns of the region also meant that the Driftless Area was home to deposits of minerals not found in large quantities in the rest of the state. Lead was a much sought-after ore in the area, even before European explorers arrived on the scene.[2] Indeed, the mining and processing of lead dominated the early settler history of the

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[1] August Derleth, *The Hills Stand Watch* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1960), 3.

[2] On this earlier history, especially the way lead shaped the respective roles of men and women in indigenous and métis communities in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, see: Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, *A Gathering of*

region, a history that developed earlier and faster than the settlement of the eastern part of the state. Once lead was "discovered" by white prospectors in the 1820s, Mineral Point became the most populated settlement in Wisconsin Territory. In the words of historian John Gurda, "Back in those years Milwaukee was just a trading post, where everyone was named Juneau, Madison [the future state capital] didn't exist, [and] Chicago was a little frontier outpost."[3] In many ways, Mineral Point was a boom town in the early part of the nineteenth century, drawing waves of newcomers to the area to harvest lead and provide goods and services to the miners. First to come in the mid- to late-1820s were the mostly male, mostly American miners who worked surface pits known as badger holes. Within the decade, however, those surface diggings had run out and a second wave of miners, many of them from England and Wales, came to the area, bringing with them knowledge of underground, hardrock mining methods. Many of these new immigrants were Cornish, from the southwestern-most county of England, and brought with them not only skills in mining below ground, but families, building styles, foodways, and folkways.[4]

One such folkway was the "Legend of the Fairy Miners." Told in any number of different iterations, the fairies, knockers, tommyknockers, smae people, or pixies, as they were alternately called, lived and worked alongside mortal men in the underground mines. Human miners would often know of the fairies' presence by the knocking sounds emanating from rock in certain parts of the mine. According to most versions of the legend, if workers left that part of

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Rivers: Indians, Métis, and Mining in the Western Great Lakes, 1737-1832 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

[3] John Gurda, "Mineral Point, *Around the Corner with John McGivern*, Wisconsin Public Broadcasting, episode 202 (originally aired January 17, 2013).

[4] For the history of early Mineral Point, see: Marie G. Dieter, Writers Program of the Work Projects Administration, *The Story of Mineral Point, 1827-1941* (1941; repr., Mineral Point: Mineral Point Historical Society, 1979); George Fiedler, *Mineral Point: A History* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1973).

the mine alone – if they left the fairies to their work and allowed them to take a small share of the ore for their own – the mine would be profitable and the miners would remain safe. If, however, miners began to dig for ore where the fairies had been working, in the areas of the mine where the pixies' knocking was audible, disaster usually followed. Sometimes it was financial collapse, the veins of ore in the mine giving out or miners drinking themselves into debt, and sometimes it was literally the collapsing of the mine. The moral of the story was clear for miners: leave the fairies, the pixies, the smae people, the knockers to their own devices – know that they are there, pay some heed to what they say, but leave them be and you will find health, well-being, and, if you are lucky, great wealth.[5]

The two men who are the subjects of this volume were mere mortals. But, they were also fairies and pixies and occasionally even labeled as such. Put in contemporary terms, the two men who are at the center of this story were queer. And much in the same way that successful Cornish miners let their fairy colleagues get on with their work unmolested, twentieth-century Mineral Pointers gave Robert Neal and Edgar Hellum similar room to live and work as they pleased. In return, the efforts of the two men helped revive a dying mining town that, by 1935, when the two men purchased what was to be the first of many stone miners' cottages, hard fallen on extremely hard times.

Most of the lead that had been dug in the region starting in the 1820s was gone by the time of the Civil War and the zinc processing industry that took its place was dismantled shortly after the turn of the century. After agricultural boom years during the First World War gave way to a glutted commodities market and overextended farmers in the 1920s, the farm service industry, the other mainstay of the Mineral Point economy, collapsed several years before the

[5] For one version of this story, see: Robert Hunt, *Cornish Legends* (Truro, Cornwall: Tor Mark Press, undated), 24-25.

rest of the country was plunged into the Great Depression. By the 1930s, then, Mineral Point was in real trouble. It would take nearly half a century, but what eventually rescued the Point's economy – or, at least, brought the town a certain degree of stability– was not industry or even agriculture, but tourism, art, and history.

At the heart of this transformation were Neal and Hellum. The ensuing pages detail the story of how these two men, who, as partners in life as well as in business, began purchasing old stone mining cottages in 1935, refurbishing the buildings, stocking them with antiques, and opening their doors to visitors who came not just (or even primarily) to buy those antiques, but to claim an "authentic" Cornish experience. This experience revolved around The Point's old houses and their unique architecture, of course, but also the "Cornish tea" and meals of Cornish pasty Neal and Hellum would serve with their own distinctive flair. Dubbed Pendarvis House after the name of a wealthy Cornish family, the partners' venture drew visitors from across the region and, especially after the Second World War, from around the country as well. Pendarvis House garnered rave reviews from food critics like Duncan Hines and Clementine Paddleford, and it appeared in national magazines like *Glamour*, *Vogue*, and *Travel Magazine*, just to name a few.[6] At one point, *The Saturday Evening Post* even listed the tiny, single-room restaurant as one of the top seven restaurants in the entire country. And such grand attention brought grand people to front door of Pendarvis House. University professors and presidents, diplomats and United Nations leaders, famous artists, architects, and literary figures all found a warm meal and even warmer hospitality at Neal and Hellum's home and place of business.[7]

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[6] "Unusual Buildings," *Travel* (September 1958); "The Romance of Staying 'Home'," *Glamour* (May 1962); "Excerpts from Two Answers to the Prix Question, 'Outline a Travel Feature for Vogue," *Vogue* (August 1955), Box 4, Edgar G. Hellum Papers, Pendarvis Historic Site, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Mineral Point, Wisconsin.

[7] Mark Knipping and Korinne K. Oberle, *On the Shake Rag: Mineral Point's Pendarvis House, 1935-1970* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1990), 39 and 34; and Will Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve: Gay Men as Keepers of Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 193-199.

Mineral Pointers thought the two men were crazy to undertake such an unsound and indulgent venture. One newspaper columnist wrote that neighbors thought Neal and Hellum were "pixilated," that is, enchanted by the pixies or *of* the pixies.[8] But over the nearly forty years that Pendarvis House was in operation, Mineral Pointers warmed to the idea of what was being presented there. Over time, it became clear that the domesticated version of their town's past that Neal and Hellum were offering up to tourists was profitable and could be a model for a town seemingly always in a precarious economic state. As a result, by 1971, nearly the entire town of Mineral Point was listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the first such listing in the state of Wisconsin, and the town had turned its attention to cultivating a burgeoning art colony and tourist trade. Visiting Mineral Point today, one finds a sleepy tourist town, anchored by the Pendarvis Historic Site, which Neal and Hellum sold to the state historical society in 1973, and proud of its distinctive stone architecture, much of which houses art galleries and studios. Walking up and down the hilly streets of town, one cannot help but see the Cornish flags in windows and flying from homes and storefronts. And, of course, there are any number of places in town where one can find pasty for sale, the food that made Pendarvis nationally famous. At its core, this is all the doing of Neal and Hellum, the fairies of Mineral Point, the pixies of Pendarvis.

Generally speaking, the work of Neal and Hellum has not been ignored. "Bob and Edgar," as they are affectionately known in town, are usually credited for saving the historic architecture of Mineral Point and making the town the tourist destination it is today. Less acknowledged, at least until recently, has been the men's queerness.[9] In tourist literature on

[8] Betty Cass, "Madison Day by Day," *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 25, 1939.

[9] The work of Will Fellows, discussed more fully below, was the first to explicitly name Neal and Hellum as queer men in 2004. The partners' relationship is also briefly discussed in Eve Studnika's feature-length film about the artists of Mineral Point, *Of Some Fair Place*. That relationship was given center stage – literally – with the play *Ten*

Mineral Point, for instance, the business partnership of the two men is almost always mentioned. The ambiguity of the word "partner," however, makes their more personal relationship implicit or even invisible.[10] This live-and-let-live attitude when it came to questions of Neal and Hellum's queerness for Mineral Pointers serves an example of what historian John Howard calls the "heterosexual-will-to-not-know," a sort of "quiet accommodation" that historically has allowed queer people to coexist with their straight neighbors in rural and small-town spaces.[11] It is also an example of the toleration – though not necessarily acceptance – historian Colin R. Johnson sees as an important part of the history of the rural and small-town village eccentric.[12] Neal and Hellum were decidedly eccentric, but, for Mineral Point, that eccentricity turned out to be economically useful just as the town was nearing rock bottom.

While many in town, especially those who were friends with the two men, knew of their more intimate partnership, that relationship remained largely unspoken until historian Will Fellows published his book, *A Passion to Preserve: Gay Men as Keepers of Culture*, including a small section on Neal, Hellum, and their restoration project at Pendarvis. Relying largely on interviews and personal narratives, Fellows seeks to highlight "the extraordinary and pioneering involvement of gay men in historic preservation."[13] His goal is to place queer men alongside

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Dollar House, written by Rick Kinnebrew and Martha Meyer. *Ten Dollar House* was staged fully for the first time in Mineral Point in April 2016, having been staged previously in Madison and Evanston, Illinois. Fellows, *Passion to Preserve*; Eve Studnika, *Of Some Fair Place*, premiered November 7, 2013, Mineral Point Opera House; Rick Kinnebrew and Martha Meyer, *Ten Dollar House*, Broom Street Theater, Madison, Wisconsin, April 11, 2015, and Mineral Point Opera House, May 15, 2016.

[10] See, e.g., *Mineral Point: Art, Architecture, Ambience*, Mineral Point Chamber of Commerce Directory and Visitors Guide, 2013 and 2016 (also at mineral point.com); and *Pendarvis Self-Guided Tour Pamphlet*, 2013, 2015, and 2016, and pendarvishistoricsite.org.

[11] John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), esp. xvi.

[12] Colin R. Johnson, *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), esp. 108-128.

[13] Fellows, x.

women at the vanguard of historic preservation. Fellows sees queer men as attracted to preservation because of their innate character, as archetype, rather than stereotype. As he writes:

> If outside of our sex lives we gays are just like straights, then it must be only a stereotypical illusion that gay men are inordinately drawn to being house restorers and antiquarians – or interior designers, florists, hair stylists, fashion designers, and so forth. Rather than dismissing these realities as the stuff of stereotype, I see them as the stuff of archetype, significant truths worthy of exploration…. It's a phenomenon that seems to grow out of an essential gay difference."[14]

In this way, Fellow's argument is an essentialist one, one that sees queerness as an innate and unchanging way of being across time, place, and culture. Fellows and I come to similar conclusions about the work of Neal and Hellum. But the following study is decidedly not an essentialist one.

Driven by contemporary understandings of rural and small-town space as incompatible with, hostile to, and even violent toward queerness, I seek to situate Neal and Hellum's story within the rapidly changing understandings and treatments of same-sex desire in the twentieth century U.S. I do so in order to explain how Neal and Hellum were able to accomplish the things they did –not only carve out a space for themselves, but also to spread their gospel of preservation to the entire town. By examining these contexts more closely, I aim to show how Neal and Hellum leveraged their queerness in different ways in different contexts, showing how, for example, the partners utilized the pansy craze of the 1930s and carefully navigated the shifting understandings of queerness during both World War II and its immediate aftermath.

My goal is to add an important perspective to the small, but growing, scholarship and historiography on queerness outside of urban centers.[15] As Johnson identifies it, the "Rural

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[14] Ibid, x.

[15] Some of the key works in queer history and queer studies that centrally address queerness and rural space include Howard, *Men Like That*; Will Fellows, *Farm Boys: Lives of Gay Men from the Rural Midwest* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996); *De-Centering Sexualities: Politics and Representations Beyond the Metropolis*,

Turn" in queer history and queer studies more broadly began in the early to mid-1990s. Arguably, this turn started with the anthropologist Kath Weston, whose study of lesbian and gay male transplants to San Francisco revealed the false narrative of what she terms the "Great Gay Migration." What Weston discovered through participant interviews was that the promise of the Great Gay Migration held out to rural and small-town queer folks – promises of community, freedom, and belonging in the big city – generally went unfulfilled. For Weston's participants, the city turned out not to be the promised land, but a space run through with the same social exclusions of race, class, and gender found elsewhere.[16]

Queer theorist J. Jack Halberstam expanded on Weston's critique of the Great Gay Migration by introducing the concept and the critique of metronormativity. For Halberstam, metronormativity is the conflation of urban space with visibility, community, and freedom from oppression and violence. It is also, then, the mythologization of rural and small-town space "by urban queers as sad and lonely, [a place where] rural queers might be thought of as 'stuck' in a place that they would leave if they only could."[17] In this way, according to Halberstam, metronormativity comes to be mapped onto the notion of coming out, meaning that sexuality simultaneously becomes a spatialized concept. In other words, if rural and small-town space is a space of invisibility, oppression, and hostility, one must leave this physical place for the visible,

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ed. Richard Phillips, Diane Watt and David Shuttleton (London: Routledge, 2000); Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Pres, 2003), and *Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Mary L. Gray, *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Brock Thompson, *The Un-Natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2010); Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Colin R. Johnson, *Just Queer Folks*; and Mary L. Gray, Colin R. Johnson, and Brian J. Gilley, eds., *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

[16] Kath Weston, "Get Thee to a Big City: Sexual Imaginary and the Great Gay Migration," *Long Slow Burn: Sexuality and Social Science* (Routledge: New York, 1998), 29-56.

[17] J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press), 36.

free, and welcoming site of the urban center – one must "come out" of the closet of the country by moving to the city. In response to this formulation, then, Halberstam and others demonstrate the queer possibilities and experiences to be found in rural and small-town spaces both past and present.

For Johnson, the critique of metronormativity formulated by Halberstam has fueled much of the work of the rural turn of which this study is a part, but it has also stalled the field as well. As he writes, "Although openly acknowledging urban-centeredness as an analytic limitation among others has become a common maneuver in scholarship dealing with gender and sexuality, the number of books and articles that actually manage to move beyond this gesture of self-qualification to deal explicitly with same-sex sexual behavior and gender nonconformity in rural and small-town contexts remains small."[18] While this study participates in this critique and uses Halberstam's theory to challenge the dominance of urban-centered historiography, I also work to move beyond the critique and answer Johnson's call, at least in part, not only to examine queerness in rural spaces more closely but also to challenge the categories of rural and urban themselves.[19] In this way, throughout the text I highlight the complicated circulation of queer individuals, desires, and dollars that traverse boundaries between rural and urban spaces. This circulation, at times even crossing international borders, muddies the already arbitrary distinctions between these spaces, blurring their difference and queering their taken-for-granted status.[20]

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[18] Johnson, *Just Queer Folks*, 9.

[19] On this call, see Johnson, 10; and "Introduction," in Gray, Johnson, and Gilley, *Queering the* Countryside, 1-21.

[20] As terms meant to describe fixed spaces, "rural" and "urban" become troublingly slippery as one begins to explore their different applications. As Johnson shows, for example, the meaning of the terms depends on their context and can convey anything from simple demographics to ideas of political and cultural difference. See Johnson, 10-17

I explore this circulation in spite of fixing the study on two specific individuals and in one specific place. Indeed, taking such a focused approach helps to reveal these very circulations while also highlighting the rootedness of Neal and Hellum's story within those circulations and networks. Such an approach sets this project apart from much the historiography of rural queerness, which is often regional in approach and broader in focus. As Johnson points out, Howard's *Men Like That*, while rightly held out as an early and foundational text in the rural turn, is more specifically (and billed as such) a queer history of the South more generally. As such, his text is as less about queer life in rural Mississipppi and more centrally concerned with queer life in Jackson and its circulation beyond the capital city. One reason for this broader regional focus is the that Howard's archives, and those of other historians of rural and small-town queerness, are often broad and regional in focus as well. The problem of the archive has long been a challenge for queer historians of all stripes. Police and court records, medical and psychological commentary, community organizing documents, and oral histories have long been the mainstay of those researching and writing queer history. These sources also tend to be produced and housed in and focused on urban spaces. When scholars leverage such documents to address queerness in rural spaces, their studies often mirror the scope of their archives.

By contrast, my work relies on a unique set of archives, most of which have been explored by only a handful of researchers, none of whom have dedicated a book-length project to their interpretation. Neal and Hellum were, first and foremost, collectors. They collected antique objects, old buildings, recipes, the history of Mineral Point and the Wisconsin lead region, and, crucially for this project, their own records. Their papers reside in two different archives, took two different routes to get to their respective repositories, and, as a result,

generally provide two different perspectives on the same story. Neal's papers are housed in the Mineral Point Public Library. In his retirement, Neal organized and donated his personal papers and a large collection of local and regional history he had amassed while at Pendarvis House.[21] It is important that Neal curated and donated this collection himself. From Neal's archive, we get a thorough picture of Neal and Hellum's public life and the public presentation of Pendarvis House. That is not to say that the partners' more private and intimate lives are hidden from view in this archive, but the queerness of Neal, Hellum, and Pendarvis tends to be much more implicit; it lives between the lines of the sizable collection of business correspondence, newspaper clippings, and miscellaneous items ranging from advertising pamphlets for caulking compound used on one of the cottages to Neal's baby book and the remnants of his first haircut.

If Neal's papers largely represent the public story of the partners and of Pendarvis – the story Neal wanted the public to know – Hellum's papers, currently housed at the Pendarvis Historical Site – offer us a much more private and intimate glance into the partners' lives.[22] This different perspective is due, in large part, to the fact that Hellum's papers apparently were not personally curated. The collection was donated to the Pendarvis Historical Site sometime after Hellum's death in 2000 and remains unedited. While the collection includes some of the same or similar newspaper clippings and publicity pieces, for instance, it also includes private financial records of Pendarvis and a variety of personal correspondence. Of the latter, the most fascinating correspondence in the collection is a set of over fifty letters written by Hellum to

[21] Neal's collection forms the nucleus of an impressive archive of material detailing the history of Mineral Point and the surrounding lead region. The archival reading room, perhaps fittingly housed in the old city council chambers, is a boon for genealogists especially.

[22] According to site director, Tamara Funk, the site is housing these papers temporarily before depositing them with the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives in Madison. Funk wants to organize and catalog the collection before sending it to its final home. I greatly appreciate Funk's willingness to allow me access to these materials while they were being cataloged.

Neal when the two lived apart during the Second World War. These documents can only be described as love letters, as they are all signed as such. They give a striking, and explicit, look into the partners' intimate lives as well as the larger queer networks of which the two men were a part. By placing these two archives in conversation with each other – the latter having been examined only by one other scholar – I begin to answer Johnson's call to move beyond critiques of metronormativity and the identification of queer folks in rural spaces, to a closer, more explicit exploration of queer lives in rural and small-town places.

I also look to a variety of queer theory and theorists to better understanding those more private and intimate lives of Neal and Hellum. In addition to using Halberstam's theory of metronormativity to frame my discussion of queerness and rural and small-town spaces, I also engage a number of queer theories of time. Building on the work of Halberstam, Elizabeth Freeman, and Lee Edelman, I demonstrate how Neal and Hellum's desire to preserve the history and the material objects of the past were an effect not of an essential difference, as Fellows argues, but of their social position outside of a culturally-defined temporal paradigm of heterosexual reproduction. In other words, instead of orienting themselves and their project toward the future, toward future generations that require heterosexual reproduction to maintain, Neal and Hellum embraced a queer temporality that looked to the past as a source of meaning, pleasure, and being. By engaging questions of queer temporality, this study both challenges Fellows' essentialist archetype of the gay male preservationist and pushes the rural turn of queer history into new theoretical terrain beyond questions of space and place.

Finally, as much of this study revolves around not only the place of Mineral Point but also the complex of stone and wood cottages Neal and Hellum purchased and restored, I see my work making several small, but important, interventions into additional areas of scholarship. For

one, it brings the study of material culture to bear on the rural turn of queer history. While much of the existing scholarship has examined either specific places or institutions, my study goes further, to examine the material objects – the cottages and the antiques, for example – that were part of Neal and Hellum's queer project.[23] Doing so, again, helps move this study beyond a critique of metronormativity to examine the day-to-day lives of Neal and Hellum and the very rootedness of their story.

Additionally, such a place-based approach to studying the queer past also brings Neal and Hellum's story into conversation with environmental history. While environmental history as a field has incorporated race, gender, and class as analytic categories, sexuality – especially queer sex and sexuality –remains largely absent from scholarship.[24] By tracing the way an extractive economy in the geologically anomalous Driftless Region both laid the groundwork for and was replaced by a tourist economy with a queer story at its heart, I hope to gesture at some of the ways sexuality might be further incorporated into discussions of environmental history.

Finally, this study urges readers to interrogate the ways in which the queer past comes to be interpreted – or not – in public history venues like the Pendarvis Historical Site. As I explain in the conclusion, specifically, Neal and Hellum's story *is* told at Pendarvis – just not the *whole*

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[23] Thompson, for example, focuses on resort towns in Arkansas, while Howard examines institutions like the church, home, and school, but neither scholar fully addresses the materiality of these sites. Thompson, *The Un-Natural State*; and Howard, *Men Like That*.

[24] There is some work in environmental history that examines the intersections of sex and sexuality with the environment, but very little in the way of intersections of queerness and the landscape. Ecocriticism, on the other hand, has utilized queer theory and queer literary studies and might offer one way for environmental history to more fully address questions of queerness. This study also hopes to add insight to those same questions. For works that explore heterosexual sex and sexuality and the environment, see, e.g. Nancy Langston, *Toxic Bodies: Hormone Disruptors and the Legacy of DES* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Courtney L. Wiersema, "A Fruitful Plain: Fertility on the Tallgrass Prairie, 1810-1860," *Environmental History* 16, no. 4 (2001): 678-699; Gabriel N. Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). On the subject of queerness in ecocriticism, see, e.g., Timothy Morton, "Queer Ecology," *PMLA* 125, no. 2 (2010): 273-281, and Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, eds., *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

story. How, this study asks, should queerness be incorporated into the public interpretation of sites like Pendarvis? More particularly, how can a site like Pendarvis share with visitors the complexity of Neal and Hellum's story within the nuanced context of the history of sexuality, without falling back onto essentialist, universalizing, and archetypal understandings of queerness?

A brief discussion of terminology in this study seem useful here. "Queer" is a term that fills the text that follows – perhaps to a fault. I use queer throughout not as an umbrella term for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and even Transgender (LGBT). Nonetheless, these are all contemporary terms that mark sexual and gender identities that would have been largely unintelligible to Neal, Hellum, and those around them during the early decades of this story. In this way, I use the term in part to highlight the shifting understandings of queerness as the meanings and terms ascribed to same-sex desire and behavior changed over the years examined here. Moreover, I also use the term in its oppositional form – as that which is outside of or in opposition to the normative. In this way, I use "queer" to name not only same-sex desire and behavior, but actions that place their actors outside of normative gender relations, for example, or outside dominant patterns of capitalism. On the one hand, this more expansive definition may appear to dilute or blur the distinctiveness of "queer." On the other hand, at its core the term itself is about resisting or, at least, challenging definitional boundaries, such that a more expansive understanding of the term might be considered, in itself, queer.[25]

In presenting this study, I have chosen to organize chapters only roughly chronologically. While each chapter generally moves forward in time through Neal and Hellum's story, the

[25] For an overview of the development of the use of "queer" in academic literature, see Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); and Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

narrative also diverges from a strict, linear march through the decades. Each chapter, instead, focuses on developing a particular element of the argument and, thus, moves both backward and forward through time as it examines that particular theme in depth. Chapters one and two, for example, both examine the period in Neal and Hellum's lives before they met in 1934. At the same time, each chapter examines a particular theme that is then carried through the rest of the project. In chapter one, for instance, I explore the youth and young adult life of Neal, while also arguing that his early regional, national, and international travels, and his correspondence with others back home, challenge sharp divides between rural and urban space and, therefore, understandings of differences between rural and urban queerness. In this chapter I suggest, instead, that paying attention to the circulation of queerness among and across boundaries of rural and urban provides us with a view of queerness that does not start in urban space and then trickle out into the rural, but is already in rural locales from the start.

Similarly, the second chapter looks at the early life of Neal's partner, Hellum, also during the period before the two met in 1934. Thematically, this chapter steps away from a focus on space – although it still traces a similar sort of circulation – and looks more closely at the concept of time and its connections to queerness in the twentieth century. More specifically, I look to the connections between queerness and antique objects. Tracing the story of Hellum and his mentor Ralph Warner, I argue that Hellum, Warner, and others invoked a sort of privileged access to a queer time. That is, these individuals were not wed to a heteronormative temporal regime oriented toward the future – specifically future generations and children – but embodied the possibility of looking back and, indeed, dedicating one's life to the objects of the past. In this chapter, I show how this brought Hellum and his mentor Warner together, as it did Neal and his mentor Gundry. And through a "married antique" in the possession of Neal and Hellum, I show

how antiques and queer time developed an entire queer family tree that resulted in Neal and Hellum's meeting and the birth of their historically-oriented project at Pendarvis House.

Building upon the importance of material objects to queer time and the Pendarvis House project, chapter three explores how the Pendarvis site buildings as well as a set of extant letters between Neal and Hellum bring together notions of queer circulation and queer time. Looking specifically at the presence in Neal and Hellum's lives of a secret queer benefactor from Chicago, Mr. X, I explore the ways in which Neal and Hellum were part of a much larger network of queer individuals and how not only people, but money, ideas, and desire flowed through these networks. In contrast to other historians who have explored the ephemerality of "epistolary networks," I argue that the networks of which Neal and Hellum were a part were distinctly place-based and built around locations dedicated to a queer temporal regime that looked to the past. Put another way, for Neal and Hellum, their queerness was ancillary to but rooted in Mineral Point and in the physical and material place of Pendarvis.

Chapter four returns more centrally to the concept of queer time, combining that idea with notions of queer domesticity to show how and why Neal and Hellum specifically embraced the history of Cornish immigration to Mineral Point. In this chapter I argue that the partners relied on particular myths of Cornish domestic life to imbue their business and restoration project with both an air of legitimacy and a sense of queer performance that made Pendarvis House at once a legitimate enterprise and a slightly exotic getaway. I also examine the growing number of artists the partners drew to Mineral Point, a trickle in the first years of operation that turned to a flood by the 1970s and ushered in the town's first art colonies. By exploring both Neal and Hellum's queer performance of domesticity at Pendarvis House and the growing number of

artists drawn to the area, this chapter builds on the previous one by showing how Neal and Hellum curated, lived, and expanded upon the queer nature of their undertaking at Pendarvis.

The fifth and final chapter takes Neal and Hellum's story up to the temporal end of Pendarvis House and the beginning of the Wisconsin State Historical Society's Pendarvis Historical Site. I place the life-long work of Neal and Hellum within the larger context of the history of historic preservation in the U.S. Echoing the work of Fellows, I seek to place the partners, as queer men, alongside the well-documented presence of women in the preservation movement. Unlike Fellows, however, I also place Neal and Hellum's story within the larger context of the history of sexuality, particularly focusing on the difficulty the two men had in garnering support from city hall as they worked to spread their gospel of preservation to the whole of Mineral Point. As such, this chapter demonstrates the limits of Neal and Hellum's queer project, especially as it faced resistance in the post-war decades.

Finally, my conclusion brings us into the present as it explores the Pendarvis site through the lens of public history. Specifically, I look briefly at questions of interpretation at the present Pendarvis site, asking to what extent Neal and Hellum's queerness should be a part of the story shared with visitors. Although I provide no direct answers to these questions, the conclusion does gesture at how public history needs to engage more accurately with the nuance and, indeed, the queerness, of the history of sexuality. In this way, I demonstrate how a more thorough and rigorous study of Neal and Hellum's work – involving histories of sexuality and queer theory, amongst other bodies of scholarship – might prove useful for public historians.

August Derleth's literary description of Mineral Point and its surrounding landscape is, in many ways, a description of a contradictory landscape. It is a landscape made up of high ridges and deep valleys, of terrain that is at the same time "tranquil country" and "wild country,"

and scenery that is simultaneously bathed in “shimmering, colorful and mystic” sunlight and plunged into the flowering dusk, “dark [and] grave.” The story of Neal and Hellum in Mineral Point is also, in many ways, a story of contradictions. The queerness of the two men was there for all to see, though many chose not to see it. The project they brought into being existed at the margins of Mineral Point for much of its early life, but is celebrated as a cornerstone of the town’s past, present, and future. The history the partners championed at Pendarvis depended upon normative forms of domesticity but was performed in such a way as to queer that normative past. And as much as their queer networks circulated through major urban centers, their relationship, their desire, and their very queerness were rooted solidly in the small town of Mineral Point. The story of the pixies of Pendarvis, the fairies of Mineral Point, is as complicated and shifting as the terrain of the Driftless Region itself. My hope is that the following pages bring some of this terrain out of the “lavender haze” of the past and into the sunlight of the present, “pooled and warm.”

Chapter 1

Queer Travels, Queer Beginnings

In the early days of September, 1933, Robert Neal sent a letter to his hometown of Mineral Point, Wisconsin, and his friend and mentor William Gundry. Neal wrote from London's fashionable Mayfair District in the West End, where he worked at a shop owned and operated by the high-end interior designer Syrie Maugham. Neal's family and friends had long noticed, and even nurtured, Neal's aestheticism, what some called his love of beautiful things. As a young adult, this was a love that included a rather queer passion for antique furniture and interior design.[1] This passion led Neal to work for Maugham, who was well known for using antique and reproduction pieces in her strikingly modern designs, but it was also a passion that remained largely frustrated, as Neal never did much actual design work, despite such an opportunity being "held out…as the inducement" for him to leave the United States for London.[2] Instead, Neal reported that he was "reduced to doing the mere cleaning, and as I have been doing the past week, working on the stock book and card files and other nasty jobs as filing boxes of old letters that have been gathering for 8 and 10 years."[3]

Not all of Neal's passions were as stymied, however. As a queer man, Neal found London exhilarating. Historian Matt Houlbrook describes 1930s London as a "site of vibrant,

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[1] As elaborated later in this chapter, Neal's aestheticism and love of beautiful things is a trait mentioned in nearly every extant letter to Neal from his mother's childhood friend, "Aunt" Marion Hurd McNeely. It is, in many ways, a way for McNeely to tacitly acknowledge Neal's queerness and urge him on in his pursuit of what he loves. See, e.g., Marion Hurd McNeely to Robert Neal, March 6, 1924, Robert M. Neal Papers, Mineral Point Public Library, Mineral Point, Wisconsin. [Hereafter cited as Robert M. Neal Papers].

[2] On Maughm's designs, see, Pauline Metcalf, *Syrie Maughm: Staging Glamorous Interiors* (New York: Acanthus Press, 2010), 29. On Neal's frustration, see, Robert Neal to William Gundry, September 8, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.

[3] Neal to Gundry, September 8, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.

extensive, and diverse queer urban culture. Overlapping social worlds took hold in parks, streets, and urinals; in pubs, restaurants, and dancehalls; in Turkish baths; in furnished rooms and lodging houses."[4] And if the letters between Neal and Gundry from this period are any indication, Neal took full advantage of a number of these venues and social world, using his time in London – and New York and Chicago before that – to explore and shape his queer sexuality and queer identity. Neal met young men in music halls, traveled the English countryside with his companions, and spent his fair share of time in and around Hyde Park and the nearby Marble Arch, two of the heaviest queer cruising areas in the West End, if not all of London.[5]

Yet, if Hyde Park was an important part of the geography of queer London, for Neal it was also a reminder of home. "Fall is fast coming on here," he wrote, "as the leaves are well colored and a lot of them completely off the trees. Hyde Park is almost covered with the dead leaves and the air has that decided Fall smell. How I like Fall, and I think that I like it because is seems to make me a bit sad." While Neal was not explicit about what fueled his sadness, we are given the sense that, despite the good times he was having in London, he also longed to return to the rolling hills of his boyhood home in rural southwest Wisconsin. "I do want to get down to Dorking and around Box Hill again, [a wooded area west of London] when the leaves are turned," he wrote, "just as I always want to get up around the [Wisconsin] river and [Frank Lloyd] Wright's at the same time of year."[6]

As the fall colors in Hyde Park turned Neal's thoughts toward home, so too did his ongoing financial and employment woes. At four pounds a week – which Neal claimed was only

[4] Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 3.
[5] Ibid., 54; Neal to Gundry, September 19, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[6] Neal to Gundry, September 8, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.

enough to live on, and not enough for savings or luxuries like the clothes he had hoped to purchase – and with no promotion in sight, Neal was beginning to weigh other options. One of those options was to quit interior design and return home to Mineral Point. He wrote:

> As I feel sometimes, and I have been feeling … a lot the last few weeks, I should love to get out of this profession completely and have a decided change…. I really feel that a good rest is the thing that I need[,] and outdoor work and labor, as I am sure it would do me no end of good. Had I the funds I should buy my house on Shakerag and work in getting that in shape. I think that would get all this out of my system.[7]

As he invokes a set of ideals about rural life, as a space of revivifying labor, Neal goes on to ask of Gundry, "Would you suggest a rest, change of work, or what? I hope that you will be frank in telling me what you think as you know you are the only one that I take up such things with." Unfortunately, Gundry's reply is absent from the archive, but we do know what Neal ultimately did. Despite his love of queer life in London, he returned home. He went home and, with the man he would meet in 1934, bought his "house on Shakerag" and began a project that put those ideals to the test. That project would ultimately come to define his life and remake his hometown.

The chapter that follows is, in many ways, a travel narrative. On the one hand, it is a narrative of Neal's physical and geographic travel – from Mineral Point, Wisconsin, to Chicago, to New York, to London, and then back again. But it is also a narrative about the presence and movement of queerness across space. Much like Neali's circular migration out of and then back into rural space, this chapter traces the ways queerness traversed boundaries between the rural and the urban. It uses Neal's travels to help articulate the various circuits that queer people and knowledge of queer life followed as these individuals and ideas moved across space and changed over time. Ultimately, the purpose of this narrative is to argue for the presence of queerness – of

[7] Neal to Gundry, September 8, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.

queer individuals and networks – in non-urban spaces by suggesting that while Neal's queer identity was honed through his urban adventures, that queer subjectivity began in Mineral Point. It began with his family and their support of Neal's queer interests in antiques and interior design, among other less-than-normatively-masculine pursuits. It also began with Will Gundry, a well-traveled queer man himself, who tutored Neal in the ways of queer life at home and in the big city. Moreover, beyond simply a starting point, Mineral Point served as an important node in the circulation of queerness Neal experienced, because the small town continued to serve Neal as a place of knowledge, desire, and community even while he found queer life in the queer urban metropolis. For Neal, the two spaces were inextricably linked such that distinctions between them – different ideas about their inherent queer potential – begin to blur and the dividing line between rural and urban becomes less clear.

This emphasis on the presence and circulation of queerness in and through rural space counters dominant cultural and scholarly narratives about the possibility of queer existence outside of urban enclaves. Such narratives, which underwrite and inform much of the work on queerness across a variety of disciplines, embody and embolden what queer theorist J. Jack Halberstam has dubbed "metronormativity." As Halberstam writes:

> The metronormative narrative maps a story of migration onto the coming-out narrative. While the story of coming out tends to function as a temporal trajectory within which a period of disclosure follows a long period of repression, the metronormative story of migration from "country" to "town" is a spatial narrative within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution, and secrecy.[8]

[8] Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 36. Julie Abraham makes a less theoretical argument for the way in which Western literature has solidified the metronormative relationship between the urban and the queer. Julie Abraham, *Metropolitan Lovers: The Homosexuality of Cities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

Indeed, when it comes to questions of queer history, the rural landscape is most often ignored and, when it is addressed, it usually follows metronormative conventions and is assumed to be backward, homophobic, and oppressive – a place from which queer people must flee. Despite a "rural turn" within queer history and queer studies, the scholarship on queerness in rural spaces remains limited.[9] This chapter is a first step in building upon and expanding the rural turn of queer scholarship, as it explores the various and inextricable threads in Neal's queer life, both urban and rural.

In order to emphasize this dual development of Neal's queer subjectivity – its simultaneously rural and urban elements – the narrative here is not linear, or for that matter, even circular. Instead, this chapter follows Neal through his big city travels while simultaneously looking back to Mineral Point. This back-and-forth movement is intended to disrupt the notion that Neal's move to urban space was, somehow, an escape from the rural, or that his return was, in any way, a failure. Neal was unquestionably changed by the six years he lived away from Mineral Point, but his queer identity – even while abroad – was also very much of that place and would ultimately find its greatest and most lasting expression there.

[9] Some key works in queer history and queer studies that centrally address queerness and rural space include John Howard, *Men Like That: A Queer Southern History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Will Fellows, *Farm Boys: Lives of Gay Men from the Rural Midwest* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996); *De-Centering Sexualities: Politics and Representations Beyond the Metropolis*, ed. Richard Phillips, Diane Watt and David Shuttleton (London: Routledge, 2000); Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Pres, 2003), and, *Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Mary L. Gray, *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Brock Thompson, *The Un-Natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2010); Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Colin R. Johnson, *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).

Syrie Maugham, the Miracle Mile, and Manhattan

Neal first went to work for Syrie Maugham in 1928.[10] He left his father and two younger siblings and his small, but comfortable, home in the quiet, rolling hills of southwest Wisconsin to begin his brief, but formative, career with the elite English designer. Neal's first assignment was at Syrie's Chicago shop, situated on one of the most luxurious and decidedly urban spaces in the Midwest – Chicago's premiere commercial strip, the Magnificent Mile. While Maugham had been selling antiques at the Chicago Antiques Fair since 1926, she waited until 1928 to open her own private place of business on that coveted stretch of Michigan Avenue.[11] In early April of that year, Neal replaced an "English man" whom manager Cornelia Conger was letting go and began his interior decorating career at a salary of $110 monthly, or about $1,500 in today's dollar.[12]

Neal had been on the lookout for an interior decorating job since graduating high school in 1923, and he enlisted family and friends in Mineral Point and surrounding communities to help him in that regard. In 1925, for example, he received a letter from his maternal aunt, Nellie Moser, in Dubuque, Iowa, about forty miles southwest of Mineral Point. Marie McDonald, an acquaintance of Aunt Nellie, had heard of a possible opening with a Mr. Darwin in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Never quite trusting Neal to make what she saw as the right decisions, Nellie noted that "[Marie] thought it might be a good thing for your father to come too. Now of course this is

[10] There is some confusion in the secondary literature regarding Neal's starting date. In some of his own recollections, Neal claims he started with Maugham in 1929; see, e.g., Gerald McKnight, *The Scandal of Syrie Maugham* (London: W.H.Allen, 1980), 142. The primary sources (and the secondary literature that relies more directly on them), however, clearly show that Neal began work with Maugham just after Easter in 1928.
[11] Metcalf, 53, 60
[12] Nancy Campbell to Robert Neal, March 26, 1928; Cornelia Conger to Robert Neal, April 2, 1928, Robert M. Neal Papers. Historical conversions of monetary value are based on 2012 U.S. dollars and made using the website measuringworth.com, accessed 3-19-2014.

nothing definite but it sounds good to us if there is an opening. [Marie] is certainly very kind and is doing more than anyone to get you into the work you would like."[13] By all accounts, the meeting never took place. Nonetheless, Neal clearly had the support of Aunt Nelly, and she and other family members and friends would continue to keep an eye open for potential positions. Neal's big break was yet to come.

The break came in early 1928 with help from William Gundry's niece, Nancy Campbell, of Chicago. As luck would have it, on March 26 Campbell had lunch with Maugham's Chicago manager, Cornelia Conger. Business was on the docket of discussion, and when Conger asked if Campbell knew of anyone to replace the employee Conger was about to fire, Campbell could think of no one else: "I immediately thought of you," she wrote to Neal that same day.[14] Despite the seeming glamour of a possible position in the firm owned by Syrie Maugham, the position itself was strictly entry level and anything but glamorous. Campbell wrote:

> The work as she outlined it to me, would be general handy work. You would have to be there at 8:55 in the morning – wash the windows sweep the dust, move furniture, wax furniture, mend loose veneer, etc. Help with shipments unpacking and arranging. Go on errand[s] – to [the] bank, etc….As you are interested in furniture and interior decorating, you would get a wonderful education that way, which would open other avenues for you. As Miss Conger will take infinite pains, with anybody truly interested.[15]

Neal was truly interested. His only employment experience to date was as an assistant in a florist's greenhouse in Mineral Point, so Neal jumped at the opportunity to work with Maugham – at least in name – under the bright lights of Chicago.[16] And he must have made an impression. By March 30 – two days later – he had the job, and by mid-April, Neal was in Chicago.[17] He rented an apartment at 61 Cedar Street, less than a block from the intersection of Michigan

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[13] Nellie Moser to Robert Neal, August 29, 1925, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[14] Campbell to Neal, March 26, 1928, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[15] Ibid.
[16] McKnight, 142.
[17] Campbell to Neal, March 31, 1928, Robert M. Neal Papers.

Avenue, Lakeshore Drive, and the Lake Michigan shorefront, and immersed himself in the world of Syrie Maugham's designs.[18]

Maugham had already made a name for herself in England, opening her first shop in London in 1922. As a decorator she was perhaps best known for creating a fashion out of the all-white room. In reality, however, she only created one such space – in her own home – and she was not the only, or even the first, to use white as a design element. Still, in the words of author Richard B. Fisher, she was the most "single-minded champion" of the color, and "in varying shades, tonalities and textures…[it] was clearly central to her revolution."[19] This was certainly true in the way that she approached the treatment of furniture, rugs, and other design pieces. While she would occasionally leave dark furniture or other elements in place as an accent, more often than not – as part of a general 1920s affront to tradition – her workmen would use paint, bleach, or a chemical process known as pickling to alter the appearance of antique and reproduction pieces. Maugham's prodigious use of mirrors and mirrored surfaces – everything from screens to picture frames to mantel pieces – in lieu of dark landscape or portrait paintings helped echo and amplify the clean lines and colors of the spaces she created.[20] As a whole, her accomplishment was to alter and mix and match furniture and fabrics of different eras and styles to create a modern tasteful look that – while not always white – was bright, fresh, clean, and uncluttered. In the words of author Pauline C. Metcalf, Maugham's amalgamations worked to dispel the tradition and "the darkness of the Victorian Era" with a "theatrical quality of glamour and luxury."[21]

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[18] See, for example: H.L. Pansom to Robert Neal, September 2, 1930, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[19] Richard B. Fisher, *Syrie Maugham* (London: Duckworth, 1978), 24.
[20] Ibid., 28-30.
[21] Metcalf, 58, 11.

Maugham's personal life was as often as "modern" and as public as her designs. In 1929, for example, during Neal's second year in Chicago, Maugham and her husband – the "notoriously homosexual" W. Somerset Maugham – filed for divorce in France.[22] Their marriage was, in many ways, a marriage of convenience. According to Metcalf, Syrie believed that conceiving a child with Somerset was the only the way to obtain a divorce from her first husband, the pharamaceutical magnate Henry Wellcome. Syrie was also on the lookout for new markets and connections, and saw an opportunity in becoming "the wife of one of her generation's most brilliant literary figures. As for Willie, he wanted a hostess who knew the London social scene, as well as a cover for his homosexual preferences."[23] Syrie reportedly knew not only of Somerset's sexuality but also the names of several of his male partners, including the American ambulance driver, Gerald Haxton, whom Somerset met in Flanders during World War I. Haxton would become Somerset's "traveling companion, secretary, and lover" until the latter died some thirty years later.[24] Syrie's personal relationships unquestionably bucked tradition, but they also afforded her access to the wealth and social connections that allowed her to become one of the "*grande dames* of interior decoration in the first half of the 20th century."[25] Neal was certainly in high company.

Indeed, these social connections – especially with the retail magnate Gordon Selfridge and the cosmetic guru Elizabeth Arden – helped Maugham launch her expansion into the U.S. Soon after her successful opening in Chicago, where Maugham's was employed by individuals

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[22] McKnight, 7.
[23] Ibid., 21-22.
[24] Haxton, however, could not visit England after 1915. That year he was charged with (but not convicted of) gross indecency after being discovered having sex with another man. As a result, he was deported. This was part of the same law – Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment of 1885 – that was so infamously used against Oscar Wilde in 1895. Wilde unlike Haxton, of course, was convicted. Ibid., 20-21.
[25] Ibid., 11.

with names like Rockefeller and McCormick (the latter's wealth accumulated in the sale of McCormick Reapers), her American expansion continued with the opening of a shop in New York City in 1929.[26] The shop was ideally located in Midtown Manhattan on East 57th Street, between the fashionable 5th and Madison Avenues.[27] Neal first went to work in the New York shop in the spring of 1930. He was temporarily trading positions with George Barton, who had injured his foot in an accident, and was taking Neal's place in Chicago, where the workload was lighter.

One likely reason for the reduced demand at the Chicago shop in 1930 was, of course, the stock market crash in 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression. But, there were other, much larger and ultimately destructive, threats looming in the shop's future – threats that took the form of agents from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. Among her employees, it was well known that Maugham did her best to evade paying the proper taxes on her business and personal transactions. In May of 1930, for example, Chicago manager Cornelia Conger wrote to Neal in New York that "The gov't agent is hot-foot after Mrs. M. because of her wild claim of 13,000 foreign buying exchanges she entered last year on her tax return…. Now she has to itemize it – if she can."[28] Dubious currency exchanges notwithstanding, the death-knell for the Chicago shop ultimately came when Maugham manipulated of an IRS rule that allowed antique furniture – furniture one hundred years of age or older – into the U.S. duty free.

Maugham's designs relied heavily on the use of antique and reproduction furniture. Only she seems to have made a habit of trying to pass off reproduction pieces as truly antique to both customs officers and her clients. This was not an easy task, and, according to Neal, he gained

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[26] Ibid., 149, 156.
[27] Maugham's first New York shop was at 20 East 57th and the second at 39 East 57th. Metcalf, 53, 62.
[28] Cornelia Conger to Robert Neal, May 1, 1930, Robert M. Neal Papers.

much of his knowledge of antique furniture not from Maugham, but from the customs agents, who would "go over it all with a fine-tooth comb, trying to find out where something was younger than it was said to be. They were experts, and I learnt a great deal from them."[29] A number of Maugham's acquaintances claim that her shops actually kept two sets of books, one with the true age and valuation of pieces and the second with the inflated ages and lower values. As the story goes, when the IRS agents visited Syrie's Chicago shop, they were shown the first book. Whatever actually transpired, on November 15, 1932, the state of Illinois revoked Maugham's business license for failure to pay franchise taxes. The shop was closed and the remaining stock sold on January 1, 1933.[30]

By this time Neal was safely, and it seemed permanently, in New York. He had briefly gone back to work in Chicago, but, by June of 1931, George Barton had returned to England and Maugham asked Neal to take his position permanently in New York. Despite warning signs at the Chicago shop, and a depressed economy nation-wide, Neal seemed reluctant to go so far from home.[31] In many ways Mineral Point existed in the hinterlands of Chicago. The two were connected by rail and by road, and people and goods circulated readily between Chicago and its outlying areas. This meant that, although Neal lived in the urban enclave of Chicago, he was still intimately connected with his family back home. A move to New York threatened that connection when his family needed him most. In early July of 1931, Neal wrote to Maugham's New York manager to explain that before he made any decision about the new position, he had to consult with his family and ultimately consider their needs before his. He wrote:

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[29] McKnight, 144-148.
[30] Metcalf, 63.
[31] While the move by the IRS to close the Chicago shop and the shop's ensuing bankruptcy were still a year away, there was talk, on the part of Syrie Maugham, of subletting the shop – talk that, despite assurances to the contrary, suggested that Neal and others would quite possiblly lose their jobs there. Robert Neal to Syrie Maugham, August 15, 1931; and Olive Cruickshank to Robert Neal, August 31, 1931, Robert M. Neal Papers.

> I am going home…over the Fourth [of July] principally to talk over with my father the organization of our family's finance[s]. My father has been temporarily out of work since the first of June and will be for three months, at the end of which time he will know definitely if it is to be permanent. My sister is in her third year at the University [of Wisconsin] and my brother is a Junior in High School, and the careful consideration of their futures is uppermost in my mind. In view of these circumstances I feel it my duty to do what I can in the way of helping out.[32]

If Neal's migration from Mineral Point to Chicago's Miracle Mile had been an escape from oppressive and homophobic conditions at home, then he would have surely jumped at the opportunity to flee to the Big Apple. Instead, family came first, and their needs had to be met before any such move could be considered.

Neal ultimately accepted the position, which included a decrease in pay, but was also sure to intimate that his acceptance was not capitulation to Maughm's wishes, but rather a calculated move for which he expected to be rewarded. "If this transfer cannot be a direct benefit both to you and me," he wrote, "I would ask you let me remain in Chicago, remembering I have your interests at heart in the various types of work and responsibility that come upon me." Moreover, Neal closed his letter reminding Maugham of his loyalty to her and to her business in the face of the IRS. "I have maintained the silence you requested of me," he asserted, "and I feel it is a matter in to which I personally cannot be drawn to affect its settlement."[33] After three years in Chicago, Neal had a clearer understanding of how Maugham operated, and wanted to make clear that he was not a drudge, but a designer. Crucially, however, Neal was a designer whose aesthetic senses were not only first developed, but nurtured and fostered, in the small town of Mineral Point.

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[32] Robert Neal to Menzies, July 1, 1931, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[33] Robert Neal to Syrie Maugham, undated draft, Robert M. Neal Papers.

The Family Aesthete – A Love of Beautiful Things

In 1906, the year Neal was born, Mineral Point was still a town fully dedicated to the mining industry that gave the place its name. Mining news dominated the front pages of the two weekly newspapers in town: The *Iowa County Democrat* and *The Mineral Point Tribune*. The booster-like stories of new veins of zinc ore, the business items detailing the purchases of new mines and the closings of spent ones, and the personal tales of accidents and triumphs kept Mineral Point locals informed and hopeful about the industry that had anchored their economy since the early decades of the nineteenth century.[34] But where zinc was the key commodity in 1906 Mineral Point, it was the importance of lead that dominated much of the early history of the region, and the history of Neal's family.

In many ways, Neal's paternal grandparents, Charles Conger I and Mary (Rogers) Neal, epitomize the early settlement of Mineral Point, including its historical foundations in lead mining. His grandmother, at just five years old, was the first of Neal's family to arrive, traveling from Cornwall to Mineral Point in 1847, as part of an ongoing wave of Cornish immigrants to the area.[35] The Cornish had been settling in Mineral Point since the early 1830s, drawn to the area – as most early settlers were – by the promises of rich veins of lead ore. Unlike the predominately American (and mostly Southern) miners who first worked "diggings" in the area, the Cornish were more prone to use hard-rock mining methods they had learned in Cornwall, so that starting in the 1830s, the small, open-pit "badger holes" of earlier prospectors were quickly

[34] For example, just days before Neal's birth, the *Mineral Point Tribune* put its faith in the future when it proclaimed, "While there is no boom in Mineral Point, a steady growth and substantial improvements are noticeable, such as will be compared favorably with any city of like size." Not exactly a ringing endorsement, but hope nonetheless. *Mineral Point Tribune*, July 19, 1906.

[35] Some of the genealogical work Neal did appears in a letter written by his brother Conger after Neal's death. Conger Neal to Mrs. Holmes, 27 April, 1985. Robert M. Neal Papers.

being replaced by underground mines.[36] While it is unclear how involved Mary's family was in mining – her father is absent from the census records – clearly the geological and historical events that made Mineral Point so important to the early lead rush in the region also brought the Rogers family to settle in the small village on the Wisconsin frontier.

Just as the lead rush pulled Southern prospectors and Cornish miners and their families to "The Point" in the early part of the nineteenth century, the prospect of successful business ventures built around the boom economy also drew Yankee merchants and land speculators to the area, including Neal's grandfather, Charles Conger Neal. Charles, born in Vermont in the mid-1830s, arrived in Mineral Point in the early 1860s, after living for some time in Ohio.[37] Shortly after his arrival in Wisconsin, he married Mary Rogers in 1862.[38] Despite being listed as a day laborer in the 1870 census, Charles is also reported to have held $1,200 in real estate and $500 in personal assets. Two thousand dollars in 1870 held the purchasing power of about 40,000 dollars today – not a huge sum of money, but certainly more than most of their neighbors and enough so that we might assume that the Neal's family lived a fairly comfortable life.[39]

Robert Neal's father, Charles Conger II, was born in Mineral Point in 1880. His birth propitiously coincided with the arrival of a new, large-scale, and well-financed industry in Mineral Point – the processing of zinc oxide. Zinc ore had been mined in the region since the late 1850s, about the same time that the quantity of lead ore in the area began to decline. Indeed, the amount of zinc mined in the region surpassed that of lead by 1871. Starting in 1857, with the

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[36] Marie G. Dieter, Writers Program of the Work Projects Administration, *The Story of Mineral Point, 1827-1941* (1941; repr., Mineral Point: Mineral Point Historical Society, 1979); George Fiedler, *Mineral Point: A History* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1973). Fiedler's text relies heavily (sometimes too heavily) on the previously unpublished work of Dieter. Because of this, I choose to cite Dieter unless quoting directly from Fiedler.
[37] 1870 U.S. Census, population schedule, City of Mineral Point, Second Ward, dwelling 78.
[38] Charles Conger and Mary Neal, Wisconsin Historical Society. Wisconsin Genealogy Index: Marriage Record Entry for Iowa County, Volume No. 1, Page No. 359, wisconsinhistory.org.
[39] 1870 U.S. Census

completion of the Mineral Point Railroad, the town itself became the regional shipping hub for this new ore as well as various farm products from the surrounding landscape. Although Mineral Point had zinc smelters in the area before 1880, the availability of cheap fuel in the coal fields of Illinois meant that those operations tended to be small and short-lived. It was more cost effective to ship rare ore south rather than smelt it at its point of origin. The Mineral Point Railroad, with its northern terminus in Mineral Point and its connections with various lines to the south, meant the town functioned instead as a funnel, gathering the zinc ore of the region at its depot – near the "point" where lead was first "discovered" in what would become the town in 1828 – and moving upwards of 6,500 tons of ore by rail to points south.[40]

In 1882, two years after the birth of Neal's father, a group of wealthy Mineral Pointers gathered $35,000 –a little over $700,000 today – to bring zinc processing back to Mineral Point.[41] Their project gained an inestimable boost when, several months later, Thomas Chrowder Chamberlin, Wisconsin's chief geologist, published the multi-volume *Geology of Wisconsin, Survey of 1873-1879*. In this work, Chamberlin challenged earlier theories of mineral deposition in the region, concluding that the layers of sediment beneath the surface were far richer in mineral than previous studies had indicated. He writes:

> Where lodes have been mined in the upper measures of the Galena limestone, and work has been suspended by reason of water or other practical difficulties, there is strong presumption of valuable deposits below….In the middle and lower portions of the Galena limestone where lead ore alone has been found at higher horizons, we deem it altogether probable that mixed lead and zinc ores occur. The progress of mining seems to indicate that zinc ores are more widely and abundantly distributed in the lower beds than has been heretofore supposed.[42]

[40] Dieter, 129.
[41] Dieter, 153.
[42] T.C. Chamberlin, *Geology of Wisconsin, Survey of 1873-1879*, Vol. IV (Madison: Commisioners of Public Printing, 1882), 567.

Despite Chamberlin's concerns about the costly and "grave obstacle" of removing the water from ever-deeper mines – a constant problem in "water-bearing" limestone and sandstone – his conclusions reignited work in the region and put the burgeoning Mineral Point Zinc Works on a solid financial footing.[43]

In October of 1899, just before his nineteenth birthday, Charlie Neal, as he was called, went to work for the Mineral Point Zinc Works, which only two years prior had merged with the New Jersey Zinc Company to become the nation's largest processor of zinc. Perhaps indicating his social position and education, Neal's father began his life-long career with the company not as a common laborer, but as a timekeeper for a construction crew of 225 men working to build the latest addition to the massive industrial site just at the edge of town: a new plant for processing zinc ore waste products into sulphuric acid. Charlie Neal earned 15 cents an hour, or upwards of 23 dollars today, for his supervisory work.[44] From there the elder Neal headed inside the plant, working various office jobs, including stints as the facility's chief accountant and purchaser of zinc ore.[45]

Unlike many employed by the Zinc Works, however, Neal remained with the company even after its demise in 1930. By the late 1920s the total tonnage of zinc ore mined in the former lead region began to decrease, so much so that despite high metal prices, by 1928 the Mineral Point Zinc Company shuttered all the mines it owned in the area. In 1929, the Zinc Works dismantled the sulphuric acid plant Charlie Neal helped to build, shifting the production of acid to its plant in Depue, Illinois.[46] Neal briefly moved as well, acting as the purchasing agent for

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[43] Ibid., 560.
[44] Measuringworth.com, accessed 3-28-14.
[45] "Half-Century Men: Charlie Neal Enters Select Group," *Zinc*, New Jersey Zinc Company Newsletter, undated [likely 1949], Robert M. Neal Papers.
[46] Dieter, 174.

the Engineering Department in Depue. Weakened by the 1929 stock market crash, the Mineral Point Zinc Works ceased operation in 1930. In 1933 Charlie was put in charge of dismantling the massive structure. Well into the 1940s – and well into Charlie's 60s – he remained employed by the firm, "taking care of real estate, and other Company business" in Mineral Point. Charlie Neal would finally retire at the age of 70, after having worked for the Mineral Point Zinc Company for fifty years.[47]

Five years after beginning his half-century career, Charlie Neal married Anne Elizabeth Moser, of Dubuque, Iowa. Two years later, on July 27, 1906, Robert Moser Neal was born – the couple's first child. Charlie and Anne would ultimately have two more children, Mary Elizabeth, born in 1910, and Charles Conger III – or Conger – in 1915. The archive detailing Neal's life contains only traces of his childhood: the baby book his mother compiled, some childhood letters to parents, and the clippings from his first haircut. More interestingly for us, however, are the materials which suggest that the inklings of Neal's adult queerness were not stifled or muted in the industrialized Mineral Point of his youth. From what remains in the archive, we can trace Neal's preference for less-than normatively masculine boyhood activities like collecting antiques and homemaking. By themselves, these activities do not necessarily denote queerness. Given the historical association, however, between aestheticism, effeminacy, and homosexuality in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – an association in large part constructed around queer public figures like Oscar Wilde – when undertaken by men and boys, these activities did bear the mark of the effeminate, the dandy, the queer.[48] The fascinating thing about Neal's story is that the queerness of these interests was not pilloried but praised by family and friends.

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[47] "Half-Century Men."

[48] On the connections between aestheticism and queerness in the twentieth century, see, Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Toward a Genealogy of a Discourse of Male Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Alan Sinfield, *The*

That is not to say, however, that Neal met no resistance when it came to his more aesthetic interests. As Neal's partner recalled in his later years, for instance, "Bob and his dad never hit it off." When Neal started bringing home antique furniture, his father reportedly queried, "God, what do you want to do with that old piece of rubbish?"[49] Regardless, the "rubbish" continued to arrive at the Neal home on Front Street. Neal's continued interest in antiques and homemaking came in large part from the strong bond he had with and the support he received from his mother. She was the source of his love of beautiful things. Sadly, Anne Neal died unexpectedly in December of 1923, when Neal was just seventeen years old. Anne's obituary – written by her childhood friend and Dubuque author, Marian Hurd McNeely – detailed the legacy she was leaving behind for her family and especially for her eldest child, Robert. McNeely writes:

> Mrs. Neal's instinct for home making was a gift. Her roof-tree sheltered a small community, where not only physical wants were ministered to, but childish interests were studied and shared....Her love of books, of pictures, and the other finest things of life were reflected in her home, and she has left her children a rich legacy of artistic tastes and wide interests. Next to her devotion to her family, this love of beauty was her strongest characteristic, and her enjoyment of books and refinement and culture made for her a world apart, which glorified all the prosaic things of a simple life.[50]

One could easily attribute this exaltation of Anne's "devotion to her family" and her "legacy of artistic tastes and wide interests" to obituary writing as a form. The nearly dozen letters from McNeely to Neal, however, suggest otherwise, as they repeatedly return to Neal's aesthetic

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Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wild and the Queer Moment (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 93.

[49] Edgar Hellum, Interview with Will Fellows, December 17, 1997. Special thanks to Will Fellows for sharing the transcript of this interview with me.

[50] Marion Hurd McNeely to Charles Neal, December 14, 1923, Robert M. Neal Papers; *Mineral Point Tribune*, December 20, 1923.

inheritance.[51] Indeed, McNeely champions this transfer of a love for beautiful things above all else.

Moreover, McNeely – or "Aunt Marion," as she signed her letters – saw it as her mission to pick up where Anne left off, to become a gentle, reassuring, and nurturing maternal figure and continue to guide Neal in his queer pursuits. "I have a perfect right," she pens in one letter, "to butt into your business because, first, I'm your adopted aunt, and second, because I'm older now than I ever was before."[52] "I'll be always watching," reads a birthday card, "to see you grow into the kind of man your mother wanted."[53] And the transfer of mission that McNeely took on was also, for her, a transfer of pride. Just over six months after Anne's death, for example, McNeely wrote, that "She was so proud of you, Robert dear, and I shall always feel that, because of her, *I* shall have the right to be proud of you, too."[54] Five years later, and a little over a year after Neal landed his job in Chicago, McNeely returned to this point: "Since your mother went, you belong, more than ever, to me, and her pride-in-you has slipped down to me."[55]

Thus, McNeely was, of course, ecstatic at the news of Neal's first interior decorating job in Chicago. In early April of 1928, she wrote, "I am so rejoiced at the news Nellie [Moser] told me yesterday – that the chance you have awaited so long is coming to you. It seems just the thing for you, and I am glad that you are soon to be with the beauty that you love so much. I have thought many times since I heard about it of how pleased and happy your mother would be."[56] Nellie Moser – Neal's actual aunt and Anne's sister – also wrote Neal a letter shortly after

[51]McNeely and Neal shared July birthdays – yet another reason for McNeely's sense of attachment – and most of the letters from McNeely to Neal are either birthday letters or cards.
[52]Marion Hurd McNeely to Robert Neal, July 25, 1926, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[53]Marion Hurd McNeely to Robert Neal, undated, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[54]Marion Hurd McNeely to Robert Neal, July 25, 1924, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[55]Marion Hurd McNeely to Robert Neal, July 25, 1929, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[56]Marion Hurd McNeely to Robert Neal, April 8, 1928, Robert M. Neal Papers.

he had accepted his new position in Chicago. Interestingly, both McNeely and Moser focused much of their attention on the perceived perils of city life. Moser's "congratulatory" letter, for example, is essentially a litany of proscriptions, invoking Neal's mother as a sort of cautionary force:

> Just hope you make good. Lots of things will probably come up to disappoint you. But don't get discouraged and huffy and throw it up. It seems too good to be true. You will have to be careful who you choose for companions. Don't lend money....And please don't drink....Robert I want you to be the kind of man your mother would want you to be. I'm proud of you – you children are all I have – and I'd hate to have you do anything to disgrace us – or yourself.[57]

While it is not entirely clear what sort of disgrace Aunt Nellie had in mind – aside from bad friends, bad loans, and bad hangovers – the disgrace of queerness does not seem to be what was at stake. In fact, Moser goes on suggest that Neal partake in less than manly grooming habits in-line with his new lifestyle. "[A]s long as you are in such an aristocratic place," Moser writes, perhaps referring to Neal's workplace on the Miracle Mile, "you will have to be careful of your clothes and your appearance. You will have to keep your finger nails clean[,] in fact it wouldn't hurt to have a manicure occasionally. Men who are particular often do. I meet one occasionally when I have a shampoo."[58]

But whereas Aunt Nellie used the memory of Neal's mother as a "stick," attempting to keep Neal away from the sins of the city, the gentle voice of Aunt Marion encouraged Neal to reach for the "carrot" of his mother's legacy and focus his energy on all the beautiful things the city could offer. "I don't feel so worried about your going to a large city as I would if you were a different sort of boy," she wrote. "You are so protected by your fine tastes, by your love of music and pictures and the beautiful things of life, that the cheap and vulgar things will never

[57]Nellie Moser to Robert Neal, April 2, 1928, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[58]Ibid.

have much attraction for you." In other words, for McNeely, Neal could avoid the pitfalls of urban life with an aestheticism that, for Neal at least, was honed in a small-town setting. The stereotypical wholesomeness of the rural landscape immunized Neal against the moral contagions of urban life. But urban life, McNeely also realized, was where Neal's aesthetic desires could be most fulfilled. "I'm so glad that you are going to be where you can get your fill of music and pictures;" she wrote, "where you can see and handle lovely fabrics and forms, where you can see good theatres, and where you can feast your eyes on the Tribune Tower when the sunlight shines on it. No one is gladder than I that the opportunity has come to you, and no one feels more certain that you will make good."[59]

Still, for McNeely, even if Neal's love of beautiful things was best realized under the sun-dappled heights of the Tribune Tower, the aesthetic heritage that Neal embodied always led back to his mother and to the home she created for her family in Mineral Point. Indeed, over the years, McNeely sometimes understood the love of beautiful things in an explicitly religious or philosophical fashion – as an approach to death and mourning, or as route to happiness and a fulfilled life. Just months after Anne Neal's death, for example, when Robert wrote to McNeely in Dubuque to share a composition piece selected for publication in the school annual, McNeely encouraged Neal in his writing and other aesthetic pursuits as a way to keep the memory of his mother alive. She wrote:

> I have written this to you partly because I am interested in any young person who loves to write, but mostly because of your mother. Those fine tastes of hers, that love of beauty, in form and words and color, she gave to you. It is the richest legacy any mother can leave a child, and you are a lucky boy that you have it. Don't fail to be grateful for it. The way to pay her back is to keep her in your living. Don't get away from the things she loved and the thoughts she had. You can keep her with you in that way.[60]

[59]Marion Hurd McNeely to Robert Neal, April 8, 1928, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[60]Marion Hurd McNeely to Robert Neal, March 6, 1924, Robert M. Neal Papers.

As Neal turned from actively mourning his mother's loss in the years immediately after her death, McNeely continued to encourage Neal's aestheticism as a route to happiness. In 1926, for example, she wrote:

> Dear Boy, I never feel any real *need* of wishing you happiness, for any one with your tastes is *bound* to be happy where ever he casts his lot....You got your fine tastes honestly, for your mother had them before she passed them on to you. Even as a little girl she was discriminating in what she read, whom she liked, and what she thought about. And I know how happy she was to see the same tastes cropping out in you. Stick to them, dear Boy, as though they were your religion – (and I think they make religion for most of us beauty-lovers.)[61]

In a sense, Neal did make the love of beautiful things his religion. And, for Neal at least, it was a religion that necessitated protracted pilgrimages into urban spaces.

But while Neal was worshiping beauty – of all sorts – on the Miracle Mile, in Manhattan, or in the Mayfair District, he was also connected to home. The love of beautiful things that drew him to these spaces in the first place was, in actuality, homegrown. In the midst of a small, industrialized mining center Neal's mother built a home and an environment that nurtured her son's burgeoning queerness and aestheticism. This was a nurturing that, at worst, was tolerated by family and friends and, at best, celebrated and encouraged. In this way, Neal's urban adventures were not an escape from an oppressive rural environment, but merely an interlude, a part of a larger ongoing circulation that made delineations between urban and rural space increasingly fuzzy. It was an important interlude, however, and one where Neal's love of beautiful things – before it could be brought back to its place of origin – was honed to its sharpest. And it perhaps reached its finest point in London, England.

[61]Marion Hurd McNeely to Robert Neal, July 25, 1926, Robert M. Neal Papers, emphasis in original.

"Gather Ye Rosebuds": Neal's Queer Time in London

At 5 p.m. on May 5th, 1933 Robert Neal set sail from New York Harbor. Given his upbringing in small-town Wisconsin, there was perhaps some poetry in his boarding the steamer *Westernland* for the journey across the North Atlantic to England. By this time, Neal had already been away from Mineral Point for five years, his various moves carrying him steadily eastward from one great metropolis to the next – from Chicago to New York and, then, in what could only have seemed at the time as the greatest adventure of his life, the chance to live in one of the grandest cities in the world: London. But even as Neal traveled farther and farther from Mineral Point, he was still deeply connected to his hometown. His decisions to move from city to city were made only after intense consultation with friends and family back home. And the aestheticism – the love and nurturing of beautiful things – that Neal refined in bustling urban landscapes had its start in the verdant hills and valleys of southwest Wisconsin. In a certain sense, then, aboard the *Westernland*, the western lands of Neal's youth carried him on his voyage across the sea.

Poetry aside, however, Neal's choice to sail on the *Westernland* was the result of instructions from his London-based employer, Syrie Maugham. Several weeks prior to the trip, Neal – who was working in Maugham's interior decorating shop in New York City – received a telegram requesting him to "Please come inexpensive boat arriving middle May." Neal obliged – both with the timing of the trip and with the cost of the fare – but not without some resistance. As he wrote to his friend and mentor William Gundry just days before his departure, "I am not being too exacting in listing my expenses as I am going to get all that I can, while I can."[62] After

[62]Neal to Gundry, April 18, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.

working for Maugham for just a few short years, enduring everything from wage cuts to IRS scandals, Neal had grown cynical in his regard for his employer as well as his position in the firm. Still, Neal did go to London and, while Maugham's actions did nothing to alter his cynicism, he clearly enjoyed his time there and understood it as a profound moment in his life. Indeed, Neal's English adventures did much to fuel and further inspire his love of beautiful things. Moreover, 1930s London was pivotal in reinforcing and shaping Neal's queer identity, while also simultaneously serving as the setting for the decision that would ultimately set him on a path back to Mineral Point.

Much like the earlier transfer from Chicago to New York, Neal's decision to move across the North Atlantic, to a new continent, was not an easy one for him to make. As he wrestled with this decision, he again turned to family and friends back in Mineral Point for advice. His old friend William Gundry became an important sounding board, as Neal worked out his next move. Gundry's counsel was especially important because not all of those offering advice were encouraging him to make the trip. Cornelia Conger, for example, the manager at Maugham's Chicago shop and the woman who gave Neal his first big break, suggested he abandon Maugham, stay in the U.S., and go to work as an assistant to a furniture designer in New York. In 1933 Maugham's New York shop was slated to follow the lead of her doomed Chicago branch and close its doors, so Conger's suggestion was less a mutiny than an orderly evacuation of the ship. Still, in early February of that year she wrote to Neal in New York with details about the opening and some scathing words about Maugham. "I felt you had learned all you could from her," Conger wrote, "and her name is now so unsavory that a further connection with her is, I

believe, more detrimental than advantageous to you...and Heaven knows what Shannanigans you've been through in New York!"[63]

From a purely financial perspective, Neal's decision would have been simple. Miss Hofflin, the New York furniture designer, was offering him 125 dollars a month, whereas Neal calculated that his proposed London wages of 4 pounds per week came out to less than 60 dollars monthly.[64] But for Neal, this opportunity was about more than money. "I have wondered if," he wrote to Gundry, "I should consider London at all from a point of view of travel and education and charge off to 'profit and loss' any debts I might run up? What do you think? People here have been saying that they would be more than delighted to go just for the experience."[65] Gundry did not have time to reply before Neal made his final decision less than a week later, after discussing the New York job with Miss Hofflin. "The first thing that I have to tell you," Neal began, "is that I am going to London. I had a nice long talk with Miss Hofflin and [she] thinks Syrie is the foremost decorator in the world, and disapproves with Miss Conger 'that any further connection with her name would be detrimental'....[Miss Hofflin] said that 'I would scrub floors if necessary and go steerage' just for what the experience would offer."[66] With his confidence in Maugham restored, and his own inclinations buttressed, Neal made his decision. While Gundry never gave Neal a definitive answer to the question of whether he should go to London, he clearly found Gundry's counsel crucial to any decision made. "I can't tell you what a relief and feeling of support it gave me," Neal wrote to Gundry in late February of 1933 after receiving a telegram from him giving a nod of approval. "You have never failed me," Neal

[63]Conger to Neal, February 8, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[64]Ibid.
[65]Neal to Gundry, February 16, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[66]Neal to Gundry, February 21, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.

continued, "and I realize more and more my dependence on you for guidance. It is, indeed, a great comfort, and I want you to know it."[67]

Gundry was an important ally for Neal to have in his final decision to make the journey across the North Atlantic. For one thing, Neal had been friends with this son of a prominent Mineral Point family for some time. Joseph Gundry, William's father, had arrived in Mineral Point in the 1840s, at roughly the same time as Neal's paternal grandmother, Mary Rogers. The Gundrys, like the Rogers family, were Cornish, but unlike many Cornish immigrants to Mineral Point who mined for lead, Joseph Gundry was a merchant. With John Gray, Joseph operated the Gundry and Gray Dry Goods store on High Street. Neal first met William Gundry through Gray. It was Neal and Gundry's mutual love of beautiful things – antiques, specifically – that first brought them together at the Gundry's hilltop estate, Orchard Lawn. In Neal's 1933 letter to William Gundry, Neal reminisced about that meeting and its importance to his life. "Neither of us ever had the faintest realization," he wrote, "that Mr. Gray's kind remark to me about calling on you to see some of the lovely old things that you had and that brought about our meeting, would have ever developed to the scope to which [it] has for me. It is a monumental milestone in my career, for what is past and [for] what future is before me."[68] Gundry – like Neal's mother and Aunt Marion after her – helped nurture Neal's love of beautiful things, and the Gundrys wealth and the elegance of their 1868 estate in the midst of an industrialized Mineral Point surely piqued Neal's interest in antiques and luxurious interiors.

But it was more than old things and fancy houses that created the bond between Neal and Gundry. The elder Gundry – who was born in 1853 – functioned as a father figure for Neal,

[67] Neal to Gundry, February 23, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[68] Ibid.

especially given the strained relationship Neal had with his own biological father.[69] Further cementing this bond, Neal and Gundry had not only their love of antiques and other beautiful things in common, but also their queerness. This, along with Gundry's previous residence in London, meant that Gundry's advice held a great deal of weight for Neal. It also meant that they could share their queer experiences of London – albeit in a surreptitious and coded manner – with one another.

In his letters to Gundry, for example, Neal wrote extensively about the men he met in London and the time he spent in high-profile cruising areas. One such letter, written just days after Neal's arrival, introduced Gundry to a man Neal would spend a fair amount of time with during his first few months in London. He wrote:

> I was to go on a picnic...today, as the fellow who was to take me to Kew [Gardens] didn't show up, but instead I got out and took a letter of introduction to a pupil of [music professor] Tobias Matthay who lives not far from Kensington Palace. I found him home and was invited to stay for lunch....He looks a lot like Roman Navarro and I'm sure so more than ---. I've asked him to stop in and see me. I went from there to the shop to see how the painter is making out and then home via Hyde Park.[70]

Several aspects of this passage would have readily signaled for Will Gundry the queerness of the situation. Neal's comparison of his new acquaintance – a 22 year-old man from Brazil, Emmanuel Braune – to the dashing 1930s queer actor Ramon Novarro was a start.[71] But so too was the dash, and whatever word it might have replaced. This was a technique that Neal also used to describe the queer set designer Oliver Messel, who worked closely with Maugham on

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[69] "In Memory of William Perry Gundry," *Mineral Point Tribune*, June 18, 1936.
[70] Robert Neal to William Gundry, 21 May, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers, dash in original.
[71] On the queerness of Ramón Novarro, see, Ernesto Chávez,"'Ramon is Not One of These': Race and Sexuality in the Construction of Silent Film Actor Ramón Novarro's Star Image," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* vol. 20 no. 3 (September 2011): 520-544; Frank Javier Garcia Berumen*, Ramon Novarro: The Life and Films of the First Latino Hollywood Superstar* (New York: Vantage Press, 2001); and André Soares, *Beyond Paradise: The Life of Ramon Novarro* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002).

several projects. "He is about 28, dark, and is a German Jew," Neal wrote to Gundry. "Very wealthy, and very ----. After our little visit he extended his hand, which of course I shook. I only hope I can see more of him, but he flies too high for me. But then." And if things did not work out with either Braune or Messel, there was also one of Neal's favorite places in London: Hyde Park.

Hyde Park, and the nearby Marble Arch and Oxford Street, were some of the most prominent queer cruising areas in 1930s London, and were intimately familiar and recognizable as queer destinations for not only Neal but Gundry as well. Indeed, the whole of the West End – where Neal lived and worked – was, according to historian Matt Houlbrook, "the heart of public queer life in the first half of the twentieth century,"[72] This is reflected in the correspondence between Neal and Gundry, as they knowingly shared with each their experiences of traversing the queer geography of London's West End. A letter from Gundry to Neal, for example, at first glance appears to be a simple reminiscing about the elder man's time in London as a youth. Upon closer inspection, however, the letter is actually a veritable road map of queer cruising locales in the West End. Gundry wrote:

> I went to the Alhambra [Theatre] with William Chase in 1929, and how it has changed, but the neighborhood seemed quite as exactly as it used to and the loafers in the doorways and looking into shop windows were quite as curious, male and female, as they used to be. There are still occasions for adventure, plenty of it of every kind, in that Piccadilly Circus.... I often think of the many opportunities...I used to have, but never dared take advantage of. I used to fancy in summer evenings...that it was quite an adventure to go along Oxford Street West (past your present neighborhood, I imagine) to Marble Arch...walk into Hyde Park and look over the jaunty soldiers...who seemed to frequent that part of the park in the evening, and then walk past the Serpentine to a large pond or lake where hordes of young fellows used to bathe in the hot summer evenings in a state of nature which was of course most shocking, but still at times very interesting.[73]

[72] Houlbrook, 45.
[73] Gundry to Neal, June 6, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.

Though he denied having taken advantage of the "many opportunities" available to him, Gundry had extensive knowledge of many of the public spaces of queer engagement. Neal likely knew of many, if not most, of these cruising spots after only a month in London, but if he was ignorant of any of them, Gundry's reminiscence served an educational as well as entertaining function. Moreover, this education underscored the circulation of queer ideas, people, and desires explored in this chapter. Gundry was transmitting the knowledge he had gained in London from the periphery of Mineral Point back toward the queer center of London.

The exchange worked both ways. Gundry, in other words, was just as interested in learning about Neal's cruising in London as he was to impart his knowledge to the young man-about-town. "I shall be very curious as to your daily life," Gundry wrote, following his laundry list of cruising grounds, also promising that, "I shall be very circumspect as to what I divulge, if any, of what you write to me."[74] Indeed, knowing that Neal had come to understand himself as a queer man in New York and Chicago and had gained experience navigating urban queer worlds, as a queer father figure, Gundry urged not only discretion but moderation as well. He wrote:

> I differed in a way from you too in as much as I was ignorant of as much that your Chicago and New York experiences have cultivated in you, and which has meant so much to you the past five years and is going to be such a tremendous item in your London life. I really hope it is not going to be your chief quest while there. You can't do without it but don't let it rule your life and all outside interests.

Gundry's comments model the very discretion he advises, framed vaguely enough that they could apply to nearly any aspect of Neal's life in London, personal or professional. Yet, Gundry's caution is book-ended by two, fairly explicit, queer remembrances: a litany of cruising grounds and a brief comment on Neal and Gundry's shared enthusiasm for lithe English lads in gray flannels:

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[74] Ibid.

> Your opinion in regard to gray flannel trousers coincides with mine, and I well remember when a similar rage reigned I was taking a bus at the junction of Fleet St. and Chancery Lane when I saw a slim young blond fellow in thin gray flannel ascend a bus...to get on what they called the 'knife board' on top. He made a bas relief that I have never forgotten, and never expect to see eclipsed, the kind that entrances you in these advanced days.[75]

Gundry's recollections of his queer life in London may have served an educational purpose for Neal, but they were also a way for Gundry to relive English romances, trysts, and "opportunities" through his younger friend. And Neal did not disappoint.

While he remained cautious and used the vague and coded language Gundry modeled, Neal was more than forthcoming about his own queer relationships, which he approached with a devil-may-care attitude. In a letter that recalls some of his relationships from New York, for instance, Neal wrote:

> I have no news to relate regarding any of those remaining in New York or else where.... "Brad" is still among the unknown and I feel now that will continue to be so. I felt all along that it was only a flighty meeting and that [it] would soon pass (which it seems to have done) but I did enjoy it while it lasted. I have come to the conclusion "Gather the rosebuds, while ye may" and in that perhaps have settled for a little while. It was strange, as you say...a museum piece, and strangely enough I have all too soon contracted another here, the intensity of which is insurpassable in my short life.[76]

Neal's new "museum piece" was the Roman Novarro look-alike, Emmanuel Braune, a 22-year-old music student from Rio de Janerio, whom Neal met through mutual acquaintances almost as soon as he arrived in London. Neal barely stopped to smell the roses, before gathering the buds.

In the beginning – as tends to be the case in new relationships – Neal and Braune were inseparable. Neal attended most, if not all, of Braune's recitals and concerts, even canceling other plans to make sure he could go. They also went on holiday together, spending the weekend

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[75] Ibid.
[76] Neal to Gundry, June 7, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.

in June of 1933 in the English countryside. They stayed at Lambourn, in Berkshire, which Neal described as "a very small village at the end of a stub railroad line (reminding me much of M[ineral] P[oint])." From there Neal and Braune explored the rural landscape, where Neal was "enchanted with the ivy and the holly" as the two men walked fourteen miles of an old Roman road in an afternoon, scouring the ground of Roman and English ruins for shards of pottery. "You can imagine," Neal wrote of their accommodations, "the simpl[e] landlady having guests from North and South America. We were waited on hand and foot, and the three days cost 6p less than a pound each."[77] The "simple landlady" might also have been amused by their attachment to one another.

Yet – and, again, as these things sometimes go – Neal quickly began to find Braune too clingy. Philosophically, Neal was in the business of "gathering rosebuds," not tending a single plant. Braune may have wanted more. Two weeks after their joyful trip to the English countryside, for instance, Braune wanted to go back, but Neal did his best to avoid a return trip. "Emmanuel wanted me to go the country this week end," Neal shared with Gundry, "but I really couldn't afford it and told him so, so then he invited me and I lied and told him that I had to help Mrs. M. get ready for her party."[78] Neal was still going to Braune's concerts, but by this time a colleague of Braune's was beginning to catch Neal's eye. After an evening of music, Neal wrote to Gundry of this second man: "[Braune] played the Ballade last night and Clifford the Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue of Bach, and both did very well. I am sure that they both bear watching."[79] Again, the ambiguous language Neal used could simply mean that the developing

[77] Ibid; and Neal to Gundry, June 5, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[78] Neal to Gundry, July 1, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[79] Ibid.

talents of both musicians were approaching professional levels and worth watching, but given the context, these words likely also carried a much more personal and, indeed, queerer meaning.

Neal's next letter to Will Gundry made it clear that by mid-September of 1933, the affair with Braune was all but over. In Braune's place was now Clifford Herzer, "an American boy from Albion Mich."[80] While Neal did not compare Herzer to any of Hollywood's dashing leading men, the two men did share a personal philosophy on relationships. As Neal wrote to Gundry:

> Clifford has been more than nice to me – he has taken me places, had me for meals – and I see him quite often. He is preparing for his next concert at Wigmore Hall on Dec. 11th. Emmanuel is almost out of the picture – it has been 5 or 6 days since I have seen him. Such a break is bound to be noticeable, and yet while I miss his being around all the time – I feel much more free – not so tied down.[81]

And not being tied down was certainly a prerogative of Neal's while in London. As his "gather ye rosebuds" philosophy would indicate, even while seeing Braune and Herzer, Neal continued to frequent queer cruising areas like Hyde Park and the Marble Arch. He even moved closer to the park in the summer of 1933, to "Gloucester Terrace, at Lancaster Gate on Bayswater road," itself a well-known cruising ground.[82] His reason for moving to the more expensive accommodations, despite ongoing money problems? It's "where I have access to the park," he shared with Gundry.[83] Indeed, when it came to cheap entertainment for Neal – and vicariously for Gundry – "Hyde Park and the Marble Arch occupy my time, for no expense is entailed from them."[84]

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[80] Ibid.
[81] Neal to Gundry, September 19, 1993, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[82] Neal to Gundry, July 1, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers. On the rooming houses of Bayswater road as a cruising ground, see, Houlbrook, 48.
[83] Neal to Gundry, July 1, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[84] Neal to Gundry, September 19, 1933, Robert M, Neal Papers.

When Neal wasn't haunting the queer cruising grounds of the West End, or spending weekends in the country with Braune, or dining with Herzer, or spending time with any of the other "boys" he met in London, he was working. However, just as Neal's personal relationship with Braune began to sour, his professional relationship with Maugham was also headed, full-steam, toward the rocks. The money question had always been a difficult one for Neal. He was paid 4 pounds a week, a salary that was decidedly les than what he had been receiving in New York. The reason for this lower "English salary," as Maugham called it, was "because as you know wages in England are not only much lower, but money goes much farther than in New York."[85] While this may have been the case, it also meant that, for Neal, the London job was not a lucrative venture. In deciding to come to London, he had chalked up to "profits and loss" any debt he might incur, and he preferred to think of the trip as one of education and adventure. But this made it difficult to purchase the clothes and antiques he desired, and limited the amusements he could afford. It also meant that he had to borrow money from his father back in Mineral Point.[86]

The money issue was even more trying because Maugham had arranged for Neal to live in England on what amounted to a student visa. This meant that even though he had agreed to work for Maugham in London for an entire year, every couple of months Neal had to falsify paperwork with the country's Home Office indicating he was a student and not employed. The situation gave Neal little leverage in asking for a raise and, since he ultimately did enroll in coursework to satisfy the Home Office requirements, it also had to pay tuition. Exasperated, he wrote to Gundry in September of 1933:

> You will be interested to know that having perjured myself again and signing something that I was not employed and that I would not except [sic] any employment *paid* or

[85] Maugham to Neal, February 1, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[86] Neal to Gundry, September 8, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.

> *unpaid* without first consulting the Home Office, I obtained a 2 months extension i.e. to the 31st of October. I got this on the supposition that I would be in school at the Polytechnic.... I was so loathe to sign that paper that I almost threw up the whole thing and called it quit[s].[87]

Neal's fear of reprisal for having perjured himself came to fruition one evening when he arrived at his apartment after his classes to find a note from his landlord explaining that a police officer had been looking for him and would return the next day. "I needn't tell you what effect this had on me," Neal shared with Gundry. "I hardly slept, thinking of all the possible things that he might want me for, and imaging all of them, but one, of course."[88]

At a time when queerness was criminalized in England, Neal's imagination likely turned to criminal activity he had undertaken in some of his favorite places, like Hyde Park or the Marble Arch. As Houlbrook writes, despite the uneven and ambiguous enforcement of sexual and public order laws, "The risk of arrest could seem ever-present, bracing many men's everyday lives with a crippling perpetual anxiety."[89] Neal likely experienced that very anxiety. In the end, however, the police merely wanted him to register his new address. Neal's relief was palpable as he proclaimed to Gundry, "I had been granted a 6 months extension !!!!!!!!!!!"[90]

But whether Neal wanted to fulfill that extension was still an open question, especially given his lack of advancement while in Maugham's employ. And, once again, Gundry served as a sounding board. Ultimately, Neal was extremely happy in London, "If I have to leave," he wrote, "it will be only out of necessity, for I do love London."[91] And as long as the question of Neal's alien status had been temporarily – if anxiously – settled, the only remaining question was

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[87]Ibid.
[88]Ibid.
[89]Houlbrook, 36.
[90]Neal to Gundry, 14 Dec, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[91]Neal to Gundry, 19 Sept, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.

whether or not he wanted to continue working for Maugham. The low pay and lack of promotion had taken their toll. "To be quite frank," Neal confided in Gundry, "I have lost most of my admiration for Mrs. M. and as I told her, that I have been doing just this same thing for the past 6 years and that I thought it time I did something in the way of making a stride."[92]

Maugham had insisted from the start, "if you come [to London] it must be on the clear understanding that you will be prepared to clean, move and arrange the furniture, and keep the shop looking lovely and to help me when I go out on jobs." But Neal clearly thought he deserved a larger hand in the design aspect of the business.[93] And, indeed, he was – if not promised – at least led to believe that such a position would soon be his. Shortly after he arrived, for example, Neal exclaimed that, "Mrs. M. was and is more than I ever though her to be, listening to ideas of mine and asking what I thought of hers. She told me the other day, that next year she would send me to America with an exhibition....I suppose that will mean New York and Chicago, and will give me considerable authority, and a chance to really run something."[94] That chance never came. In fact, such creative responsibility went to someone else. In the fall of 1933, Neal wrote home to complain, "Mrs. M. is now planning to have a man that was head of the Interior Decorations at Fortnums and Masons come in here as a partner, and of course, will see to the arranging of the shop and other things that I was supposed to do."[95] Neal was fed up. "Mrs. M. is still in France (Paris now)," he wrote, "and returns Sunday. I am still undecided what to do, but I can see that I am bound to have some sort of show down with her. I have written my father today, telling him of my trend of thought."[96]

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[92]Neal to Gundry, 8 Sept, 1933, Robert M Neal Papers.
[93]Maugham to Neal, February 1, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[94]Neal to Gundry, May 27, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[95]Neal to Gundry, September 8, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[96]Neal to Gundry, September 19, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.

Whether or not that showdown ever happened, and what it looked like if it did, the archive is silent on Neal's final days in London. But by the fall of 1933, Neal's thoughts were increasingly turned toward home – to autumn-hued hills of the Wisconsin River Valley; to the small, run-down stone cottage he adored on Mineral Point's Shake Rag Street; and to the friends and family who groomed his queer, aesthetic leanings and his love of beautiful things, and who continued to support him with sound advice, professional connections, and a sympathetic ear.

Before Neal left England in the summer of 1934 aboard the British steamer *Olympia*, he turned introspective, reflecting on his time in London and especially his time with designer Syrie Maugham – time that he increasingly intimated was drawing to a close. "I wonder if I shall ever be the same again," he wrote home to Will Gundry, "for I can see only too well how I have let Mrs. M. completely do away with the things within me that I wonder if I shall ever regain."[97] Surely Maugham took advantage of Neal's youth and naivete, and more than once turned his enthusiasm for antiques and interior design to her advantage. But whatever Neal may have lost during his time with Maugham, he certainly gained in knowledge about himself – his queer desires and identity – as well the business of antiques and how to make a profit out of beautiful things.

While he may have trained these understandings in the urban spaces where Maugham operated, their roots were planted solidly in the rolling hills of southwestern Wisconsin and the family and friends who called Mineral Point home. As his correspondence with McNeely, Gundry, and others shows, Neal's queerness – his aestheticism and love of beautiful things – began in Mineral Point. In contrast to dominant metronormative narratives, then, the small-town space of Mineral Point was not a space of oppression but one of nurturing. Moreover, although

[97]Neal to Gundry, September 8, 1933, Robert M. Neal Papers.

Neal did fulfill those same dominant narratives by spending several years of his young adulthood in major urban centers, his time there was always reflected back through his upbringing in Mineral Point. And crucially, the queer identity he honed and the desires he acted upon in those urban spaces were part of a larger circulation of queer people, ideas and desires. As evidenced by the letters he exchanged with Gundry, while in London Neal learned about how to be a queer man in the city from Gundry back in Mineral Point. At the same time, Gundry fulfilled his own desires not only by passing this knowledge on to Neal but also by partaking in Neal's queer adventures via post. This circulation, then, challenges the dichotomous nature of metronormativity, which positions rural space as hostile to queerness and urban space as queer promised land. Neal found promise and possibility in both spaces. Thus, when Neal's time of urban exploration was over, he returned to his boyhood home, but not at the cost of his queer being – quite the opposite, in fact. Shortly after his arrival back in Mineral Point, Neal's queerness would lead him to a new venture rooted firmly in small-town Wisconsin. Fulfilling the dreams of his childhood, Neal purchased, refurbished, and lived in his "house on Shakerag." But he did not do it alone.

Chapter 2:

The Married Table:
Queer Times, Queer Styles, Queer Meetings

When Robert Neal returned to Mineral Point in 1934, after six years of working under the tutelage of high-end interior designer Syrie Maugham and among the metropolises of Chicago, New York, and London, he brought back to his small hometown a new knowledge of himself and the world around him. On the one hand, Neal returned with a new sense of himself as a queer man. From letters exchanged with his hometown mentor, the Mineral Point patrician William Gundry, we know Neal engaged fully and enthusiastically with queer male subcultures in the cities he called home. These letters and other documents also indicate, however, that Neal's understanding of his own queerness began well before his time in Chicago, New York, and London. Indeed, Neal's queer education began in Mineral Point and, while his queer sense of self was honed in the big city, it was always reflected back and through his small-town upbringing.

Likewise, as part of his education in modern interior design, Neal had fine-tuned his knowledge of antiques while abroad. Like his developing sense of queerness, his knowledge of collecting also began in Mineral Point. Neal and Gundry ostensibly met because of antiques, brought together by a mutual acquaintance who identified their shared passion for old and beautiful things, but quite possibly also their because of their shared queerness. And even though Neal would later claim he learned more about antiques from the Treasury Department inspectors who hounded his metropolitan employer for attempting to pass off contemporary furniture as non-taxable antiques, that newfound knowledge – like his growing queer sense of

self – was reflected back through his small-town Wisconsin upbringing. There under Gundry's tutelage he purchased the first of many antiques, dragging the strongbox of territorial governor Henry Dodge carefully through the snowy streets of Mineral Point to safekeeping at the Neal family home.[1]

Antiques also brought Neal into contact with a fellow collector named Edgar Hellum. In many ways Hellum's life before the men met in 1934 mirrored Neal's. Both young men were born in small Wisconsin towns. Both men enjoyed pursuits that could be characterized as gender non-normative. Both men lost parents at an early age. And, perhaps most importantly, both men found themselves guided along by older queer mentors. While Neal had Gundry to nurture his burgeoning queerness and penchant for antiques, Hellum had a man named Ralph Warner who taught him the ins and outs of collecting. Crucially, given the preservation project Neal and Hellum would undertake after meeting in 1934, Warner also set Hellum on the path of historic home restoration, a path that led Hellum to Mineral Point and an apparent chance meeting with a young Robert Neal. That meeting marked the beginning of a forty-year relationship and preservation project that revived the dormant and decaying mining town and brought Neal and Hellum national renown. More important for this study, however, the meeting also signaled the uniting of two queer networks, of two queer family trees whose branches continue into the present.

Neal and Hellum quietly celebrated that union in the form of a non-descript coffee table they used in the living room of the third stone cottage they would purchase, renovate, and live in together. The piece itself was not particularly old or especially beautiful. It was not likely something the pair would be able to sell in the antique shop they would eventually open. At least

[1] Jim Jewell, "Bob Neal: Equal to the Challenge," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, July 23, 1983.

it was not anything that would command a high price. In appearance, it was an ungainly and awkward looking piece. Standing about two feet off the ground, it had four rather plain turned legs held apart by eight stretchers – four on the top, four on the bottom. Sitting atop the legs was a large, flat, unadorned piece of wood, longer than it was wide, with the longer edges extending beyond the feet, making the whole thing look slightly off-balance. In a tiny photograph of the table Neal and Hellum took, the object looks a bit out of place set amongst the pewter candlesticks, antique chairs, and finely milled mantelpiece of the carefully crafted interior for which Neal was well known.[2]

Yet, this odd looking coffee table was important enough to Neal and Hellum that it not only found a home in their living room, but was also the subject of a photograph. And not *just* a photograph, but one that bore an inscription; Neal labeled it "married table." In the language of antique collectors, marriage refers to the union of two or more parts, each with its own history, construction, and style. In most cases, collectors avoid married pieces, since they are no longer in their original condition, and therefore of lesser value. Unscrupulous antiques dealers often try to pass off married pieces as original mates, thus increasing their profit margin. For seasoned collectors like Neal and Hellum, tutored as they were by Gundry and Warner, it would have been imperative to spot such mismatched items before purchasing a piece at an inflated price.

Neal and Hellum held on to the strange-looking table because its value had nothing to do with whether or not it was in its original state. For Neal and Hellum, the value of the piece – to borrow again from the collectors' lexicon – was in its provenance, where it came from and who owned it. While determining provenance is not on easy task, Neal and Hellum had little difficulty with the married table. After all, they were the ones to marry the piece and record its

[2] "Married Table" photograph, ca. 1966, Pendarvis Photograph Files, Box 2, Robert M. Neal Papers, Mineral Point Public Library, Mineral Point, Wisconsin. [Hereafter cited as Robert M. Neal Papers.]

union – a union that held a unique significance for the two men, because in many ways it marked their own.[3]

The top of the table, Neal's note reported, was a "bread board from the Gundrys." The bottom legs, on the other hand, were originally part of a "stool from Ralph Warner of Cooksville."[4] The age, condition, and monetary value of the table, then, was moot. This was a piece that marked the union between two men and their queer family trees, and its value lay almost solely in that symbolism. Its value was rooted in the past rather than in present or even future markets, as each piece was a memento of Neal and Hellum's respective mentors. Each piece was also represented the different but interdependent roles Neal and Hellum themselves would play in their relationship, business, and restoration projects – Neal the public face of everything the partners would do together, and Hellum the unassuming, but unwavering, support system. To function as a table, each piece depended on the other.

Whereas the preceding chapter traced Neal's life before the fateful 1934 meeting, a meeting marked by the married table, this chapter examines that same period from Hellum's perspective. It not only traces the similarities and differences between the early lives of the two men, but also seeks to explain why antiques and old homes would be the glue that bound together two generations of queer men. To approach this question, I once again turn to the theoretical work of J. Jack Halberstam. Instead of spatial concerns, however, this chapter takes time as its category of analysis. Using Halberstam's notion of queer time, I want to suggest that antiques collecting and historic preservation offered these men an alternative temporal framework within which to live their lives. In lieu of the heteronormative imperative to

[3] An additional photo of the table survives in Hellum's papers, with the inscription, "Table EGH made," Box 13, Photographs, Edgar G. Hellum Personal Papers, Pendarvis Historic Site, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Mineral Point, Wisconsin. [Hereafter cited as Edgar G. Hellum Papers].
[4] "Married Table," Robert M. Neal Papers.

reproduce and organize one's life toward the future and the next generation, Neal, Hellum, Gundry, and Warner organized their lives around a queer time that looked backward to the old, the antique, and found pasts they could merge into their present, pasts they could make usable. The married table was just one example of this kind of queer focus on the past. The value of the table, for Neal and Hellum at least, lay not in its future sale, but in its connections to the past. And those connections spoke not to heteronormative ideals of the nuclear family and the reproduction of a biological line but to a queer genealogy of elders, mentors, and ancestors. This queer attachment to the past not only united Neal and Hellum, but served as the focus of their life's work: the preservation of a vision of Mineral Point's past through which they forged a future for themselves and, ultimately, their town

"We were just farm people, small-town Stoughton people"

Hellum's story begins not in Mineral Point and the state's former lead region, but some sixty miles nearly due east in the town of Stoughton and the heart of Wisconsin tobacco country. Tucked in the corner of Dane County, about twenty miles southeast of the state capital of Madison, Stoughton was the speculative vision of a Yankee farmer and merchant named – perhaps not surprisingly – Luke Stoughton. Stoughton, like many Yankee settlers, aspired to great wealth in the West. Despite owning both a farm and a mercantile business in the nearby village of Janesville, Wisconsin, Stoughton wanted more. In the late 1840s, as Mineral Point neared the end of its second lead mining rush, talk in the territory of Wisconsin turned to statehood and railroads, leading Stoughton to purchase 800 acres of land twenty-five miles north of Janesville near a small tributary of the Rock River called Catfish Creek (now the Yahara River). The creek would provide water for drinking and power for mills. But the real prize for

Stoughton was the railroad, which he lured to his village in 1853. The railroad fueled growth in Stoughton, which was incorporated in 1868, more than forty years after the permanent settlement of Mineral Point and a little over a decade after Mineral Point turned to its third and final mineral rush – the extraction of zinc and the production of zinc oxide.[5]

The settlement of the village of is more typical for Wisconsin; Mineral Point is more the outlier. But the history of Stoughton, like that of Mineral Point, was tied to the immigrant groups that flocked to the area. Whereas Mineral Point drew people from mining regions – the U.S. South and Cornwall, for example – the growing town of Stoughton drew Yankee farmers and merchants like Stoughton himself, as well as a large influx of Norwegian immigrants. Hellum's family was among these early Norwegian immigrants. Hellum's father Thomas emigrated from Christiania (now Oslo) with his parents Ole and Martina in 1883, when he was only five years old.[6] Although the Hellums apparently farmed in Norway (Edgar claims the family name was borrowed from the farm itself in an attempt to avoid confusion over Norwegian patronyms), the family was actually drawn to Stoughton by one of the largest industries to establish itself on the banks of Catfish Creek – the Stoughton Wagon Works.[7]

While his father labored away painting wagons for a dollar and a half a day, or about 25 to 35 dollars today, Hellum's maternal grandfather, Ole Longemo, farmed tobacco, the cash crop that came to define this tiny sliver of Wisconsin during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[8] By the time of Edgar's birth, in February of 1906, just five months before Neal was

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[5] On the history of Stoughton, see, Fred Homme, *Oak Opening: The Story of Stoughton* (Stoughton: Stoughton Centennial History Committee), 20-21; "Luke Stoughton," Stoughton Historical Society, stoughtonhistoricalsociety.org; on the early history of Mineral Point, see, Marie G. Dieter, Writers Program of the Work Projects Administration, *The Story of Mineral Point, 1827-1941* (1941; repr., Mineral Point: Mineral Point Historical Society, 1979).

[6] U.S. Naturalization Record, Thomas Hellum, 1913, National Archives and Records Administration, ancestry.com.

[7] Hellum, interview.

[8] Ibid.; currency valuations obtained at, measuringworth.com

born, Amelia's parents, Ole and Martha Langemo, had only recently moved to Stoughton from a farm in the nearby township of Pleasant Springs.[9] Ole Langemo, along with his older brother Tollef, owned and farmed large tracts of land, growing tobacco and likely raising livestock and dairying as well.[10] Unlike the Hellums, when the Longemos immigrated to Dane County sometime before 1860 they continued as a farming family, first in the neighboring township of Christiana and then in Pleasant Springs.[11] By all accounts, the Langemo's appear to have been successful farmers, steadily expanding and capitalizing on their tobacco crops and land holdings. In 1873, for instance, the eldest brother Tollef owned just eighty acres in Pleasant Springs. Some twenty-five years later, in 1899, Tollef and Edgar's grandfather Ole owned almost 425 acres combined, well over half an entire section.[12] When Ole began to sell off his parcels shortly after the turn of the century, he was able to use the proceeds from the sale to retire to a 4,000 dollar house in town – a home that would be worth almost 300,000 dollars today. Edgar's great uncle Tollef and Tollef's son Olaus – who also owned and operated the Stoughton Shoe and

[9] In most of Wisconsin, rural townships are referred to as towns. To avoid confusion I use the more general term township. George R. Keachie, *Atlas of Dane County Including Plats of Towns, Cities and Villages* (Madison: Democrat Print Company, 1904), 27; *Standard Historical Atlas of Dane County, Wisconsin Containing Maps of Villages, Cities, and Townships* (Madison: Cantwell Publishing, 1911); 1910 U.S. Census, Stoughton, ward 3, dwelling 87.

[10] Because tobacco crops quickly deplete the soil of nutrients, livestock was often raised in conjunction with the cash crop. Livestock and dairy cows not only provided extra income when either animals or milk was sent to market, but the manure could help replenish the soil. Although there are no details about what was grown or raised on the Langemo farms aside from tobacco (or even how extensive the crop was), land-use maps from the 1930s indicate that the land owned by Ole and Tollef was a combination of cleared crop land and grazing pasture, a pattern indicative of this type of mixed farming operation. On the cultivation of tobacco and the importance of fertilization in Dane County, see, Benjamin Horace Hibbard, *The History of Agriculture in Dane County Wisconsin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1904): 162-163; for information on land use, see: *Wisconsin Land Economic Inventory (Bordner Survey)*, "Town of Pleasant Springs," (Madison: Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, 1939), University of Wisconsin Digital Collections, www.digicoll.library.wisc.edu.

[11] 1860 U.S. Census, population schedule, town of Christiana, dwelling 202; *Atlas of Dane County* (Madison: Harrison and Wheeler, 1873), 37.

[12] *Atlas of Dane County*; Charles M. Foote, *Plat Map of Dane County* (Minneapolis: C.M Foote and Company, 1890), 44; Leonard W. Gay, *New Atlas of Dane County, Wisconsin* (Madison: Leonard W. Gay and Company, 1899), 51.

Leather Company, just down river from the Wagon Works – continued to hold portions of the family farmland into the 1930s.

Late in life Hellum would draw on this family history when interviewed about the preservation work he and Neal had accomplished in Mineral Point. In a 1997 interview with the historian Will Fellows, Hellum suggested that, compared to the classier influences of Neal and Gundry, his background was far more workaday, plain-spoken, and folksy. "We were just farm people, small-town Stoughton people," he recalled. "I didn't know all that finesse."[13] According to Hellum, life on the farm taught him, from an early age, the value of hard physical labor. "I was in the tobacco fields when I was eight years old," he remembered. "My grandad hired me for fifty cents a day to learn to work," imparting to the young Hellum the existential, if perhaps limiting, wisdom that, "'You're put in this world to work.'"[14]

And Hellum seems to have taken this message to heart, especially in his old age. In interviews conducted in 1989 and 1990 by Mark Knipping and Korinne Oberle, then director and curator of the Pendarvis Historic Site, respectively, Hellum compared his background, interests, and contributions with those of his partner Neal. "Basically, at heart," he observed, "I was more of a country boy than Bob. I think I could have been a farmer. I like to grow things, I like to have my feet in the dirt and actually put things in and I would like to make my living from the land." And while he never actually was a farmer, he did muse that with Pendarvis House and the

[13]Edgar Hellum, interviewed by Will Fellows, Mineral Point, WI, December 17, 1997. This interview is a key source for Fellows' chapter on Neal and Hellum in his book, *A Passion to Preserve*. My sincere thanks to Will Fellows for sharing the transcript of this interview as well as other materials relating to Neal and Hellum. Will Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve: Gay Men as Keepers of Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).
[14] Ibid.

larger preservation project, "we came pretty close. We took the land and put it back so that it didn't bring crops of potatoes or corn but it brought people to bring us our income."[15]

But while there may be more than a grain of salt's truth in Hellum's self-characterization as a down-to-earth country boy – he never quite had the same experiences or attachments to urban spaces as Neal did – the affectation of just being one more in a line of "small-town Stoughton people" belies the complicated, aesthetically-driven, and queer life Hellum led before meeting Neal in Mineral Point in 1934. For starters, while there is no reason to doubt that Hellum labored in his extended family's tobacco fields as a child, he never actually lived on a farm. Rather, Hellum spent his childhood living in the town of Stoughton, first with his parents in rented apartments, and later with his mother and her parents in the their 4,000 dollar home while his father traveled, looking for work after the Stoughton Wagon Works shifted from building horse-drawn wagons to automobiles.[16]

Indeed, the class differences between his own father and his maternal grandfather may be one of the reasons Hellum was so drawn to portraying himself as a farm boy in old age. Given the financial difficulties his father faced as an immigrant laborer in an industry that was quickly being phased out by newer technology, the profitable farming ventures of his grandfather, not to mention the ongoing success of his maternal uncle's shoe company, represented an economic and familial stability his father could not offer. The Langemos owned their land and their homes and businesses. Thomas Hellum did not. The Langemos were rooted to the land, while Thomas Hellum was not. During the First World War, for example, when Edgar was only eleven years

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[15] Mark H. Knipping and Korinne K. Oberle, *On the Shake Rag: Mineral Point's Pendarvis House, 1935-1970* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1990), 51.

[16] Homme, 63. It is interesting to note that, through a series of sales and mergers, the Stoughton Wagon Works of Thomas Hellum's era evolved to become Stoughton Trailers, "the fourth largest manufacturer of [semi]truck trailers in the United States." "Stoughton Wagon Co., Stoughton Cab and Body Co.," "Encyclopedia of American of American Coachbuilders," www.coachbuilt.com/bui/s/stoughton/stoughton.htm, accessed: July 14, 2015.

old, the elder Hellum left Stoughton, first traveling to Madison to work as a painter with the Madison Plow Company and then Racine, some eighty miles southeast of Stoughton on the shores of Lake Michigan.[17] It was here, in late April of 1920, at the age of 42, that Thomas, who was rooming in a boarding house with other migrant laborers, contracted influenza and died.[18] His body was brought back to Stoughton for burial.[19] Edgar was only fourteen years old. Hellum's framing of himself as a farm boy and his family as a small-town farming family suggest, then, that Hellum looked to his grandfather as a father figure and at farming, not working-class, migrant labor, as a worthy, stable, and profitable class of work.

But issues of gender and sexuality are also important to take into account here. Hellum framed the relationship between himself and his partner Neal as one of gendered opposites, especially where the question of labor was concerned. "He was sort of a prima donna," Hellum divulged of Neal in 1997. "But I was the one that did the bullwork." According to Hellum, Neal was the brains of the operation, Hellum the brawn; Neal the promoter and Hellum the laborer. In the restaurant the two men would eventually open, Neal worked the front of the house, Hellum the back. And in the pair's preservation project, Neal would decorate the interiors of the homes the men purchased while Hellum would restore the buildings and the grounds. "Bob didn't like hard, physical labor," Hellum declared. "That's why we made a partnership, you see. He did things in the house that I didn't like to do. Bob had an eye for decorating….He liked the opera, he liked ballet, he liked what the city had to offer." In this way, Hellum gendered his own

[17] Thomas Hellum World War I Draft Registration Card, ancestry.com, accessed July 2, 2015; 1920 United States Federal Census, Population Schedule, City of Racine, Ward 3, ancestry.com, accessed July 2, 2015.
[18] United States Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Death Records, 1920, ancestry.com, accessed July 2, 2015.
[19] "Stoughton Man Buried Monday," *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 4, 1920.

physical and often outdoor labor as masculine and earthy while Neal's often more domestic work was feminized, made delicate, and positioned as urban and urbane.

As a child and a young man, however, Hellum showed little interest in the more practical aspects of life like farming or holding a steady job. He preferred to grow flowers, instead, or travel the country, or become an artist. In this respect Hellum's youth was not that different – in his aesthetic pursuits, at least – from the young Neal in Mineral Point. Given his father's limited income and his grandparents' farm background Hellum helped with the large vegetable garden the extended family kept to lower the cost of feeding so many mouths. Hellum took to gardening at a young age, even before his time in the tobacco fields, but preferred decorative flowers to useful vegetables. "[I was interested in] gardening…when I was six or seven," Hellum recalled. "We had a large vegetable garden. But I didn't want to grow vegetables, I wanted a flower garden."[20]

While it is not clear if Hellum ever got to grow the flower garden he wanted as a young child (if not, he surely made up for it as an adult), when it came to another of his passions – books – he made full use of the resources available to him in the town of Stoughton and read voraciously. Despite the availability of books at the local library, the young boy did not receive much support for his bibliphilia from his grandmother, Martha Langemo, who seems to have shared her husband's utilitarian philosophy that one is put into the world solely to work. "It's a disease, there's something wrong with him," Edgar recounted her saying. "He's always got his nose in a book." Hellum did not even receive much support from the local librarian. "And then when I started down at the library," Edgar remembered, "and I'd take three and four books, and

[20] Hellum, interview.

so finally the librarian told my mother, she said 'Does he just come down and take those books home as sort of a show?' And Mother says, 'No, he's got his nose in a book all the time.'"[21]

Just like the young Robert Neal in Mineral Point, Hellum's various passions and pursuits received mixed reviews from his family members. Much like Neal's father in response to young Bob's collecting, Hellum's grandmother could not understand the joy and pleasure her grandson obtained through reading. After all, "She never read a book in her life," according to Hellum. Hellum's mother, on the other hand, constantly supported him as he explored the things in life that perhaps made him different than other boys. When it came to books, for example, rather than scorning his voracious appetite for reading, she would quiz the young Edgar on his most recent literary adventure. "She began to ask me questions," Edgar remembered. "'Well, how did you like this one?' And I said, 'I didn't like it very well.' And she'd ask me definite questions and I'd say why or why not." Hellum also found support from one of his mother's sisters. "Oh God, she was close to me," Hellum remembered of his aunt. "She introduced me to flowers, to birds, to wildlife, and books…I've got some on my shelf now, books that she gave me when I was four, five, six years old."[22]

Hellum also received support, implicitly at least, from his father while he was alive. Thomas Hellum regularly purchased season tickets to the Chautauqua that traveled each summer to the Stoughton City Auditorium (now the Stoughton Opera House), a family tradition that continued after the patriarch's death. At the Stoughton Chautauqua – a commercialized circuit show that differed significantly from its Methodist summer meeting namesake – the young Hellum would have been exposed to a variety of speakers, politicians, theologians, musicians,

[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

and artists.[23] The artists had the greatest effect on Hellum, who would work to imitate the art he saw on stage. After witnessing one artist sculpting clay, Edgar purchased wooden manicure sticks and began to sculpt, working with media from clay to Proctor and Gamble soap. While in high school, Hellum displayed his sculpture and other artwork alongside that of other young artist friends in a room above the Eat More diner, where he worked part-time washing dishes.[24] At the same time, Hellum participated in the performing arts as well, acting in the high school play alongside a cast that included a live black cat.[25]

Ultimately, then, Hellum was not "just" a farm kid or simply descended from small-town, folksy, work-a-day stock. Indeed, his upbringing and the support he received from family members and friends in the pursuit of his more aesthetic pursuits suggests that small-town life was never as folksy, work-a-day, or simple as such categorization implies. It is hard to know exactly why Hellum insisted on framing himself in such a way late in life, especially since the support he received as a young artist in Stoughton crucially shaped his future trajectory. Among these early supporters was a close friend of his mother's named Georgia Townsend. Townsend never married, and spent most of her life in Madison, where she was initially a student and then worked a variety of jobs, including stints as a clerk and waitressing at the tea room in Madison's Baron Brothers Department store.[26] According to Hellum, "She was very artistic, and she kept

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[23] On the development of the various forms of Chautauqua, see John E. Tapia, *Circuit Chautauqua: From Rural Education to Popular Entertainment in Early Twentieth Century America* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Co.); on Chautauqua in Wisconsin, see Harrison John Thorton, "Chautauqua in the Midwest," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 33 no. 2 (December 1949): 152-163; and "Wisconsin Cautauqua," University of Wisconsin Extension Services Pamphlet, ca. 1920.

[24] The life of the young artist is summarized in two similar texts written for two different exhibitions of Hellum's work both as a young man and after his retirement from Pendarvis. See, "Of Craftsmen and Consumers: Wisconsin and the Arts and Crafts Movment," Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1997-1998, transcribed by Will Fellows; and Kori Oberle, "Edgar G. Hellum" *Unparalled Lives*, Chicago Institue of Art, 1999.

[25] Among Hellum's personal papers is a promotional picture of the cast, including the cat balanced on Hellum's arm. Box 13, Photographs, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.

[26] Madison City Directories, 1919, 1943, 1946, 1947, 1951, and 1955, ancestry.com, accessed July 20, 2015.

trying to encourage me to do things with my hands."[27] To this end – and whether by coincidence or design is unclear – Townsend orchestrated a series of meetings that would alter Hellum's life forever. The first of these meetings occurred one Sunday afternoon, when Hellum was just a junior in high school. Townsend brought the young student to a small village called Cooksville, six miles south of Stoughton, just across the county line. There, while enjoying a picnic lunch at one of the charming brick buildings that lined the village common, Hellum met Ralph Warner, the man who would become Hellum's queer mentor and set him on a course toward that other important meeting made possible by Townsend – Hellum's first encounter with Neal in Mineral Point, a meeting embodied in the invaluable, if largely value-less, married table.[28]

Hellum, the "He-Witch," and the Spell of History

During the summer of 1923, when Hellum was just seventeen years old, his mother's friend – the "artistic" Townsend – took young Hellum on a Sunday road trip that included a stop in the small village of Cooksville. This road trip culminated with a picnic at a place known as the House Next Door. Referred to by village historians as the 1848 Duncan House, the House Next Door was a two-story Greek revival structure made of local vermillion brick and owned by an equally artistic man named Ralph Warner. Warner's home was filled with antiques and his gardens grew all manner of flowers and "medicinal herbs" – the latter giving one journalist the opportunity to describe Warner's home and business euphemistically as a "Witchery in Wisconsin," an appellation which in turn allowed Warner, a confirmed bachelor, to endearingly

[27] Hellum, interview.
[28] Ibid.

self-identify as the "he-witch of Wisconsin."[29] Beyond supernatural categorizations, Warner was variously described as "an artist, a musician, 'a very pleasant, romantic gentleman,' [and] a 'delightfully temperamental antique collector,'" by journalists who sought to describe, without naming, the queerness of Warner, his home, and his business.[30]

Why Townsend brought Hellum to visit Warner and his home in Cooksville is unclear, but in the same way that John Gray arranged the meeting between Neal and Gundry, Townsend may have brought Hellum and Warner together based on a shared interest in more than just antiques. The two men certainly had plenty in common. Hellum, who had wanted a flower garden of his own, for example, remembered Warner's horticultural skills quite fondly: "Ralph had the most beautiful garden," he reminisced. "He was a marvelous gardener." They also shared a love of books. Hellum, for instance, kept in his possession toward the end of his life a book from Warner bearing the House Next Door nameplate. Hellum may have held on to this copy of *The Quest of the Colonial*, a 1908 text by Robert and Elizabeth Shackleton about colonial homes, because it represented what he gained from his meeting and ensuing friendship with Warner – a passion for antiques and restoring old homes. As Hellum recalled, "Ralph Warner was the first one to influence me in the interest in antiques and restoration. He had restored his [home] very carefully. He started me off on the right foot….he [had] his collection of stuff, did food, liked good music. He liked the good things in life. That started my education, started my curiosity."[31]

Perhaps even more than Neal and Gundry, the mentoring relationship between Hellum and Warner mirrored the relationship between father and son. Neal's father, of course,

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[29] Eleanor Mercein, "Adventurous Cookery" *Ladies Home Journal*, March 1933, 13; Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve*, 165.
[30] Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve*, 164.
[31] Hellum, interview.

unsupportive though he was, was still alive and head of the household in Mineral Point. Hellum's father, on the other hand, separated from the family in search of work, had passed away in 1920. Pointedly, in his reminiscences of Cooksville and Warner, Hellum described his mentor as "old enough to be my father."[32] Warner was y older than Thomas Hellum, only by three years, but in many ways he served as a role model for the young Edgar. Most crucially, Warner and the House Next Door would be a direct model for the business and restoration efforts of Neal and Hellum in Mineral Point.[33] Not only had Warner restored his house, just as Neal and Hellum would do in Mineral Point, he also served tea and food and provided entertainment at the House Next Door, practices the young men would also emulate. For Neal and Hellum, the "remarkable house and its owner," as one magazine article put it, were profitably and aesthetically pleasing models to follow.[34]

In providing this model for Hellum, however, Warner was giving the young man with more than just a business plan. It was also a way of life and, specifically, a queer way of life that could be emulated as effectively as Warner's business practices. Indeed, the two, in many ways, were inextricably linked. Born in Milwaukee in 1875, Warner was, according to Fellows, "ambivalent about engaging with the world….He was bright, sociable, and talkative, a creative homemaker and gardener, a gifted pianist. He was also quite effeminate in voice, mannerism, and essential nature, and his complexion was badly scarred as a result of childhood smallpox."[35] Despite his introverted nature, Warner became a teacher in Racine, where he taught music and woodworking.[36] It was in Racine that he met an unmarried teacher named Susan Porter. The

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Adeline Evans Harris, "The Man in the House Next Door," *House Beautiful*, January 1923, 70.
[35] Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve*, 163.
[36] 1900 U.S. Census, population schedule, Racine county, Mount Pleasant township, dwelling 71; Hellum, interview.

Porters – alongside the eponymous Cook brothers – had been one of the founding families of Cooksville in the 1840s. By 1911, Susan Porter maintained a summer home in her ancestral village. That summer, Porter invited Warner to a party in Cooksville, an invitation that the latter fortuitously accepted.

When Warner visited Porter in her 1847 home bordering the village common, he was entranced by the charm of the tiny New England-style settlement. Dubbed by one visitor as "The Town that Time Forgot," the buildings of Cooksville were largely frozen in time, mostly untouched since the mid-nineteenth century.[37] Unlike the town of Stoughton, just to the north, Cooksville, which was first platted in 1840, never saw the arrival of the railroad. And unlike other country crossroad villages, which were often abandoned or physically moved when bypassed by the railroad, Cooksville remained in part because of its economic importance to the surrounding farmers, but also – perhaps even more so – because its buildings were made of a local vermillion-colored brick, which made the structures difficult and expensive to dismantle and reconstruct elsewhere.[38] Thus, when Warner arrived at the beginning of the twentieth century it was as if he had stepped back in time a fifty years.

This act of time travel suited Warner in more ways than one. From a young age Warner had collected antiques, "starting with family pieces from his grandmothers and aunts and other old women he got to know," essentially furnishing his home before he actually had a structure to go with his collection.[39] Visiting Porter in 1911, Warner finally found that home, the Duncan House, right next door to Porter. He quickly restored the house, filled it with his collections, and

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[37] Virginia A. Palmer, "Cooksville: The Town that Time Forgot," *Wisconsin Tales and Trails* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1963): 21-25.
[38] Palmer, "Cooksville"; Lillian Russell Porter, *Choice Seed in the Wilderness: From the Diary of Ann Eliza Bacon Porter, Cooksville, Wisconsin, 1845-1890* (Rockland, Maine: Seth Low Press, 1964).
[39] Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve*, 163.

began accepting visitors. Despite doing no advertising and relying solely on word-of-mouth, the summers Warner spent at the House Next Door included a steady stream of visitors, who would stop to purchase antiques, have a spot of tea, or simply look at the house – or, as Hellum and Townsend did, enjoy a picnic at the charming house on the village green.[40]

But Cooksville and the House Next Door were important to Warner, and later to Hellum, not only because they were artifacts of a time gone by, antiques writ large, but because of the queer possibilities, the queer temporalities found in the village, its houses, and its antiques. That is, for Warner and Hellum, the House Next Door and its objects materialized a sense of queer time – a concept drawn from the realm of queer theory. For theorists like J. Jack Halberstam and others, queer time is a temporal framework that exists outside of dominant, heteronormative understandings of time, what Halberstam specifically refers to as "reproductive time." Reproductive time, for Halberstam, is the dominant way of understanding time as organized around heterosexual reproduction, moving from birth through childhood, adolescence, adulthood and marriage, the birth of children, middle and old age, and finally death. This linear understanding of time is propelled *forward* by reproduction, the figure of the child, and various forms of inheritance that, taken together, work to reify not only heterosexuality as *the* normative and default form of organizing sexuality, but also systems of capitalism by producing ever more workers and consumers. Crucially, Halberstam sees this temporal regime queered – that is, challenged, exposed, and made fragile – by those moments when queer folks reject, alter, or otherwise truncate the future-oriented trajectory of reproductive time.[41]

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Judith (J. Jack) Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 1-5.

Queer theorist Lee Edelman, sees this queer temporal challenge most clearly in modern-day cinema and the portrayal of villainous queer characters as threats to children and what he terms "reproductive futurity." Rather than challenge these negative portrayals, as contemporary LGBT activists have done, Edelman sees in this portrayal the possibilities of a powerful, radical political and cultural critique. By disavowing a politics that works toward a better future for the next generations, Edelman suggests that radical queer political and cultural actions should embrace an anti-reproductive, indeed a symbolically anti-child, strategy. At the heart of Edelman's polemic is the notion that queerness, in its truly radical and transformative form, has "No Future."[42]

With less abstraction and a less polemical bent, the queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman sees normative temporal regimes – reproductive time or reproductive futurity – challenged, altered, and exposed by what she refers to as queer style. Rather than an open attack on normative regimes of time, Freeman's theory takes into account the power and flexibility of dominant temporality and sees queer style as a more subtle and subversive tactic, one that does not proscribe a radical alternative but merely suggests its possibility. According to Freeman, queer style includes "all of the compositional elements of literature, the arts, and live performance [that] encodes and enacts the bending of dominant form…[Queer] style neither transcends nor subsumes [dominant] culture but pries it open a bit, rearranges or reconstitutes its elements, providing glimpses of an otherwise-being."[43]

Collecting antiques, preserving old homes, and generally cultivating an aesthetic lifestyle are examples of just such a style. Indeed, the lives of Neal, Hellum, Gundry, and Warner can be understood to have embodied snapshots of the queer "otherwise-being" Freeman sees as made

[42] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
[43] Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xix.

possible by queer style. More specifically, the way in which these men dedicated their lives to looking *backward* rather than *forward* in time can be understood as an example of the queer style Freeman refers to as "temporal drag," or the "countergenealogical practice of archiving culture's throwaway objects, including the outmoded masculinities and femininities from which usable pasts may be extracted."[44] Put another way, Neal and Hellum's mentors were teaching their young protégés more than just the ins and outs of collecting antiques. Gundry and Warner were providing their dedicated pupils with the possibility of a life*style*, a queer way of living outside the heteronormative imperatives of marriage, reproduction, and a concomitant career.

For contemporary observers, this connection between the past cultivated by Warner and his queerness was palpable. In addition to being unmarried and having effeminate mannerisms, Warner's attachment to antiques and to the past was, for a number of journalists who trekked to Cooksville, the queerest aspect of his personage. A 1923 write-up in the magazine *House Beautiful*, for example, proclaims that:

> The story of how [Warner] dreamed the house for years, collected much of the furniture to go into it, and finally acquired it and with his own hands made it the charming place it is today has a legendary sound. It wouldn't be so much of a story, or so interesting perhaps, if Ralph Warner were a woman; it certainly wouldn't be if he were a wealthy collector and had the house as a hobby, or if he were a shrewd business man and used it as a money-making proposition. But Ralph Warner is the direct opposite of these things. It is not easy to catalogue him at all, except to say that he is – in the broader meaning of the term – an artist.[45]

Here the author was playing on the queer connotations of the word "artist" – connotations that, according to art historians, had solidified in late nineteenth century, making the artist and the queer one in the same.[46] But the author was also suggesting that Warner's connection to the past

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[44] Ibid, xxiii.
[45] Harris, "The Man in the House Next Door,"; Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve*, 163-4.
[46] Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 94.

and his antiques was, in itself, queer. He was not a woman, who according to the author's sexist essentialism would be prone to such frivolous things, nor was Warner a man who was simply a collector or cunning capitalist. Instead, he had a different, much closer, and more intimate relationship to the past that put him outside of normative, productive understandings of time. He was, in a certain sense, an embodiment of queer time. What Warner presented in his antique house filled with antique objects was the possibility of an otherwise-being. He was something other – other than a womanly collector or a manly businessman – such that the only way the journalist could categorize Warner was with the ambiguous, shifting, and queer label of "artist."

In many ways Warner was an artist, "an artist," as one Madison newspaper put it, "who has neither painted pictures, sung songs, or written books."[47] Put another way, Warner's home and his gardens were his canvas, and his antiques and "medicinal herbs" his palette. And for many observers, this art form was subversive, a rejection of heteronormative and capitalist imperatives to reproduce children, workers, and capital. Whether that subversion was amusing or an alternative way of being depended on who was looking. Warner, for instance, was often portrayed by journalists as forgoing wage labor, especially the masculine work of farming. "He always puttered around the house," one journalist noted, "cooking, making hooked rugs, collecting antiques and the like. Strolling around the village in his white pants, he always had plenty of time to talk when the farmers were busy with their chores."[48] Here, collecting antiques was grouped with decidedly feminine pursuits of cooking and crafting, and Warner was an interfering housewife. For this journalist, domestic work was not proper work, or at least not proper work for a man. After all, these tasks didn't require overalls, they could be accomplished in white pants. Moreover, the writer paints Warner as oblivious to the "real" work of farming, to

[47] Mary York, "The 'House Next Door' Is a Step Into History," *Capital Times* (Madison, WI), July 23, 1933.
[48] May I. Bauchle, "The Land of Long Ago," *The Wisconsin Magazine*, September 1925, 6.

the labor of "real" men. In a sense, then, just as the queer figure of Warner interrupted real men's work, antiques and their collection interrupted the future-oriented capitalist imperative to produce. Warner, for this observer, was simply playing housewife.

But for other individuals, particularly queer individuals, Warner and the House Next Door offered a different lifestyle, an otherwise-being. By performing the style of temporal drag, Warner showcased the possibilities of queer time and the possibilities of a queer subculture in Cooksville, and by extension rural and small-town spaces more generally. Beyond simply collecting antiques, Warner sometimes dressed in literal temporal drag, becoming a living antique himself. When hosting visitors for tea or meals, for example, Warner would often don a nineteenth-century top hat and tails. "When he got through [serving the guests]," Hellum recalled, "he would go and put on a long-tailed suit and top hat and a vest, and sit down and play the piano. The old square [piano] that he had, the felts were all gone, so that it sounded like a harpsichord. So he'd play these English tunes and even sing. He would really put on a show for them."[49] This performative style of history proved popular with guests, and it was a style Neal and Hellum emulated in Mineral Point. It underscored Warner's dedication to the past and his disavowal of a heteronormative reproductive future. Indeed, when asked by visitors, "'Where is *Mrs*. Ralph?,'" Warner provided a reply that worked to stake a position outside a future-oriented heteronormative temporality. "'All of the ladies nowadays belong in the tommorrows and next days,'" Warner stated. "I've never found one that fitted into my land of long ago.'"[50] Warner's temporal logic was not oriented to the future, but to the past. Or, to put it another way, Warner imagined his future as the past. Within this queer logic, there simply was no time or space for a

[49] Hellum, interview.
[50] "Sleepy and Picturesque Cooksville Scorns Gasoline Pumps," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 26, 1940.

Mrs. Ralph, whose presence would then bring about the heteronormative imperative to reproduce, to create a future generation.

That is not to say, however, that Warner produced no offspring or left no genealogical line. By signaling to queer individuals the possibility of an otherwise being, Warner drew such individuals to him, to his house, and to the village of Cooksville. "'Somehow, I never feel alone when I am here," Warner told a visiting journalist in 1933. "It seems that there are always others with me – persons who belong here more than I do."[51] And many of those persons were queer. Without knowing it, Warner was helping to develop a queer rural and small-town culture focused on antiques and historic preservation. In this way, Warner and his House Next Door fit into Halberstam's formulation in which "Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death."[52] This subculture and its lineage in the tiny hamlet of Cooksville began with Susan Porter and Warner. As Fellows has uncovered, in the Duncan House alone, a string of queer men lived and cared for each other into the 1980s. Chester Holway and his partner Marvin Raney purchased the house after Warner's death in 1941. In 1980, Larry Reed and his partner Michael Saternus joined Raney in the Duncan House, after Raney suffered a stroke. Raney sold antiques in the Duncan House, and through that business and other connections, brought queer men to inhabit several of the other houses in the village. To date Reed remains in the village, the apparent last branch of the century-long queer family tree.[53]

[51] York, "The 'House Next Door' Is a Step Into History."
[52] Halberstam, *Queer Time and Place*, 2.
[53] Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve*, 186-189.

Hellum, of course, was a part of this queer lineage, drawn to Cooksville and Warner for what Warner had to teach him about antiques and restoration. Warner was "erudite," Hellum remembered. "He'd been around enough, and knew antiques. There wasn't anybody that I knew at that time…that had anywhere near the knowledge that he had."[54] Hellum respected Warner's knowledge so much that, in 1933, at the Warner's urging, Hellum purchased his own home in Cooksville – the 1848 Cook House, the oldest house in the village. Hellum even managed to convince his practical grandfather that the small, run down structure was a good investment:

> So when I bought the house and got it paid for and got the deed, I said Grandpa, you gotta get in the car. We got in the car and drove out there and he looked at the house – it hadn't been painted in twenty-five years, and the shingles looked like feathers on a bird. He said, "I don't think you bought much." I said, Pa, I've gone through the house and basically it's well-built. I said it needs a lot of repair, but basically it's a good house. Well, he said, "Do you mind if I ask how much you paid for it?" and I said, no I paid two hundred dollars cash. And then I had it surveyed and that cost me twenty-five dollars; I had to be sure that I had the well that was right on the lot line. The taxes, Grandpa, are a dollar and eighty-seven cents a year. I said nobody will ever take the house away from me if I can't pay the taxes. He threw back his head and he laughed and said, "I don't think you did too badly."[55]

This was high praise from a Norwegian. For Hellum's grandfather, owning a house was both an important financial decision and a key sign of middle-class masculinity. "'Every man likes to have his own house,'" Hellum recalled his grandfather saying in 1933. But other individuals saw something else in Hellum's purchase. Warner, who had recently suffered a stroke, likely saw the purchase as a guarantee that the preservation work he had begun in the village would continue and even spread beyond the House Next Door. And, according to Hellum, other Cooksville residents felt the same. "I got to know the Kramers and Mattakats and other people in Cooksville," he remembered. "They wanted me to stay in Cooksville, of course. When I came

[54] Hellum, interview.
[55] Ibid.

[to Mineral Point], oh god, they were unhappy about that, because I was sort of an outside spirit that came in and really started the [preservation] thing going [in the village]."[56]

Hellum did work to restore the Cook House, but he never actually lived there. Instead, during the summer of 1933, Hellum lived in the Duncan house with Warner after Warner's stroke. Hellum maintained ownership though, leasing the Cook House to his aunt and uncle for seventeen years – rent free. In the early 1950s, Hellum sold the house to the Mattakat family, who ran an antique shop in the building called The Red Door.[57] And while Cooksville residents may have been sad to see Hellum's "outside spirit" leave the crossroads settlement, that spirit – that otherwise-being of queer possibility and queer temporality – was not gone but merely transferred to a larger pasture. In 1934, Hellum needed building materials for his restoration work on the Cook House. Some stories say he needed window frames, others doors, others still say shutters. Regardless, Georgia Townsend – the woman who first introduced Hellum to Warner – suggested Hellum might find what he was looking for among the rolling hills of southwestern Wisconsin and in the small town of Mineral Point.[58]

Staying Un-Stuck

Before Hellum went in search of those window frames, doors, or shutters, however, indeed, before he even owned the Cook House, he followed the same basic metronormative trajectory Neal traced following high school graduation. Leaving the small town of Stoughton and his mentor Warner behind, Hellum set off for the big city. Unlike Neal, however, evidence

[56] Ibid.
[57] Hellum, interview; Hellum, Interviewed by Sally Eager, October 6, 1981, Cooksville Village Archives, Cooksville, Wisconsin.
[58] Hellum, interview.

suggests that the queer cultures of metropolitan centers were not a draw for Hellum. Instead, his travels were more centrally about his need to find his place in the world, what he would refer to later in life as his "pattern."[59] Whereas Neal's aestheticism lead him firmly into interior design, Hellum's journey was a far more complicated and wandering one. In many ways, Hellum was wrestling with contradictory forces in his life. On the hand, there was the "farm boy" imperative to work and be successful like his maternal relatives – especially his grandfather Ole, with his lucrative tobacco farm, and his uncle Olaus, who worked his way up to the presidency of the Stoughton Shoe and Leather Company. On the other hand, there was the competing, less productive, queerer drive toward flower gardens, books, art, and antiques –interests that challenged the capitalist imperative to produce ever more and ever newer things, those things that put Hellum squarely within the realm of queer time.

Hellum's first attempt at a traditional career was a stint at dentistry school in Milwaukee. According to Hellum, the idea came from his father, the immigrant laborer who wanted his son to achieve the American Dream of class advancement. "My dad was forty-two years old when he had his first dental work done," Edgar remembered. "He came home and told my mom, my god, there was a good white-collar trade – your own office, your own business, and you can be prosperous."[60] Ultimately, this was Thomas Hellum's dream, not Edgar's, and Hellum lasted only two semesters at the Marquette University School of Dentistry. He tried to quit after the very first semester, realizing he did not want to be a dentist. His mother and uncle Olaus convinced him to give it one more try, insisting he "shouldn't be a quitter." So Hellum went back to Marquette, but "the middle of the second semester, I don't know why, I just simply packed up my books and came home. This isn't it…it isn't what I want to do. I said it was

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

going to cost eight or ten thousand dollars to put me through school…then I'm stuck."[61] If it was one thing Hellum did not want, it was to be stuck.

Starting a family was also out of the question for Hellum. This too would make him stuck. At the same time that he told his mother and uncle he was done with dentistry, he also proclaimed his intention to remain single. "And then I told them," Hellum recalls, "'I don't want to get married.'" Initially, Hellum's mother and uncle reassured the young man, "well, you've got time for that." But Hellum elaborated, "when you get married and settle down and get a family, then you're stuck. If you stay single, then you can do anything, you don't have to make a living for the family."[62] While not a "coming out" in the sense of proclaiming a particular sexual identity, this was for Hellum a queer declaration of independence, the voicing of a desire to find a life outside the normative conventions of heteronormative family life. Put another way, for Hellum, to be stuck was to be constrained by reproductive time. Hellum was searching for an alternative.

Following this rather queer announcement as well as his aborted attempt at dentistry school and a "good white-collar trade," in 1926 Hellum took a job as a clerk in another Midwestern metropolis – this time, Minneapolis.[63] Here, as he continued to seek his "pattern," he fell back on his interest in art, an interest he began to cultivate as a high school student back in Stoughton. Visiting the museums Minneapolis had to offer, Hellum once again began to make art. He dabbled in sculpture, crafting a series of three busts called *The Furies*. During this time he also sculpted the figure of a horse and rider, which made its way back to Stoughton and the gallery above the Eat More restaurant, where it was purchased by a local art lover – possibly

[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

Hellum's first sale as an artist. And whether out of a sense of playfulness or in an attempt to separate his work life from his life as an artist, Hellum signed his pieces "Ragde Mulleh" – or, Edgar Hellum in reverse.[64]

By 1930, Hellum had taken his revived interest in art to yet a third midwestern city. This time it was to *the* midwestern metropolis, Chicago. There Hellum worked as a bookkeeper and a printing shop machinist while taking night classes at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.[65] Some have suggested that Neal and Hellum actually met during this period, while taking classes at the Art Institute, and not later in Mineral Point.[66] Neal did register for classes at the art school, but he was enrolled for the term before Hellum arrived in the spring 1930.[67] The two men also lived on opposite ends of the city, with Neal at various addresses on the Near North Side and Hellum on the city's South Side, near Jackson Park.[68] Neal, however, was a regular visitor to the Institute and the pair may have travelled in similar or even the same circles.[69] Regardless, if the two did happen to meet during this period, it certainly was not a notable event for either man.

At the Art Institute, Hellum studied drawing, art history, and his preferred medium of sculpture. Perhaps an effect of feeling himself just a "farm boy" from Stoughton, he felt his

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[64] "Of Craftsmen and Consumers."

[65] 1930 U.S. Census, population schedule, Chicago, Ward 6, Block 83.

[66] See, e.g., Helen O'Neill, "Cornish charm in Wisconsin," *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 19, 2014, E1; and "'The Bachelors,' a Play About Fidelity to Partner and Community," *Evanston RoundTable* (Illinois), January 2, 2013. O'Neil's Associated Press article was also published as "Mining town remade into arts destination," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), July 20, 2014, D2; and "All things Cornish in Wisconsin Arts Town," *Epoch Times* (New York), July 24, 2014. The play, "The Bachelors" became "Ten Dollar House" in later iterations and has been staged in Mineral Point, Madison, and Evanston, Illinois.

[67] Neal and Hellum's application and registration records, Institutional Archive, Chicago School of the Institute of Art. Special thanks to Nicholas Lowe for sharing these documents with me.

[68] Neal rented in a number of different locations in Chicago, first at 1241 N. La Salle Street, and then at 61 Cedar Street, a now extremely fashionable (and expensive) early-twentieth century brownstone just north of downtown and a block from North Shore Drive and the Lake Michigan shoreline. Hellum, on the other hand, lived much farther south at 5334 Cornell Ave. That site is now a parking lot. See, e.g., Robert Neal Dairy, Box 1, Edgar Hellum Papers; Syrie Maugham to Robert Neal, March 4, 1930, Robert Neal Papers; U.S. Census, population schedule, Chicago, Ward 6, Block 83.

[69] Robert Neal, Chicago Diary, Box 1, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.

artistic talents were inadequate. "When comparing his work with that of his classmates," Oberle wrote, "he believed that he lacked sufficient talent to become a successful artist. So at the age of twenty-five, he left Chicago and returned home to Stoughton to work with his hands. He told his grandfather he thought he might become a farmer."[70] This perception of inadequacy combined with the growing economic depression sent Hellum back to his family in Stoughton where he ended up not on a farm, but in his uncle's shoe factory. Mercifully, for Hellum, his uncle seemed to understand the young man's ongoing struggle between seeking an aesthetic lifestyle like Warner's, dedicated to beautiful things, and the utilitarian lifestyle celebrated by his maternal grandfather, the retired farmer. "My uncle never shut the door on me," Hellum remembered, "Anytime I wanted to go from the shoe factory, he always let me go, but he always took me back."[71]

Hellum took advantage of this uncle's understanding – not to mention the privilege of being able to come and go from a job during the Depression – to take a trip he may have seen as one last hurrah before settling into life at the shoe factory. Like Huck Finn escaping the confining life of respectable, reproductive domesticity, Hellum and a friend dropped a canoe and supplies into the Wisconsin River just west of Madison at Spring Green, Wisconsin in 1934. Following the Wisconsin River west to Prairie du Chien, the two men then paddled the entire length of the Mississippi River before returning to Wisconsin.[72] Upon his return, Hellum discovered that Warner had suffered a stroke. Rather than moving into town with his mother and grandparents, Hellum spent the remainder of the summer in the Duncan House at Cooksville,

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[70] Kori Oberle, "Edgar G. Hellum," part of "Unparalleled Lives: An Introduction," pamphlet for exhibition "Unparalleled Lives," Art Institute of Chicago, 1990, Robert Neal Papers. Hellum's work was featured alongside that of Harold Allen at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1990. Both men were alumni of the Institute's school.
[71] Hellum, Interview.
[72] Oberle, "Edgar G. Hellum"; Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve*.

acting as nursemaid for his close friend and mentor. At the same time, Hellum continued his education under Warner's tutelage, even though Warner had largely lost the ability to speak. Hellum also continued to work on his own home in Cooksville, an effort that sent him on that fateful trip to Mineral Point. Or, to be more specific, it sent Hellum to Mineral Point at the urging of the artistic spinster Georgia Townsend.[73]

Hellum and Neal first met sometime in the late summer or early fall of 1934. Hellum simply recalled, "I came over here [to Mineral Point] with a friend of my mother's to look for building material, and Bob was home on leave from London, and having difficulty with a visa for working [overseas]."[74] Indeed, as the local newspaper reported, Neal had only just returned from London to Mineral Point at the beginning of August and he reportedly intended to return.[75] Whatever transpired between the two apparent strangers, they quickly became close friends. That December, for instance, Neal and Hellum exchanged Christmas cards. While not necessarily a marker of a close relationship, Neal held on to his card from Hellum, which points to its sentimental value at the time. Simply signed, "Edgar," the card's imagery – in hindsight – speaks to the future Neal and Hellum may or may not have seen before them that winter. The front of the card, for example, bore the image of three individuals clad in Victorian-era clothing (and their dog) awaiting the arrival of a stage coach in a nearly treeless, windswept winter scene. Inside the card, with Hellum's signature just below, the threesome enthusiastically wave from the top of the stage (perhaps the interior was already occupied) to two individuals framed in the warm light of a small snowbound cottage.[76] They had arrived home. And so too, soon enough, would Neal and Hellum.

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[73] Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve*; Hellum, Interview.
[74] Hellum, Interview.
[75] *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, August 2, 1934, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[76] Edgar Hellum to Robert Neal, December 28, 1934, Robert M. Neal papers.

Fanciful readings of an otherwise generic Christmas card aside, however, that winter saw Neal and Hellum grow closer. In the first months of 1935, they regularly spent periods of appreciable length together. In January of 1935, for example, Hellum spent a week with Neal at his father's home in Mineral Point.[77] In the middle of March, Neal spent two weeks in Stoughton, staying with Hellum and his mother, after the two men had reportedly "just returned from a two months' visit at New Orleans, La."[78] After their "two weeks' sojourn in Stoughton," Neal and Hellum both arrived back in Mineral Point in late March, where Hellum once again stayed with Neal and his father.[79] In other words, in the three month period between January and March of 1935, Neal and Hellum spent nearly two months in each other's company. As it turned out, then, Hellum's Christmas card was likely more than a simple message from one acquaintance to another.

Soon after their fateful rendezvous, Hellum remembered, "[Bob] came over to Cooksville to see what I was doing and then [he] said 'I'm going home and find a house.'" We know, of course, from Neal's letters written to Gundry while Neal was still in London, that the motivation for finding a stone cottage in Mineral Point to restore was already there. But seeing the work Hellum was doing in Cooksville and meeting Hellum's mentor, Warner, surely did nothing to dissuade Neal in his search. In April of 1935, Hellum, once again, spent two weeks in the Neal household on Mineral Point's Front Street, a period during which he and Neal were quite possibly eyeing the little one-room stone cottage on Hoard Street that they would one day make famous.[80] A deal to purchase the house was in the works by early May. Working with a childhood friend of Neal's, the attorney Ray Wearing, Neal and Hellum were closing in on what

[77] *Iowa County Democrat*, January 24, 1935, 5.
[78] *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 15, 1935, 14.
[79] *Iowa County Democrat*, March 21, 1935, 5.
[80] *Iowa County Democrat*, April 11, 1935, 5.

the lawyer described as a "stupendous transaction."[81] By the beginning of August, Neal and Hellum had purchased the dilapidated, hundred year-old cottage. Back taxes of around 200 dollars notwithstanding, Neal and Hellum bought the house for a paltry 10 dollars – less than 200 dollars today.[82]

Neal and Hellum's purchase turned out to be a "stupendous transaction" in more than just financial ways. The tiny cottage represented an opportunity – a "queer possibility" – to live outside of heteronormative, reproductive time. Here they could follow in the footsteps of their mentors Gundry and Warner and live a life dedicated to beautiful things and to the preservation of the past, rather than, as Hellum put it, being "stuck" in a future-oriented life of heterosexual marriage and the reproduction of children. Put a different way, the miniscule structure that came to be known nationally as Pendarvis House offered the newfound partners a portal through which they could access queer time and its promise of an otherwise-being, a space within which they could embody a queer style. To make their dreams a reality, however, the pair would have to rely on help from a much larger network of men and women, both queer and not, for the knowledge, publicity, and money that would make Pendarvis a success. This network crucially began with Warner and Gundry, in small-town Wisconsin – a beginning represented by the married table. It was also fostered by Neal and Hellum's early metronormative travels, travels that upon closer inspection were rather queer circulations of knowledge, desire, and people. This circulation continued in the network Neal and Hellum built, as it expanded far beyond specific individuals and places, making the small town of Mineral Point look not so small and putting both it and the Pendarvis House on the map.

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[81] Ray Wearing to Robert Neal, May 4, 1935, Robert M. Neal papers.
[82] Wearing to Neal, May 4, 1935; Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve*; measuringworth.com.

Chapter 3

Mr. X and Material Culture: Places, Objects, and Networks of Desire

When Robert Neal and Edgar Hellum purchased what would be the first of several stone miner's cottages in Mineral Point in 1935, for the "stupendous" price of ten dollars, they brought to their new project a particular set of aesthetic ideals. Trained by their respective queer mentors, Will Gundry and Ralph Warner, in antique collecting, interior design, entertaining, and historic preservation, the newly formed partnership was continuing a queer dedication to the past and to a life of beautiful things that was encouraged not only by their mentors, but by friends and family as well. The two men only needed a blank canvas upon which to work, and the tiny stone cottage in Mineral Point was a project the pair seemed destined for. According to Hellum, the bones of the cottage were solid, all it needed was hard work. "And," he recalled saying at the time, "it's going to take some money."[1]

For two relatively young men with training, support, and a vision, hard work was easy to come by. In 1935, on the other hand, money was a little more difficult. At the time, Hellum was working at his uncle's shoe factory in Stoughton.[2] Neal was unemployed. With the help of some auspicious newspaper coverage just days after opening the Pendarvis House antiques shop, as well as a holiday mail order business offering baked goods, Neal and Hellum limped by for the first few years. In the summer of 1938, however, the partners' luck forever changed for the better. That summer they agreed to let "Mr. X", as Neal and Hellum referred to him, fund their work as well as an expansion project involving the purchase and restoration of additional

[1] Edgar Hellum, interview by Will Fellows, December 17, 1997.
[2] Ibid.

buildings. Alongside continuing to run Pendarvis House and restoring the additional buildings in good faith, there was only one other condition to this agreement: that the true identity of Mr. X remain a secret.

By simply referring to a benefactor at all, let alone labeling him Mr. X, Neal and Hellum were already skirting the rules of their agreement. This breach of confidentiality came to a head in the spring of 1942, when Mr. X made a rare visit to Mineral Point and Pendarvis House, where local friends of Neal and Hellum connected the dots. Mr. X, as it turned out, was a man named Gordon McCormick, grandson of Cyrus McCormick, inventor of the McCormick reaper. The fallout from this unexpected exposure – this outing of McCormick as Mr. X – played out in a series of letters between Neal, Hellum, and the friends who made the discovery on the one hand, and McCormick and several of his closest aides on the other.[3]

These letters, as well as numerous others written between 1938 and 1945, survive and shed light on the otherwise secretive relationship and business between Neal, Hellum, and McCormick. Set alongside a fascinating collection of letters written by Hellum during the partners' separation at the height of World War II, these documents detail not only the early preservation work at what would eventually became the Pendarvis complex, but also the key presence of a network of queer individuals that helped that complex come into being in the first place. As such, these letters serve as an example of what historian Nicholas Syrett describes as a queer epistolary network. In his work on queer, white, middle-class businessmen in the Midwest during the 1950s, Syrett details how individuals used letters to create an epistolary network of itinerant queer men, building community, cultivating relationships, and coordinating sexual

[3] Gordon McCormick to Robert Neal, April 22, 1942; Dr. T.A. Hagerup to Gordon McCormick, April 21, 1942; Robert Neal and Edgar Hellum to Gordon McCormick, April 28, 1942; and Gordon McCormick to Robert Neal and Edgar Hellum, July 14, 1942, all letters in Robert M. Neal Papers, Mineral Point Reading Room, Mineral Point Public Library, Mineral Point, Wisconsin [hereafter Robert M. Neal Papers].

liaisons. For Syrett these networks were largely ethereal, creating community that was generally placeless and fostering meetings and relationships that, when realized physically, were more often than not fleeting and temporary, taking place most often on business trips and in sites like motel rooms and bars far away from home.[4]

By contrast, the networks of which Neal and Hellum were a part were, this chapter suggests, very much rooted in place and in material objects. As such, the letters examined in this chapter uncover a network that, rather than emerging wherever two businessmen had arranged to be, was grounded in a number of specific places, specific places that these men called home. Much like the exploration of Neal's early travels abroad, these letters trace the movement of people, ideas, money, and desire among a series of cities, small-towns, and rural locales. Collectively, as these entities travelled amongst sites like the metropolis of Chicago, the small town of Mineral Point, the war time city of Madison, Wisconsin, and the wilderness retreat of White Deer Lake Camp in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, they revealed a network of queer men who, far from being isolated, invisible, and itinerant, were rooted in place and found each other in those locales. Indeed, for Neal and Hellum, these letters reveal quite vividly that their desire for each other, their partnership, and their longing for a larger aesthetic sense of being, to be amongst beautiful things, were very much tied together and tied to their preservation project in Mineral Point. In other words, to modify Hellum's recollection, these letters show that the preservation efforts Neal and Hellum undertook beginning in 1935 required not only hard work and money, but, perhaps most importantly, each other and the larger networks of which they were a part.

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[4] Nicholas L. Syrett, "A Busman's Holiday in the Not-So Lonely Crowd: Business Culture, Epistolary Networks, and Itinerant Homosexuality in Mid-Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 21, no. 1 (January 2012): 121–40; Nicholas L. Syrett, "Mobility, Circulation, and Correspondence: Queer White Men in the Midcentury Midwest," *GLQ* 20, no. 1–2 (2014): 75–94.

Additionally, these networks and the physical locations they were inextricably connected to were also tied to material objects. As the previous chapter shows, objects like the married table came to symbolize the relationships between queer mentor and mentee, as well as the union between Neal and Hellum. But the letters themselves also become material objects that represent not only the networks Neal and Hellum were a part of and relied upon, but also the key element of circulation itself. These letters moved in the same way the queer men who were are part of these networks moved. These letters also became the material conduit through which news about queer friends, philosophical musings on queer life, and queer desire itself moved amongst the men who wrote and received them. Finally, the letters exchanged between Neal, Hellum, Mr. X, and others underscore the rootedness of the networks in question by emphasizing the central importance of the Pendarvis House complex, the tiny stone cottages Neal and Hellum would purchase and restore in the decades after 1935. Pendarvis – not Chicago, or Minneapolis, or even Madison – was the central point around which the lives of these men pivoted. In these letters, all roads lead back to Pendarvis House and Mineral Point. In this way, the stone cottages themselves, then, can be understood as an integral part of the history of queer material culture at the heart of Neal and Hellum's story.

Pendarvis House is Launched

In the middle of August 1935, one of the local Mineral Point papers, the *Iowa County Democrat*, announced with very little flair that "Robert Neal has bought a building on Hoard street [sic] near the lake and is rebuilding it and repairing it with the idea of a later business venture."[5] By August, both Neal *and* Hellum had already been working on the restoration for

[5] *Iowa County Democrat*, August 15, 1935, 5.

months. And in contrast to the small stature of the notice in the paper, the "rebuilding and repairing" of the tiny stone cottage was a decidedly large undertaking. Immediately, Neal and Hellum knew their restoration would be a total gut job. "It was filthy dirty," Hellum remembered. "So the first thing we did was get two kids with a shovel, wheelbarrows, and a truck and then we simply took the insides of the house out."[6] Hiring workmen for sixty-five cents a day and kids for decidedly less (their job was to squeeze into the attic crawl space and "[pound] all the plaster down" from above), the crew stripped to cottage down to its rock walls, leaving Neal and Hellum a blank canvas upon which to work.[7]

There was plenty of work that needed to be done on the exterior of the building as well. The building's two chimneys, one at the peak of each gable end, had to be rebuilt. The stone walls had to be cleaned and the mortar repointed. The windows – two at the front of the house, on either side of the door, one at the back – had to be restored and repainted. The roof was replaced and gutters added to move away rain water. When Neal and Hellum purchased the building, it sported a dilapidated front porch, covering three quarters of the front facade. It had been added to the structure relatively recently, so Neal and Hellum removed it, restoring the face of the building to something closer to the original. By contrast, at the back of the cottage, out of sight from the street, the two men built a wooden lean-to addition, adding a second small room to the cottage to function largely as a makeshift kitchen. Finally, the partners cleared away the overgrown brush in the yard, planted their own flowers and plants, cleaned up the stone steps and retaining wall, and installed a lamppost complete with a nineteenth-century looking fixture and a small, unassuming sign labelled "Antiques." Next to its dilapidated neighbor – a two-story stone

[6] Mark H. Knipping and Korinne Oberle, *On the Shake Rag: Mineral Point's Pendarvis House, 1935,1970* (Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1990), 7.
[7] Ibid.

cottage with a tar paper roof, sagging shutters, and broken fence mere feet away – Neal and Hellum's cottage looked a bit out of place. So, too, did the business the partners ran out of the cottage.[8]

Following the model taught to them by Ralph Warner of Cooksville, Neal and Hellum's "business venture" was initially focused on antiques, as the sign out front suggested. The partners filled their newly refurbished cottage with the best of their collections: fine furniture, china, glassware, and textiles, all arranged with Neal's eye for interior design. Within days of opening its doors in September 1935, the little shop was visited by a journalist named Betty Cass. In the initial years of their business venture, Cass, the "gossip columnist" for the Madison paper of record, the *Wisconsin State Journal*, would play a crucial role in helping Neal and Hellum launch their project.[9] In Cass' first column on Neal and Hellum it was antiques that took center stage.

> Inside [the cottage] there was a fire crackling merrily in a fireplace to the left, old pewter on the mantelpiece above, a Norwegian chest, open and spilling silks and velvets and homespuns all over the floor beside it. Straight ahead, near the door which led into the tiny lean-to kitchen at the rear, stood a magnificent old maple secretary, its glass cupboards filled with creamy old Leeds china. To the right, in a corner, a maple bed with a patchwork quilt, and in the other corner, near the window, a desk lined with leather-bound first editions. The windows were filled with ancient glassware, ruby wine glasses, blue bottles, and a luscious low bowl of the most fragile thin glass of olive green, and hung with very old and softly mellowed India prints.[10]

In Cass' initial description of the stone home's interior, there was only the slightest hint of the famous restaurant the tiny cottage would eventually house. Cass' emphasis here was on the

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[8] Although largely undocumented, much of this exterior work can be inferred from comparing "before and after" pictures of the cottage. See, for example: Oberle and Knipping, 8-9; and "Pendarvis House – Exteriors" Folder, Pendarvis Photos Box 1, Robert M. Neal Papers.

[9] Cass' column was called "Madison Day by Day," and might more accurately be referred to as a Society Column. It was a regular feature of the *State Journal's* "Women's Pages." Hellum, interview.

[10] Betty Cass, "Madison Day by Day," *Wisconsin State Journal*, September 10, 1935.

luxurious interior the two men had created; Neal and Hellum had created something magical on the margins of Mineral Point, such that Cass' column overflowed with descriptions of the treasures expertly displayed in the tiny stone cottage.

But Neal and Hellum did not stop at antiques. Again, following the example of Warner, the partners served tea to their guests as well. The very first guests for tea at Pendarvis House were Neal's mentor William Gundry and his sister, Marjorie King. Neal and Hellum had invited the pair to visit the newly refurbished cottage and to show off the work they had done. Gundry, in particular, had done much to support Neal and Hellum in their efforts, often having the pair to dinner at the ornate Orchard Lawn. "At least once a week," Hellum remembered, "[Gundry] would call us up and say you boys work so hard, I don't think you get enough meals, enough food."[11] In addition to protecting Neal and Hellum against malnutrition, Gundry also wanted to help the two men find a house to live in while operating their antique shop. Gundry's primary goal in this endeavor was to get the partners out of the rundown, impoverished section of town where the antique shop was located – a narrow ravine called Shake Rag that ran perpendicular to the main part of Mineral Point. "Gundry always backed us up with what we were doing." Hellum recalled. "But he wanted us to be up in the town, he wanted us to have a house up near the water tower. In fact, he put up five hundred dollars towards it."[12] Unfortunately, for Gundry, Neal and Hellum did not have the other twelve hundred dollars it would have taken to purchase the seventeen hundred dollar house, so the partners remained down on the Shake Rag where, at that first tea-time visit, Gundry exclaimed with a certain upper-class disdain, "I never thought I

[11] Hellum, interview.
[12] Ibid.

would be taking tea on the Shake Rag."[13] Thanks to the work of Neal and Hellum, Gundry was not the last visitor to make such a pronouncement.

The tea the partners provided their guests at the little stone cottage quickly came to be referred to as a Cornish tea. When Neal and Hellum served their guests such Cornish delicacies as saffron cake with plum preserves and clotted cream, they were capitalizing on the cottage's connections to the early lead mining in the region, especially the influx of Cornish immigrants in the 1830s and 1840s who brought with them knowledge of hard-rock mining.[14] This use of the Cornish history of the town and their cottage was amplified by Gundry, who declared – in the tradition of his own estate, Orchard Lawn, and perhaps with a certain sense of irony – that every fine house should have a name. Gundry chose the name Pendarvis, a slight misspelling of the Cornish noble family name Pendarves.[15] Thus, Pendarvis House was born during a quaint tea service amongst queer men (and Mrs. King), in a tiny refurbished stone cottage, in the midst of a derelict section of Mineral Point, smack dab in the middle of the Depression. That Pendarvis House, as it was now known, would not only survive, but thrive, over the next forty years was nothing short of miraculous. But then again, Neal and Hellum had much in the way of "divine" intervention. Gundry and Warner were certainly influential in this regard, as would be Mr. X. But Cass, the Madison columnist, had much to do with this survival was well.

Cass was instrumental in getting Neal and Hellum to shift their focus away from antiques and toward a greater emphasis on serving tea and food – whether they wanted to or not. When she first stopped at Pendarvis House in September of 1935, her column's central focus was on

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[13] Ibid.

[14] On Neal and Hellum's Cornish Tea, see: Cass, September 10, 1935. On the Cornish settlement of Mineral Point, see: Marie G. Dieter, Writers Program of the Work Projects Administration, *The Story of Mineral Point, 1827-1941* (1941; repr., Mineral Point: Mineral Point Historical Society, 1979); George Fiedler, *Mineral Point: A History* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1973).

[15] Hellum, interview.

antiques, but she also happened to mention the plans Neal and Hellum had for the new business. At Pendarvis House, she wrote, "Robert Neal and Edgar Hellum will serve Cornish tea…such as we are having…and Cornish dinners: meat pastys and gooseberry fool; steak and kidney pies, curried muttons, and veal and parsley pies…and other goodies of old England."[16] At the time, Hellum remembered telling Betty Cass that, "the farthest thing from my mind was that I was going to be running a tea room."[17] The die, however, was cast, and Hellum recalled that the week after that first column ran, "we had at least eight or ten cars out in front who wanted to have tea."[18]

Some of these visitors arrived unannounced, but many of them wrote ahead to request reservations, especially if they were hoping to be fed. As Cass' column stated, though many visitors over the years forgot, food would be served by appointment only, though tea would be available if the partners "happened not to have other parties."[19] Thus, after the first column ran the letters requesting tea and food began to arrive. One such letter, for example, written just days after the column was published, illustrates the demand for food in the tiny cottage. "I understand through Betty Cass's column in the *Wisconsin State Journal*," wrote Miss. Gay W. Braxton of Madison, "that you have some very lovely antiques and serve tea. We wonder if you are also serving lunches. If so, we would like very much to have lunch for five people Saturday, September twenty-first around one o'clock. If not, we will try to just drive over some future time."[20] While antiques and the allure of the house itself seemed to warrant a pleasure drive at "some future time" for Miss Braxton and her friends, the real draw for this group was the

[16] Cass, September 10, 1935, ellipses in original.
[17] Hellum, interview.
[18] Knipping and Oberle, 12.
[19] Cass, September 10, 1935.
[20] Gay W. Braxton to Robert Neal, September 16, 1935, Robert M. Neal Papers.

possibility of taking luncheon at Pendarvis House – it was the food. Thanks to Cass, then, Neal and Hellum had stumbled onto a business that would, by all appearances at least, sustain them and their preservation project for the next forty years.

This newfound focus on food would also serve Neal and Hellum well during the off season, when traffic was slow and the antique shop and largely unheated cottage was closed for the winter. Rather than cease commercial business, Neal and Hellum mailed the tea-time goodies served at Pendarvis House during the summer season to guests, just in time for the holiday season. "A fellow in Carolina made us little hand-made pots [for preserves]," Hellum remembered. "I bought a hogshead full of 'em for eight cents apiece. We got government postcards and then [the Mineral Point artist] Max [Ferneckes] did us a [wood]cut. We just sent them out to people who'd signed our guest book. We had to learn all along the way." One arc of the learning curve included how to price items. Initially, Neal and Hellum forgot to include shipping prices in their rates, only to find that "It cost as much for postage for a cake as the cake cost," so a shipping surcharge was quickly added on.[21]

Pricing issues aside, the boxed Cornish tea delicacies were a hit with customers and, perhaps more importantly for Neal and Hellum, profitable. King, who along with Gundry first sampled the partners' tea-time treats at Pendarvis House, regularly ordered a holiday gift box for her family in Philadelphia. For King, however, that box usually never made it to the holidays. "The box…came just before luncheon and everything was unpacked and put right out on the table, we just were not going to wait. The scalded cream was such a surprise and was so fresh and good, the saffron cake, none better, the plum jam, the gooseberry jam, both just as they should be, and the Darjeeling tea delicious."[22] With such rave reviews, it seems unsurprising

[21] Knipping and Oberle, 13.
[22] Marjorie King to Robert Neal, October 25, 1936, Robert M. Neal Papers.

then that Neal and Hellum's mail order venture was a success. The first winter alone, according to Hellum, left the partners with eighty seven dollars in profit, or roughly fifteen hundred dollars today.[23] Five years later, in 1940, the partners cleared twice that amount in holiday profits.[24] While not extremely lucrative, the profits from the mail order business augmented what the partners had earned during the summer season in a meaningful way, such that, with the exception of the winters during World War Two, Neal and Hellum sent out cakes and preserves to waiting tea tables across the U.S. every fall through 1971.[25]

While the partners were by no means flush with cash, the money Pendarvis House generated was enough, if only enough, for Neal to be able to reject a series of job offers in his old line of work – not something most people could afford to do in the midst of the Depression. In January of 1936, for example, after the hustle and bustle of the holiday mail order business was over, Neal wrote to Gundry to share news of a job offer in Chicago. "About two weeks ago," Neal told Gundry, "I received a letter from a carpet dealer in Chicago saying that he had an opening and as Miss Conger [Syrie Maugham's former manager] has suggested my wanting to get a job in the city, he wrote and asked if I would be interested in having an interview." Neal was interested enough to travel to the city in the cold and snow of January. Neal and Hellum were so determined to get to Chicago that they traveled through a blizzard to get there, replacing their original plan to drive there with a train ride. Once in Chicago, Neal met with the dealer twice, but ultimately rejected the offer. According to Neal, the dealer wanted a more permanent employee, who could help him build his new business from the ground up. The pay, fifteen

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[23] Knipping and Oberle, 13.

[24] 1940 Financial records indicate holiday business expenses of $147.17 and revenue of $213.17. Financial Statements, 1940, Edgar Hellum Papers.

[25] On the conclusion of the mail order business, see: Robert Neal to Mrs. Coleman Woodbury, January 7, 1971, Letters Sent, 1970-1979, Edgar G. Hellum Papers, Pendarvis Historic Site, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Mineral Point, Wisconsin. [Hereafter, Edgar G. Hellum Papers].

dollars a week, was also not what Neal was looking for. "Had it been more than an existing wage," he declared in his letter, "it would have been a different thing, but to just get started in the work and then leave in a few months time [sic] would have been too bad for him."[26] Neal was only looking for a temporary position and something that did not, once again, relegate him to level of a mere shop boy. Moreover, as his reasoning made clear, he had his mind set on opening the doors of Pendarvis House in the Spring.

Pendarvis House did open for the 1936 season, and it was again successful and profitable. And again that winter, Neal had to decide whether to return to big city life or continue to labor away at the vision he and Hellum had for their project in Mineral Point. In February of 1937, Neal received a letter from Norman Adams, the director of an antiques business with shops in New York and London. "Miss Conger has given me your name and has told me you would like to work with an antique firm in New York….If you are interested, perhaps you will send me by return a brief resume of your experiences and what salary you would desire."[27] Neal responded to Adams' request, but ultimately rejected that offer too. On the one hand, with some embellishment surely meant to steer him clear of, yet again, being a mere shop boy, Neal claimed that "my work in Chicago and New York, and London the last six years has dealt more with decorating than in the actual business of a shop routine," such as the "cleaning and arranging," and "waxing [and] typing" Adams' offer outlined. On the other hand, Neal cited the profitability of Pendarvis House as yet another reason for not taking the job. "My establishment here," Neal wrote back, "which is seasonal and which is now in its second year, brought me an odd amount over 27 hundred dollars, and I feel that I should want to better that figure before

[26] Robert Neal to William Gundry, January 30, 1936, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[27] Norman Adams to Robert Neal, February 17, 1937, Robert M. Neal Papers.

considering anything from outside."[28] The "odd amount over 27 hundred dollars" was small – a mere dollar and ten cents, according to Neal and Hellum's account books, meaning the partners cleared over $45,000 in today's currency.[29] While not an extraordinary sum, it was enough to keep Neal tied to Pendarvis House. Indeed, by rejecting these job offers Neal was doubling down on his commitment to the project, to Hellum, and to the small town of Mineral Point. And, over the next few years, many who came into contact with the partners and their business responded in kind.

As the publicity increased, the numbers of visitors climbed, the profit margin inched a bit wider, and Neal and Hellum began to think of expansion. The lovingly restored and neatly maintained Pendarvis House stood in stark contrast to the houses on either side. Directly to the north, a two-story stone cottage sported a sagging roofline, a dilapidated porch, and a fence line that looked like so many broken teeth. To the south, on the other side of a large birch tree, stood what looked like a two-story gable-ell farmhouse with wood siding in only slightly better condition than its neighbor two doors down. Neal and Hellum were penned in and looking to break out. "The Pendarvis lot is thirty feet wide and two hundred feet deep," Hellum remembered. "We couldn't step over the lot line, the narrow lot line. We first tried to buy the two-story rock house [to the north]; Pete Sieger wouldn't sell. But the people who owned [the house to the south]; they'd sell. We just wanted to buy the birch, enough of a piece of land to include the birch tree."[30] Neal and Hellum got the birch tree they wanted, but they had to purchase the clapboard house as well. As Hellum recalled, they bought "the whole thing [the

[28] Robert Neal to Norman Adams, February 24, 1937, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[29] Paid Receipts, 1936, Edgar G. Hellum Papers; measuringworth.com.
[30] Knipping and Oberle, 17.

land and the house] for four hundred and fifty dollars: five dollars down and twenty-five dollars month."[31]

Shortly after Neal and Hellum purchased the clapboard house, the owners of the stone cottage to the north suddenly decided to sell. "Well, as soon as we made the deal [on the clapboard house], [the owner's daughter] and her sisters got together and put the pressure on Pa, convince him that, by gosh, they'd better sell [the stone cottage]. So all of a sudden, that happened too. We bought [the stone cottage] for two hundred and seventy-five dollars and where we got the two hundred and seventy-five dollars, I'll never know…."[32] While money may have been in short supply, the partners managed to purchase two houses within a year of each other and begin restoring one of them. They started with the stone cottage to the north of Pendarvis. Keeping with the Cornish naming scheme, the partners dubbed this building Trelawny. They tore off its drooping front porch, reset sagging stone lentils, repointed stone work, refurbished windows, and removed a deteriorated back wing, replacing it with a smaller addition that would become the new modern kitchen for the Pendarvis House restaurant. The rest of the structure would serve as Neal and Hellum's private home. [33]

The question of the clapboard house to the south of Pendarvis remained, however. It was the largest of the three houses Neal and Hellum had purchased. This large structure and the outbuildings that were included in its purchase would require a new influx of cash to refurbish. Initially, this structure, which they named Polperro, served as storage while the two men brought Trelawny back to life and continued to operate their restaurant and antiques business. They had dreams, however, of transforming the structure into guest rooms and a stand-alone antiques store.

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[31] Ibid., 17.
[32] Ibid., 16.
[33] Hellum, interview.

Ultimately, these dreams would come true, thanks to the unlikely patronage of the one and only Mr. X.

Mr. X, "The Good Fairy," Leaves His Mark

Starting in 1938 and stretching into the postwar years, McCormick channeled thousands, if not tens or even hundreds of thousands, of dollars toward the stone cottages of the Pendarvis project. By all accounts he received no profit from any of the business dealings. If he had, we might be able to surmise that Mr. X's anonymity was meant to act as a tax shield – allowing McCormick to avoid paying income taxes. Instead, something else was at work in Mr. X's desire to anonymously aid Neal and Hellum.

On the one hand, McCormick was deeply interested in historic preservation. He was, for instance, in charge of handling his family's properties, and paid particular attention to his family's White Deer Lake camp, deep in the woods of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. During the 1930s and 1940s, McCormick was working on restoring the camp to its former glory.[34] The desire to preserve structures, places, and beautiful things, then, might be one reason for Mr. X's assistance with the preservation project at Mineral Point – so, too, however, might be queerer desires and connections. McCormick never married.[35] And while this does not automatically mean he harbored same-sex desires, it does position him outside the heterosexual norm. And as

[34] Richard Hendricksen, "History," *McCormick Grand Camp*, www.richardhendriksen.com, accessed July 1, 2015.
[35] One of the results of never having married is that McCormick had no heirs and the family property at White Deer Lake was ultimately willed to the U.S. Forest Service in 1968. The Forest Service turned the property into the McCormick Wilderness Area. Because of the land's new wilderness status, the Forest Service began to burn the camp buildings McCormick had worked so hard to restore. In 1984, before all the buildings were demolished, a local resident stepped in and negotiated with the Forest Service to allow him to have the buildings dismantled and stored privately. What remains of the McCormick family's great Northwoods camp is being stored piecemeal in a barn in Michigan's U.P. In a sadly ironic twist, the buildings' savior, Richard Hendricksen, is still in search of investors to fund their reconstruction. Richard Hendricksen, "Request for Proposals for McCormick Camp, Inc." *McCormick Grand Camp*, www.richardhendriksen.com, accessed July 1, 2015.

some of the extant letters reveal, this queerness may have had something to do with Mr. X's involvement in the Pendarvis project and, more importantly, his insistence on strict anonymity.

Despite Mr. X's insistence on remaining publicly unconnected to the project, in 1939 Cass, the Madison columnist who had helped make Pendarvis House a successful restaurant, antiques shop, and tea room regaled her readers with a decidedly dramatized version of Neal and Hellum's initial meeting with the kind "stranger from the East," a stranger she dubbed "The Good Fairy"

> One day there knocked at their door a man, a stranger, who said that he would like to see the Cornish houses they were restoring….
>
> The stranger inspected the entire premises, including all three houses, with keen interest, asking many questions but with a noticeable lack of verboseness usually displayed by visitors. When he had finished and seemed ready to depart, he quietly introduced himself by a name well known over the whole country…
>
> A few days later they received a lengthy letter from the man outlining in detail a perfect and complete restoration for the third house….And he ended, "I would consider it a privilege to be allowed to finance this restoration."
>
> He said his faith in them and in the ability and ideals was so great that, when the restoration was complete, there would be no obligations on their part to him. He was interested in the project only because it would add an interesting chapter to the architecture and history of the country.
>
> Mr. Neal and Mr. Hellum felt as though The Good Fairy had visited them…and had said, in traditional Good Fairy parlance, "You may make three wishes, and I will grant them."[36]

As discussed in the following chapter, Cass' use of the word "Fairy" was a not-so-subtly coded way of referencing the queerness of Neal, Hellum, and Mr. X as well. Interestingly, the language of "Fairy" seems to have not bothered McCormick in 1939. At any rate, it receives no direct mention in the surviving correspondence between Neal and McCormick. The latter may have never seen the column or, more likely given McCormick's habit of reading and often personally organizing much of the publicity surrounding Pendarvis, he may have felt protected

[36] Betty Cass, "Madison Day by Day," *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 25, 1939.

by the ambiguous terminology as well as the misleading characterization of being a "stranger from the East."

This absence of direct concern, however, does not mean the question of anonymity was not one of constant vigilance for McCormick. A few months after their initial meeting in the summer of 1938, for instance, McCormick wrote to Neal and Hellum after reading a promotional piece on Pendarvis House in one of the Milwaukee newspapers in March of 1939. "With such an historically interesting occupation as yours," Mr. X began, "there naturally have been and will be articles written about [the project] – this letter is just to remind you and to put on record that I would prefer absolutely no mention of any name in connection with any articles or references concerning the houses. But I believe I wrote you of this wish sometime last fall….What's been done on my part is quite privately between ourselves."[37] Similarly, just a few months after the March letter, and again prompted by a newspaper article, this time in the *Janesville Daily Gazette*, McCormick reiterated his strict condition of anonymity at length:

> I am glad the article gives the unwritten impression that you and Hellum are doing this whole thing on your own. As I previously said, if I can possibly be kept out of the affair, it will be much more satisfactory as far as I am concerned. If however you prefer, from your own standpoint, not to have it locally supposed that you were doing this on your own, you might give it out in an offhand manner that several visitors have expressed interest in the project and have helped out from time to time….To again explain, there is no real reason why I should withhold my name except that the help given had no ulterior purpose other than architectural interest in restoration of a supposedly old log and stone building, and on the basis that what one does accomplishes more without the fanfare of publicity.[38]

For McCormick, the "fanfare of publicity" may have brought with it any number of unwanted associations. From his perspective, it may have drawn the scrutinizing gaze of the tax man, or

[37] McCormick to Neal, March 1939, Robert M. Neal Papers. This letter was actually received by Neal in March of 1940 (dated March 19, 1940) having been missed, as the enclosed not from McCormick's secretary indicates, in the process of typing up hand-written drafts the year before.
[38] McCormick to Neal, May 27, 1939, Robert M. Neal Papers.

pleas from other cash-starved preservationists, or perhaps most importantly an unwanted association with two queer men and an decidedly oddball project.

For their part, Neal and Hellum – in a decidedly Midwestern way – did not know quite what to do with the generosity offered them. In one letter back to McCormick, for instance, Neal offered his humble thanks while also positioning himself, Hellum, and by extension McCormick as caretakers of something more than just a set of crumbling buildings.

> Both Edgar and I feel strange in taking "the pats on the back" as you call them. We feel that we are stewards of something that has come to us out of a generous heart and a deep interest, and that we will never be able to convey to you what your kindness [and] interest has meant to us and to all the people who have seen the house and all of those who have yet to see it. As a literary friend of ours mused after being shown around, "That all of this belongs to Time, and to the generations yet to come."[39]

The "literary friend" may have been August Derleth, the prolific Sauk City, Wisconsin author who became a regular at Pendarvis House restaurant, despite apparently not liking pasty.[40] Or it may have been one of any number of artistic and literary types who visited Neal and Hellum during the early years of their project. Regardless, the story taps into the understanding of Neal and Hellum's project as one predicated on queer time. Although the literary friend sees the project benefitting future generations, the wordsmith more centrally understands the project as belonging to "Time," that is, somehow not of this temporal world but both of it and beyond it. For Neal, Hellum, and McCormick, that meant looking backward to the past as they reconstructed the Pendarvis project buildings in the present, attempting to secure for themselves a place in the future of Mineral Point.

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[39] Neal to McCormick, July 21, 1939, Robert M. Neal Papers.

[40] For a sense of the frequency of Derleth's visits, see, for example, Pendarvis House Reservation Book, 1941, Edgar Hellum Papers; August Derleth to Robert Neal, October 15, 1952, October 2, 1952, and June 29, 1960. For Derleth's dislike of pasty, see August Derleth to Robert Neal, June 29, 1960, Robert Neal Papers.

In the fall of 1938, Neal and Hellum began their restoration of Trelawny and Polperro with funds from the coffers of Mr. X. To further hide any association between the partners and Mr. X, a bank account was opened not in Mineral Point, but sixty miles away in Madison, upon which the partners could draw their funds. Mr X would deposit a set amount of money – anywhere from $250 to $500 – into the account and, according to instructions given to the First National Bank of Madison, "all withdrawals [should] be made by check only, signed by Robert M. Neal and countersigned by Edgar Hellum."[41] After the cancelled checks were returned to Neal and Hellum from the Madison bank, these would be sent along to Mr. X's office along with appropriate receipts, invoices, and bookkeeping. If the account grew low in funds, Mr. X would send another deposit, sometimes as often as once every four or five weeks.[42] With this system of record keeping in place, Mr X.'s office in Chicago could be sure its money was being spent in a manner approved of while also maintaining McCormick's anonymity.

Generally, the Chicago office kept close tabs on the partners. In 1942, for instance, Neal and Hellum paid for materials from the local hardware store but were still awaiting delivery when they received a letter from Chicago stating that, "Our own preference would be to pay invoices on actual material delivered. However, the methods of transacting business in a small community of your type where the integrity of individuals is unquestioned permits a certain amount of divergence from this general policy." Despite this, Mr. X's office politely asked Neal to have materials on hand, warehoused, and accounted for as soon as possible.[43] On the other hand, however, Mr. X was often willing to fund more than business and restoration expenses at

[41] The amount of money deposited would be approximately $4,000 to $8,500 in today's currency. Measuringworth.com; W.C. Heimbeck to First National Bank of Madison, October 3, 1941, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[42] See, for example: W.C. Heimbeck to Robert Neal, October 16, 1941 and W.C. Heimbeck to Robert Neal, December 2, 1941, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[43] Heimbeck to Neal, January 20, 1942, Robert M. Neal papers.

Pendarvis House. In a personal note attached to a letter between his office and Neal and Hellum, for instance, McCormick tells the partners to use some of his financing to buy personal items for themselves. "I suggest," he writes, "that the items in Madison might certainly include a suit each for you and Edgar and also a hat each, or etc. Then, depending on the prices, the balance could be used for any other small personal accessories, such as ties, shoes, or etc. I assume a suit could be bought for $30 or $35." Lest anyone get the wrong idea, however, McCormick ends the note some specific instructions. "The above," he writes, "is separated from the letter so that you can destroy it," thus maintaining the anonymity of Mr. X.[44]

Far and away, however, the bulk of the money McCormick funneled into Pendarvis House via the Madison bank was spent on the restoration of Trelawny and Polperro and the expansion of the Pendarvis project and business. At the head of the operation on McCormick's end, and the go-between for Neal, Hellum, and Mr. X, was the latter's architect Walter C. Heimbeck. While McCormick had the eye for business and Neal had the inclination toward aesthetics, Heimbeck was the architect and engineer that, literally, kept the project standing. Starting in 1939, he and Neal kept a regular correspondence on everything from wax applications for wood surfaces (Neal preferred the method he had learned under Syrie Maugham to that suggested by Heimbeck), to the best type of stove for making pasties (Neal preferred kerosene), to the color of the chinking on the log portion of Polperro (an issue that apparently caused McCormick much disagreement).[45] Heimbeck would offer his expert opinion on any variety of matters and Neal would keep him updated on advice taken and advice set aside. Through the circulation of these letters in and out of Mineral Point, Mr. X left his mark on the Pendarvis

[44] McCormick to Neal, undated, Robert M. Neal papers.
[45] This collection of letters exchanged between Neal, McCormick, and Heimbeck is part of the Robert M. Neal Papers.

project not only through his financing, but in the physical restoration and (re)construction of the site. In this way, the networks these letters highlight were not temporary and fleeting, but very much rooted in place and in the material culture of the Pendarvis site.

The building dubbed Polperro, just to the south of Pendarvis House, was the structure most directly shaped by Mr. X's involvement. When the partners first purchased the building, it looked like an ordinary gable-ell farmhouse. Closer inspection of the layout of windows and doors, however, hinted at something older beneath the clapboard. Regardless of whether Neal and Hellum knew this when they purchased it, what they found obscured by a farmhouse was a miner's cottage of limestone and logs. What they had to do to restore it to such, needed expert guidance. "We used [Polperro] as it was, with the frame on and everything, for one year…The place was lathed and plastered with split lath which we took off…And paper, oh gosh, wallpaper and then calcimine and then wallpaper and then whitewash. It took us over a month scraping and soaking the timbers from the ceiling to take all the paper and whitewash and stuff off."[46] Heimbeck provided the engineering guidance and suggestions on the latest materials to use and Mr. X provided the funds as Neal, Hellum, and a group of local builders removed the clapboard and the farmhouse addition, rebuilt the stone fireplace, jacked up the second story of logs, repointed the stone first floor, and replaced rotted and infested logs and reapplied chinking between them.

The chinking – the insulating material used to fill the gap between the logs on the upper story – was an issue that took up a great deal of time and correspondence for Neal, Hellum, Heimbeck, and McCormick. Indeed, the initial effort proved to be aesthetically displeasing for McCormick, and had to be redone. "I don't know whether you recall that we used a water proof

[46] Knipping and Oberle, 17.

cement instead of plaster for the outside chinking," Neal wrote to Heimbeck in 1941. "At the time that it was new…the mortar was quite light and in contrast to the newly treated old logs. The elements and time have now turned the mortar the regular cement color, and caused the logs to become lighter in color, so that the effect of the gray cement and the gray logs is not pleasing. I think this bothered Mr. McCormick."[47] Aesthetics aside, the chinking also leaked, staining the plaster chinking inside. McCormick provided suggestions directly to Neal regarding both issues, after which Neal went to Heimbeck for practical advice on implementation. "With the moisture coming in," Neal wrote to Heimbeck in the same letter, "Mr. McCormick asked me to find out from you about using 'Nu-caulk'…of the gun type. We can't get that here locally in the natural color that I think we would need. Could you hazard a guess as to how much we would need to close up all openings?"[48] Likewise, when it came to painting the cement chinking, Neal was sure to keep Heimbeck updated. "Relative to the contrast between the logs and the plaster chinking on Polperro, I might say that Mr. McC. wrote to us from Camp about a Medusa cement paint, which we then inquired about. After we had seen the color chart we ordered and received 50 lbs. (5 ten pound pails) of a color that will match the native limestone."[49] Through this exchange, we can see how closely McCormick worked with Neal and Heimbeck on the smallest of details at the Pendarvis Project. Mr. X left his mark, then, on virtually every inch of the restoration work he funded, following the restoration closely and freely making his preferences known. In this way, the epistolary network that included Neal, Hellum, and McCormick can be read through the material history of objects like Polperro itself.

[47] Neal to Heimbeck, August 7, 1941, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Neal to Heimbeck, January 8, 1942, Robert M. Neal Papers.

McCormick's influence did not end at the restoration of Polperro. As Neal and Hellum neared the end of restoring that structure, with the financial backing of Mr. X, they looked to expand their collection of buildings and business operation. Neal and Hellum, for example, had their eye on adding a log building to their collection, for use as a workshop and storage space. Again, McCormick gave the aesthetic approval and Heimbeck the practical advice. "Having mentioned old log sheds for reconstruction," Neal wrote to the latter, "We took Mr. McCormick to see two old log buildings, just on the outskirts of Dodgeville, the town eight miles north of here. We told him that we could buy them for $25.00…He approved of this plan, and asked us to prepare to do it…Would you want to know the dimensions and the location and what we propose to do, in order that you approve of the method and give us advice and suggestions?"[50]

For his part, McCormick was far more interested in expanding the business side of the operation to include overnight accommodations and a "Cornish Inn." In a letter to McCormick, written in the fall of 1941, Neal wrote of his and Hellum's excitement at the possibility of developing overnight accommodations in a newly acquired stone building to the north of Pendarvis, dubbed Redruth. "The planning of a real Cornish inn appeals to us greatly," Neal replied to Mr. X. "Planned as an Inn and to be used for nothing else, [it] would solve the growing demands that we constantly have from visitors who would love nothing better than to stay overnight. 'Bed and Breakfast,' for an interested class of people, would be a definite and certain source of income."[51] Neal, Hellum, and McCormick saw the development of an inn as a logical expansion of the business side of Pendarvis, at least for "an interested class of people." Moreover, through this business expansion, Neal and Hellum saw their historic restoration project reaching a greater number of people. In other words, as much as their preservation work

[50] Neal to Heimbeck, August 7, 1941, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[51] Neal to McCormick, September 12, 1941, Robert M. Neal Papers.

looked to the past, capitalism demanded that the partners' look toward future expansion to keep the project afloat. As Neal wrote to McCormick, "Pendarvis House was six years old last Sunday, and we looked back over those six years with a great deal of satisfaction. We have established a work of a certain historical significance, and are appealing and reaching more people, and we are still looking ahead."[52]

That forward-looking entrepreneurial spirit was put on hold, however, with the entrance of the United States into World War II just three months after Neal's exchange with McCormick. As such, the Cornish Inn never happened, although Neal and Hellum did eventually offer overnight accommadations to select individuals in a stone cottage just down the road from Pendarvis.[53] Redruth, however, never was transformed into an inn and the structure itself was soon dismantled. McCormick, by contrast, did not fade from the scene. As war descended on the U.S., Mr. X stepped up to offer his greatest help yet, securing the work done at Pendarvis for the duration of the conflict while also helping the partners find wartime work. Importantly, McCormick offered this help despite being outed as Mr. X in the early part of 1942. From a financial perspective, it could be argued that McCormick had already invested a small fortune in the Pendarvis project, and he wanted to see it continue after the war. From a personal, queerer persepective, however, the closeness with which he drew Neal and Hellum toward himself during the war, as well as his ability to forget the partners breaking the one rule he set for them, is indicative of a closer bond between the three men as well as McCormick's personal investment in not only the people and the past of Pendarvis, but the material and physical objects of the place as well.

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[52] Ibid.

[53] The two-room cottage that housed overnight guests of Neal and Hellum was given the Cornish name Newlyn and was reserved by guests in the know. The building is still used as a two-room guest cottage, now owned by the Brewery Creek Inn: http://brewerycreek.com/inn-and-cottages/the-springside-cottage/.

The War Comes Home

As the nation turned its attention toward war in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, Neal and Hellum, too, began to concern themselves with what role they would play in the conflict and what would happen to their project in Mineral Point. A month after that "infamous" day in 1941, Neal penned a letter to Heimbeck, raising the issue of the impending war and asking for suggestions to secure the future of Pendarvis. "Another thing that I would like to bring to your attention and to Mr. McC's is the fact that both of us [Neal and Hellum], without a doubt will come up for examination for drafting….Whether or not we have the makings of a soldier is not the question for us to decide, but in view of the uncertainty, we would like to have your suggestions in regards to keeping this restoration intact and without any legal complications."[54] Neal and Hellum were in their mid-thirties by the start of the war, but Neal's passing doubts of the partners' fitness as soldiers was likely more about their shared queerness than age.

That queerness was evidenced, in part, by the way Neal and Hellum had situated their business and personal assets before the war even started. As Neal wrote to Heimbeck, for instance, "I should like to say that the deeds are so phrased that the property would go to the remaining member in the event of the death of the other member. I have forgotten the legal term. I have a will, Edgar has not. There is nothing to take of the personal property. By that I mean all the furnishings and things that are part of the business and jointly owned."[55] Despite the fact that Neal was very much the public face of the enterprise, the two men were in it together, whether that meant business or personal holdings. According to Neal, the two seemed very much blurred, so that the queer relationship of Neal and Hellum was their business relationship. The question,

[54] Neal to Heimbeck, January 8, 1942, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[55] Ibid.

then, of what would happen to Pendarvis in the case of either one or both men being called up for active service, was also a question of what would happen to the personal relationship the two men shared.

As it turned out, both men were turned down for active enlistment. As Neal put it, neither seemed to have the makings of a soldier. Or, as Betty Cass put it in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, "both men were definitely turned down" for service.[56] Ostensibly, the partners were given medical deferments – Neal was said to have a heart condition and Edgar suffered from a recurring stomach ulcer. The queerness of the men, however, may have also played a factor. As a number of historians have shown, the U.S. military was particularly interested in finding and weeding out homosexual draftees, servicemen, and women at the outset of World War II.[57] Thanks in large part to the growing importance of psychology as a medical field during the first half of the twentieth century, queer men and women – in contrast to queer sex acts – were now seen as a threat to military performance. "The idea that homosexuals were mentally ill," historian Alan Bérubé writes, "defined the person, even when there was no sexual act, as disruptive of morale and unfit to serve."[58] Regardless of whether Neal and Hellum were "definitely turned down" for service due to physical health or queerness or some combination thereof, neither man found himself in uniform during the war.

Despite not being actively enlisted in the armed forces, Pendarvis as a business venture had to be put on hold. In the immediate aftermath of the declaration of war, for instance, Neal and Hellum's mail order business plummeted. The partners sent off 600 advertising

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[56] Betty Cass, "Madison Day by Day," *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 14, 1943.
[57] See, for example: Alan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Plume, 1990); Margot Canandy, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009; and Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
[58] Bérubé, 33.

announcements to former guests and mail order shoppers, "but unfortunately," Neal wrote to Heimbeck, "all of the cards must have reached their destinations right after the war was declared." The partners received only forty five replies.[59] Likewise, limits on the use of rubber and gasoline by civilians meant that the automobile-driven tourist traffic the partners depending upon also dried up.[60] Finally, Federal limits on new construction – first limited to $500 per year, then $200 – meant that expansion and construction at Pendarvis also came to a halt.[61] In the fall of 1942, Pendarvis House was closed indefinitely and Neal and Hellum were in search of wartime work.[62] Once again, Mr. X came to the rescue. Leveraging his connections and writing letters of recommendation, McCormick secured a job for Neal in the kitchen at Truax Air Base in Madison.[63] Hellum, on the other hand, found a wartime home in Michigan's upper peninsula, at McCormick's White Deer Lake lodge. Pendarvis House was closed, the partners were separated, and their relationship was in question.

The work of maintaining that relationship outside of their Pendarvis House operation has been preserved in a remarkable archive of letters written by Hellum during the duration of their separation. Approximately fifty of these letters survive and provide an intimate look at Neal and Hellum's relationship, their understanding of their own desires, and the networks of queer men they were a part of during the war years, particularly in Madison. These letters can best be described as love letters, not only because they are nearly all signed as such and because Hellum

[59] Neal to Heimbeck, January 8, 1942, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[60] Heimbeck to Neal, June 30, 1942, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[61] Heimbeck to Neal, April 14, 1942 and September 19, 1942, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[62] While title to the structures at Pendarvis remained in Neal and Hellum's names during the war, the building materials that had been amassed through McCormick's patronage were stored, insured, and title transferred to Heimbeck himself. Neal to Heimbeck, April 21, 1942; Heimbeck to Neal, April 22, 1942, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[63] On McCormick's support of Neal, see: Heimbeck to Neal, November 2, 1942, and November 9, 1942, Robert M. Neal Papers. For an example of McCormick's letters of recommendation, see: McCormick to Unnamed Recipient, November 6, 1942. Neal also received a letter of support from the superintendent of the State Historical Society: Edward P. Alexander to Unnamed Recipient, October 27, 1942. All letters in Robert M. Neal Papers.

often used terms of endearment like "my dear," but because they articulate with stark frankness the desire and emotion at the heart of the partners' relationship.[64] In the early part of November, 1943, for instance, just a few months after he first arrived at McCormick's Upper Penninsula camp, Hellum penned a letter to Neal. He described at length the canning he had done that day, the new fallen snow, and the dogs at camp. He was also sure to note a passing anniversary. He wrote:

> That makes it nine years ago? On a rainy night. It was a Saturday, wasn't it? For some reason or other it seems so much longer ago, so much has been done since that time – maybe that is why. We have had what is worth a lifetime anyway, in that span of time. I am very thankful and we never will be enough, I'm afraid, for the years we have had! Trials and tribulations too. But they have been marvelous years Bob! I do hope it won't be so long before we can pick up again and carry on![65]

Whether this passage is marking their initial meeting back in 1934 or something, perhaps, more intimate, the crucial point here is that that very intimacy, their pleasure and their desire, is laid bare in these exchanges.

This intimacy can be seen in the Valentine's Day cards Hellum sent to Neal in Madison. In February of 1944, for instance, Hellum sent a card to Neal with a generic text that read, "This Valentine comes as a tribute, to your many attractive ways, that make you 'one in a million,' and my favorite subject for praise." On the back of the card, Hellum personalized this note of praise: "To 'My Valentine,' Just a hello and a wish on this day that we may soon be together again. Let's hope the future holds as much for us as the past has given us." Hellum undercuts the sentiment a bit when he adds the post script, "Quite a maudlin Valentine?,"[66] but the desire to be

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[64] Special thanks to Eve Studnicka, who first alerted me to the presence of these and other documents being held at the Pendarvis Historical Site. My appreciation also goes to Tamara Funk, director of the Pendarvis Site, for allowing me access to these potentially sensitive materials.

[65] Hellum to Neal, November 9, 1943, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.

[66] Hellum to Neal, February 13, 1944; see also, Hellum to Neal, February 13, 1946, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.

reunited and the pleasure of being together is readily apparent in such an exchange. While the hope of reuniting – whether for a weekend or on a more permanent basis – is a constant theme throughout the letters, fidelity was clearly not expected from either man.

In addition to the frankness with which the partners expressed their desire for each other, this collection of letters demonstrates the presence of networks of queer men Neal and Hellum found in their respective living situations. Moreover, the way in which the partners interacted with and understood these connections highlights the shifting nature of the cultural understanding of male same-sex desire during the Second World War. As already shown, the two men were part of pre-war networks that stretched across small-town Wisconsin to Chicago and beyond and as the next chapter shows, that network brought queer artists to their doorstep in Mineral Point. Queer men were also circulating through local institutions like Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin, near Spring Green, Wisconsin, about twenty-five miles north of Mineral Point. As historians Roger Fiedland and Harold Zellman demonstrate, there were always a disproportionate number of queer men working under Wright at the Taliesin school.[67] In the summer of 1943, before heading north to McCormick's camp for the winter, Hellum wrote Neal of the "new ones" he found on a trip to Wright's home and studio. "Nothing going on here," he wrote innocently. "Haven't seen Wendell. Harry M. stooped last nite [sic]. Had been up to Taliesen [sic] and they have some *new* ones there. All doing some building – and canning like mad!"[68]

As much as Neal and Hellum were a part of larger queer networks during the pre-war years, the mass mobilization of men and women beginning during the conflict created new

[67] Roger Fiedland and Harold Zellman, *The Fellowship: The Untold Story of Frank Lloyd Wright and the Taliesin Fellowship* (New York: Regan, 2006), especially 429-447.
[68] Edgar Hellum to Robert Neal, July 15, 1943, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.

opportunities for queer individuals to find community. As historian Alan Bérubé has shown, "The massive mobilization for World War II relaxed the social constraints of peacetime that had kept gay men and women unaware of themselves and each other…Gathered together in military camps, they often came to terms with their sexual desires, fell in love, made friends with other gay people, and began to name and talk about who they were."[69] Although the idea of a queer acquaintances was not new to Neal and Hellum, it seems the idea of a queer community was. Anticipating Bérubé's analysis by some fifty years, Hellum sees the connection between wartime mobilization and the community of queer men Neal was finding in Madison. "We always did think there just must be such a clique," Hellum wrote to Neal, "but could never figure out where. The war is certainly going to emphasize the *inverts* again! It did the last time, and is bound to now too. It is all very interesting."[70] Interesting, certainly, but also dangerous. "As I said in the last letter," Hellum cautioned Neal, "do be careful, though, you are so close to home. Madison is small compared to Chi[cago], and you just must not get involved! I don't blame you for being part of it – you are – I'm sure I would do the same thing…"[71]

The cautions and warnings Hellum would deliver to Neal throughout this collection of letters was not in vain. In 1943, for instance, he wrote "I know it really isn't necessary, but I get

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[69] Bérubé, 6.

[70] Edgar Hellum to Robert Neal, undated ca. 1943, Edgar G. Hellum Papers, emphasis in original.

[71] Ibid. Hellum's caution here ends with the statement, "but be careful about Frank." The figure of "Frank" appears throughout many of these letters, especially those that involve some sort of warning. For example, in the same letter cited here, Hellum declaims, "Poor Frank, I suppose he often gets the run around, but he is so damned unsurreptitious." Although it is not entirely clear, this Frank may be Frank Riley, a well-known Madison architect of this period. By all accounts, he was also a queer man and a friend of Neal and Hellum. As evidenced by a letter from Betty Cass, the men knew each other at least by 1940, and Riley seems to have gifted the partners a small stone dragon, which sits in the parlor of the Pendarvis Historic site today, near the married table discussed in the previous chapter. On Riley's queerness (including clues like such as the name of Riley's "big-eyed cat," Bette Davis), see: Aiken Welch, "The Happiest Man I Ever Knew," *American Magazine* (January 1949): 51; 86-88; In his papers, Neal had a collection of material related Riley, including an obituary that opined, "Creative artists are entitled to their eccentricities, and Frank Riley had his." "Frank Riley Obituary," *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 24, 1949; and Betty Cass to Robert Neal, October 12, 1940, Robert M. Neal Papers.

the reaction from your tales of the gang – do be careful!...Be as discriminating as you can – there surely are some who are not too promiscuous and bitchy!...and with everything that's going so wild – and the army involved etc!!" As noted earlier, the military actively worked to find and remove queer men and women from the armed forces during the war. Truax Field in Madison was no exception. One such search at Truax Field, however, was in pursuit of a different purpose. Chaplains, doctors, and commanding officers were finding homosexuals, but, in a number of cases, not disciplining or discharging them. In one instance, for example, twenty men who volunteered their status as homosexuals were handed over to psychologists for study. According to the published study, which focused on hormone levels in the study's subjects, the men "were all definitely aggressive in their homosexual activities and in fact four of them were known to be members of an organized group." Moreover, the study found these men relatively well-adjusted, having "participated apparently without conflict in a wide variety of homosexual practices." Indeed, according to the paper's authors "The cases would be considered extremely questionable from the standpoint of profiting from any therapy; in fact, therapy was not requested or desired by any of them."[72] While the participants of this study appear to have been returned to active duty, this was generally an exception to the rule and homosexuality was still illegal both on base and off – and the distinctions between the two often blurred.

In November of 1944, Hellum began one of his notes by writing, "Rec[eived] your letter this a.m. – and enclosures – thanks so much! The clippings are certainly bad business – do be careful – as I know you are! But you can't be too cautious." The clippings Hellum was referring to brought news of a sting operation in Madison. "On complaint of a sailor," the local paper

[72] A Special thanks to local historian Dick Wagner for bringing this study to my attention. E.L. Sevringhaus and Major John Chornyak, "A Study of Homosexual Adult Males," *Psychosomatic Medicine* 7 (September 1945): 302-305, 302. This study is also briefly discussed in Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 203.

reported, police arrested a man in a Madison theater who then confessed "that a 'ring' of homosexuals exists in Madison," giving authorities the names of men who were "university students, businessmen, and soldiers." Once again, however, these men were not severely punished. For one thing, the "Vice Probe" begun by the city prosocuter's office the day of the initial arrest lasted a mere twenty-four hours and netted only four men. Only three of these "perverts" were charged and then only for disorderly conduct. Each man had to pay twenty-five dollars in fines, and none of them were identified by name and address in the paper, a common practice at the time.[73]

While it is hard to decipher exactly why these queer men were treated with relative leniency, one likely reason is that, as Bérubé, Canaday, and others have shown, the category of "homosexual" was one still in formation during the war years. For Canaday, especially, the homosexual as a figure of political and legal concern was a diffuse one before the war years, as the bureaucratic U.S. state had yet to come of age. As we will see in the following chapter, the social category of the fairy or pansy was well established during the prewar years. This knowledge was on display, for instance, in syndicated columns on the topic written by medical professionals and published in the *Wisconsin State Journal* – columns that claimed, amongst other things, that "Man Can Remodel His Own Personality by Using His Brain."[74] But the legal, regulatory category of homosexual lagged behind these other forms. In prewar years, Canaday argues, homosexuality was policed by targeting "broader problems [like] poverty, disorder,

[73] This leniency was enough for one Madsonian to write a letter to the editor, complaining that the men should have been given prison sentences for their homosexual conduct. R.L.K., "Justice?," *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 27, 1944. On the investigation itself, see: "Prosecutor's Office Starts Vice Probe," *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 20, 1944; and "Three Men Fined After Admitting Morals Charge," *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 21, 1944.

[74] Dr. George W. Crane, "Man Can Remodel His Own Personality by Using His Brain, Psychologist Claims," *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 28, 1944.

violence, or crime." With the onset of war, however, the U.S. extensively expanded its bureaucratic reach and its understanding of the thing it sought to control. In this way, for Canaday, the Second World War helped form the category of homosexual itself. "After the Second World War," she argues, "an increasingly powerful state wrote this new knowledge into federal policy, helping to produce the category of homosexuality through regulation."[75] As much as these letters expose the "organized groups" and "rings" of homosexual men Neal was finding in Madison – what Hellum referred to as the "inner circle" – the actions, events, and anxieties they document also reveal the development and criminalization of the category of homosexual taking place during the war years.[76]

While Hellum wanted to protect Neal from the growing regulation of queer desire and behavior in Madison, he also sought to protect their relationship and, crucially, their project at Pendarvis. For Hellum, the two were generally indistinguishable. Early on in their separation, for instance, Hellum offered Neal advice and a bit of philosophy of same-sex desire while helping Neal through difficulties he was having with an individual named "D."[77] "You do *no* wrong," Hellum offered, "(meaning no one does) if your conscience is clear and your heart is right! Your association with D. is a beautiful thing…If one's mind is *right*, and one is honest with one's self, then relationships, be they with *man* or woman are not wrong." At the same time, he signaled how he saw their relationship rooted in Mineral Point. "I have stayed on here,"

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[75] Canandy, *The Straight State*.

[76] Hellum to Neal, September 18, 1943, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.

[77] At least some of the difficulties of this relationship stemmed from the difference in age between Neal and Hellum. Although details in the letter are lacking, D. was possibly a teenage boy. There is little indication that any sexual relationship was occurring. As such, Neal – as Hellum would do in Northern Michigan – were modeling the same sort of mentor/mentee relationship they experienced with Will Gundry and Ralph Warner, respectively. Neal and Hellum would buy these boys clothes, for example, and encourage them in activities like cooking and, at one point, even suggested two of these teenagers should come to Pendarvis for summer work. See, for example: Hellum to Neal, [month and day unreadable], 1943; September 13, 1943; November 21, 1943; and February 20, 1945, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.

he chastised, "because I have not wanted to jeopardize *our* future, and I feel that you, as your share, should not do anything to jeopardize *our* future….But you must think *deeply* about the situation. First, D., who has *inclinations* and nothing should spoil his whole life. *Yourself*, which you just can't risk – and lastly me, and Pendarvis."[78] For Hellum, then, as much as the partners were taking part in larger circulations of people and desire that came as a result of the upheavals of wartime America, their relationship was inextricably connected back to their restoration project in Mineral Point. Their relationship *was* Pendarvis.

This understanding, however, did not mean a return to Pendarvis was inevitable at the close of the war. By 1945, what Hellum wanted more than anything was a place where he and Neal could be together, living away from war, outside of what he called the "social set up," and with some degree of freedom. Put a different way, what he wanted was a queer space, a space outside of dominant society and the mainstream world, something akin to Michel Foucault's notion of a heterotopia.[79] Just three months before the allies would claim victory in Europe, Hellum wrote at length of his vision of Neal and Hellum's future:

> Of course, all I think of is where will be *home* again. With proper planning and expansion we should have a place that would bring us a good income and have the things we *want*. However, if you don't think we will get it at Pendarvis than we should be making plans for what we think we do want! As is always uppermost in my mind, I want *freedom* and independence from *everyone*. I suppose that is one reason why I am not exactly happy here [in Michigan] – all the rest being of course that we aren't together. I could be happy *anywhere* – as long as I have *freedom*! The other thing uppermost in my mind – in regards to freedom – is to get away from *war*….If we could find that security and independence – anywhere on the face of the globe – that is where I would like to be. Pendarvis has proved – probably more to me than to you – that if you *really* want something you can get it. As you know, most all the things I ever thought I wanted

[78] Hellum to Neal, [day and month unreadable], 1943, Edgar G. Hellum Papers, emphasis in original.

[79] For Foucault, a heterotopia is an "other space," a space outside of and on the margins of dominant society. It is a space that allows for reflection upon and critique of dominant society and models an other way of being. Foucault contrasts heterotopias with utopias, which he sees as unrealizable spaces, as he sees escape from dominant discourses, society, and spaces to be impossible. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* (October, 1984), trans. Jay Miskowiec.

> culminated with Pendarvis. If that is over, then we should set our minds to what we want for the future, and go after it. We'll get it – if we are sincere….Then Pendarvis would just be that part of our lives – a realization of the things we *did want* up to that time….For me, quiet security, close to the soil, independence – above all else – of the law, and all this set up, that is [the] so-called social set up….If it can't be done here, then we go where we can get it. The world is large….We have to think of all these things! We aren't tied to Pendarvis. I like to think we are tied to *each other* – from there on in it is up to us![80]

Whatever the future held for Neal and Hellum, crucially, Hellum saw the two men as facing it together. In this vision, Pendarvis played an equally crucial role. It brought the men together and gave them the life they were looking for before the outbreak of war. For the partners, it must have held out a similar possibility after the conflict was over. Neal and Hellum returned to Mineral Point and continued the work that would make Pendarvis House and the restoration project into the queer space they so desired. As the following chapters will show, they did this not by hiding their queerness as McCormick did – by bowing to the pressures of the "social set up" – but by leveraging that queerness and its connections to individuals like Mr. X to carve out a queer space of their very own.

This became an especially bold move as shifting understandings of sexuality during and after the Second World War positioned queerness as increasingly suspect in the second half of the twentieth century. Still, as seen through their own understanding of their relationship to each other and to the physical and material place of Pendarvis, Neal and Hellum and their queerness *were* Pendarvis. As such, even as the partners had to approach the normative public with increasing caution, that very queerness remained a key component of and an important draw for visitors to Mineral Point and Pendarvis House. Neal and Hellum had to strike a constantly shifting balance between putting their queerness on display in service of their project and articulating that same queerness within a rapidly changing terrain of medical, psychological,

[80] Hellum to Neal, February 20, 1945, Edgar G. Hellum Papers, emphasis in original.

political, and social understandings of sexuality. As explored in the following chapter the queerness of Neal and Hellum was an integral part of the visitor experience at Pendarvis and, as such, was an ever-present element of their project. Ultimately, it was up to Pendarvis visitors and the residents of Mineral Point to figure out how to approach the Pixies of Pendarvis.

Chapter 4

The "Fairies" of Mineral Point: Queer Performance Down on the Shake Rag

When Gordon McCormick, the Chicago-based heir of the McCormick reaper family, funneled tens of thousands of dollars into the Pendarvis House restaurant and Cornish restoration project during the late 1930s and into the 1940s, he did so under the strict condition of anonymity. One of the most plausible reasons for "Mr. X's" shadowy patronage of Robert Neal and Edgar Hellum's work in Mineral Point was his desire, as a life-long bachelor, to publicly disassociate himself from men, from a project, and from a business that might taint him, and his family name, as queer. As the letters and objects explored in the previous chapter show, Neal and Hellum where themselves part of an extensive and mobile queer male community of which McCormick seems to have been an integral part. Unlike McCormick, however, as this chapter will suggest, Neal and Hellum did much to embrace their queerness personally and, even more importantly, professionally as well. Rather remarkably, this calculated embrace of queerness on the part of Neal and Hellum helped launch their project in 1935 and relaunch their business again, following the Second World War, ushering in what historian Will Fellows calls the "golden years at Pendarvis House."[1]

While Pendarvis House may have hit its stride in the postwar era, thanks in large part to Neal and Hellum's curated queerness, the foregrounding of that queerness was an integral part of Pendarvis from the very beginning. When the Madison columnist Betty Cass wrote up her first visit to Pendarvis House in September of 1935, a visit Neal and Hellum credited with launching

[1] Will Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve: Gay Men as Keepers of Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 198.

their business, her primary focus was on the antique collection Neal and Hellum had on display. She was also interested, however, in portraying the two men in a rather particular light. Alongside antiques and Cornish teas, Cass clearly – if carefully and largely through euphemism and suggestion – intimated to her readers that these two men were more than just business partners. Indeed, for Cass as for others, collecting and queerness went hand in hand.

First, Cass began by describing the cottage and its occupants, even using the ambiguous language of "partners" to describe Neal and Hellum's relationship. "The house was built in the early 1830s," Cass wrote. "And was a Cornish miners' house, of course, but no one can be found who knows its real history. The young man [Neal] and his partner, who was working in the tiny kitchen garden at the rear, and whom he introduced as Edgar Hellum of Stoughton, bought it some months ago, restored it, and moved their treasures in."[2] In 1935, the term partner would not necessarily have had the same sort of valences it has today – including a gender-neutral term for life partner or spouse – but Cass' use here may have been telling for readers at the time especially given of the absence of women in this domestic scene and the presence of the partners' antique "treasures."

These treasures, in particular, loomed large in Cass' piece. As already discussed, antiques and the preservation of beautiful things of the past gave Neal and Hellum, like their mentors Will Gundry and Ralph Warner before them, access to a queer temporality that offered them the possibility of life outside the heteronormative strictures of marriage and family. It also, of course, publicly marked the men as queer. Cass makes this demarcation clear when she links colleting and queerness at Pendarvis House:

> Then the young man opened another chest and pulled out yards of luxurious velvet in apricot and bottle green; rich taffetas of lime green and roman stripes, heavy white

[2] Betty Cass, "Madison Day by Day," *Wisconsin State Journal*, September 10, 1935.

> brocade satins, painted silks of the 18th century, heavy Italian tapestries, and quantities of other gorgeous fabrics of unbelievable richness or fairy-like delicacy.
>
> "And who are you…?" I asked, "the Fairy Prince with the Magic Wand?"
>
> "No…I'm just Robert Neal, of Mineral Point," he said.[3]

"Fairy," here, is decidedly less ambiguous than "partner." By the 1930s, fairy was well ensconced as a term for effeminate, often homosexual, men. As historian George Chauncey demonstrates, "the fairy was recognized as a distinct cultural type" as early as the 1870s.[4] Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the figure of the fairy was emerging as a feature of popular spectacles in the nightlife of large cities like New York, where their "presence made [certain] clubs a mandatory stop for New Yorkers out slumming and for the urban entrepreneurs who had made a business out of whetting and then satisfying the urge of men visiting the city to see the spectacle of the Sodom and Gomorrah that New York seemed to have become."[5] By the 1920s and 1930s, when Neal and Hellum were beginning their work on Pendarvis House, the spectacle of the fairy had "acquired unprecedented prominence throughout the city, taking a central place in its culture." This new prominence was symptomatic of a larger "pansy craze" among popular audiences, whose interest was marked by the presence of fairies and pansies in "newspaper headlines, Broadway dramas, films, and novels."[6]

For Chauncey, what distinguished the figure of the fairy from the medical, and later the political, subject of the homosexual was that the former was a category based first and foremost on gender and gender performance, not upon sexual activity or the object of one's desire. The fairy was, in Chauncey's formulation, an "indeterminate sex," defined by his position between

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[3] Cass, September 10, 1935.
[4] George Chuancey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 385.
[5] Ibid., 37.
[6] Ibid., 301.

cultural norms of masculinity and femininity. Crucially, however, the figure of the fairy was not merely a proscriptive category, but a set of gendered behaviors and signs men could take up in their own right as "a means of constructing public personas they considered more congruent with their 'inner natures'…."[7] Even more broadly, for many men, to take on the label of the fairy – to perform gender as a fairy – was "a deliberate cultural strategy" that not only helped queer men come to an understanding of themselves but also helped these men carve out a queer space for themselves in a heteronormative world.[8] This latter strategy of the fairy, as embodied by Neal and Hellum's performance of queerness at Pendarvis House is the central concern of this chapter. It was also a central concern of Cass and other visitors.

During Cass' first visit, for example, as evening closed in on Pendarvis House, she highlighted the performance Neal and Hellum were putting on. This was a performance that gave prominence to the antique treasures of the two men but also gave center stage to the men themselves, men who were acting the part of housewives, who were embodying the normative gender roles of women. Cass wrote:

> Then, as dusk began to fall, Mr. Neal pulled up a small round tilt-top cherry table in front of the fireplace, spread it with an old red linen fringed cloth with tiny white figures, English china, and lit the candles in the pewter candlesticks on the mantlepiece…candlesticks which came from the first Catholic church in Mineral Point.
>
> And from the kitchen, where Edgar had been busy, Mr. Neal brought a plate of fragrant saffron cake…the utmost in Cornish delights…a dish of fresh plum preserves, made by his own hands, and a steaming pot of tea…and invited us to tea. And while we drank our tea and the spicy preserves and cake, (and pinched ourselves to see if we awake) he sat on a stool in front of the fireplace and told us of his plans.
>
> …we went slowly away from the little Cornish house on Shakerag street…back to Dodgeville and home…and only the little packages of saffron cake, wrapped in gay paper napkins and tied with "Syrie Maugham" ribbon, told us our adventure wasn't a dream.[9]

[7] Ibid., 49.
[8] Ibid. 56.
[9] Cass, September 10, 1935.

Indeed, Cass' visit was not a dream. Nor was the stream of visitors that made their way to Pendaris House each summer.

While the nineteenth-century cottage and its antique treasures were certainly part of the allure of Pendarvis, at the heart of the fantasy scene Cass found so appealing and difficult to believe were Neal and Hellum. More specifically, this chapter suggests, Cass and countless other visitors to Pendarvis were drawn in and charmed by the dream-like world created by the two men as they showed off their home, displayed their treasures, and entertained guests. Put another way, the pull for Pendarvis House guests was the queer performance of a stylized form of domesticity, a performance staged, not coincidentally, by two men. The "Fairies" of Mineral Point and their performance of gender inversion, their temporal drag, were the draw. Through their queer performance of domesticity, Neal and Hellum bound together the cottage, the antiques, and the food in a package that – "wrapped in gay paper" – delighted visitors and, crucially, turned a profit.

Down on the Shake Rag

At the heart of Neal and Hellum's queer performance was their embrace of Mineral Point's Cornish immigrant history. More specifically, the partners latched onto a very particular domestic history that focused most centrally not on the mining labor of Cornish men, but on the daily habits of Cornish women. This exclusive focus is telling because, while the Cornish immigrants to Mineral Point were highly influential, they were not the first immigrant group to settle in Mineral Point. And although the Cornish did arrive in Mineral Point in the 1830s and 1840s in large numbers, they were part of a larger multi-national and multi-ethnic mix of frontier settlers from the British Isles and Western Europe as well as the Eastern Seaboard of the U.S.

and frontier states like Kentucky, Missouri, and Illinois. In contrast to much of the popular narrative of Mineral Point history, which holds that the iconic stone homes and commercial structures were a direct result of the Cornish alone, architectural historian Audrey Stewart Parkinson suggests that, "Mineral Point's architectural identity is more complex than choice of material or ethnicity. It is a mix of tradition, what was known from Western Europe with the possibilities or America, blending memory and experience in varying proportions."[10]

Neal and Hellum were well aware of the mix of national and ethnic groups in Mineral Point's past as well as their varied contributions to the community. In a 1954 interview with William Scheick of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, for example, Neal admits "There have been many other nationalities in this area [besides the Cornish] – [such as] German[s], Scandinavians. And in the early days they intermarried, as in my case. I am only part Cornish, so a lot of these [historically prominent] people probably couldn't be identified as being Cornish. They might have some Cornish background in their lineage, but not to definitely say that they are Cornish people."[11] Indeed, for Neal there was a genealogical connection to The Point's Cornish past. His paternal grandmother had emigrated from Redruth, Cornwall to Mineral Point in the nineteenth century.[12] And, according to Neal at least, the recipes for pasty, saffron cake, and other Cornish specialties served to guests at Pendarvis came from this connection to the old country. Hellum, on the other hand, was thoroughly Norwegian, with more recent family roots in the U.S. And while he did bring the stereotypical Norwegian gift for hospitality and conversation over a cup of coffee, the project at Pendarvis was always thoroughly Cornish.[13]

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[10] Audrey Stewart Parkinson, *Stone by Stone: Early Mineral Point Buildings* (Mineral Point: Preservation Works, 2000), 15.
[11] Robert Neal interview with William Scheick, 1954, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[12] See, for example: 1870 and 1880 U.S. Census, City of Mineral Point, Mary Neal.
[13] Hellum, interview.

Even the Cornish delicacies that made Pendarvis so famous – especially the portable meat pie known as the pasty – were not solely Cornish. And, this too, Neal and Hellum knew. "There are a few things that are perpetuated around here not only by the Cornish descendants but by many other nationalities as well," Neal explained in 1954. "The Germans and Scandinavians that live around Mineral Point here have their pasties and their plum preserves [and] scalded cream just as much as the Cornish do. And in fact I think if some of the younger generations were pinned down they would think they were German dishes and not associate them with the Cornish."[14] Neal was quite clear that the pasty, especially, was a product less of any particular ethnic group, but of a shared occupation. Rather than solely a Cornish dish the pasty is well known as a staple of miners, like those "in the northern Michigan peninsula where the Finns and the Cornish were together in the copper mines."[15] With the filling enclosed in a double pie crust and crimped shut around the edges, the pasty was a favorite with miners who could stuff the portable meal in a lunch pail or even a jacket pocket. At meal time the miner could pull out the pasty, eat it, and discard the crimped edge along with any dirt and contaminants on his hands.

So, if the Cornish were only one among many immigrant groups – albeit one of the largest – and if they were not directly and solely responsible for the stone structures that made Mineral Point famous, and if the dishes and desserts Neal served as Cornish specialties were also found in other ethnic communities, then why did the partners focus so exclusively on the Cornish past? For one thing, the two men looked to the Cornish as an ethnic group which brought both physical and social stability to the Wisconsin frontier. "The thing that I think is particularly important about the Cornish in southwestern Wisconsin," Neal articulated, "is that they are the first nationality group to give a social and economic stability to the Territory of Wisconsin."

[14] Neal, interview.
[15] Ibid.

According to Neal, Mineral Point was the third oldest white settlement in the territory of Wisconsin, after Green Bay and Prairie du Chien. These two older settlements, Neal argued, were founded as military outposts and as such "their social life had a military background." By contrast, "The Cornish came in here [to Mineral Point], settled, and lived. They built their houses and came here to stay." Crucially, for Neal and Hellum, "The principal things that the Cornish left in southwestern Wisconsin [were] their buildings and foods."[16] It is no coincidence that in his explanation of Mineral Point history Neal would emphasize the buildings and the food of Cornish pioneers. These two elements were key to the work of Pendarvis House. So too was the domestic performance that linked the two – the cottages and the food.

For Neal and Hellum, the Cornish domestic practice they put on display was something they referred to as the practice of the Shake Rag. This practice, according to Neal, gave rise to an early name for the section of town that was now home to Pendarvis House. During the early days of Mineral Point, settlement clustered around two different sets of springs. One of these, Jerusalem Spring, was close to the "Point" where lead was first "discovered" by white prospectors in the 1820s, and where the majority of the town developed, spreading up and out of a ravine now known as Commerce Street and towards the ridge above. A second, narrower, ravine running perpendicular to Commerce Street was home to the Federal Springs, where a second cluster of homes was built under the shadows of nearby hills. Shake Rag Under the Hill was the name of this second section, a name that apparently derived from the daily practice of women calling their mining men folk home for the noon-day meal. As Neal explained, "The housewives, the mothers or the wives as the case may be, would stand in their doorways and

[16] Ibid.

wave to them [the miners on the opposite hillside], shake their rags or cloths or something to attract their attention and tell them that the meal was ready."[17]

Neal and Hellum used the imagery of this story widely in the literature meant to promote Pendarvis House and the growing complex of buildings that quickly became known as the Cornish Restoration. In the wood cut designs that graced the cards, menus, and postcards distributed from Pendarvis, for example, Cornish housewives were often framed in doorways waving toward the hungry viewer, calling them to Pendarvis House for a filling meal of pasty.[18] Neal and Hellum even published the tale in *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* in 1946 as well as in a self-published pamphlet reprinted several times during the 1950s. These articles were primarily focused on the restoration work the partners accomplished, but they mentioned in passing that, historically, "The menfolk, working on the eastern ridge with their windlasses and newly-mined piles of lead ore, could look down at about mealtime to see the housewives shaking a rag to tell them it was time to eat."[19]

Neal and Hellum's hailing of the Shake Rag story went far beyond just words and images, however. In the late 1940s, for example, the two men convinced the town of Mineral Point to change the name of the street that ran in front of their cottages to Shake Rag Street. When the partners moved into their first home in 1935, their official address was 114 Hoard Street. Robert C. Hoard was an early American miner who traveled from South Carolina to Mineral Point and was briefly in command of local militia during the Black Hawk War in 1832,

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[17] Ibid. [neal interview]
[18] See, for example, Pendarvis House menu, ca. 1955, Marketing and Public Relations, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.
[19] Robert Neal, "Pendarvis, Trelawny, and Polperro: Shake Rag's Cornish Houses," *Pendarvis: The Cornish Restoration*," 1957, 4. This essay was previously published (less a few photgraphs) as a pamphlet in 1952 and in *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, June 1946.

thus earning him the honor of an eponymous street.[20] Neal and Hellum, of course, were not nearly as interested as others in the mining history of Mineral Point that preceded the arrival of the Cornish, a focus that lead to a battle of historical emphasis discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter. Despite officially living on Hoard Street, the partners had been using the name Shake Rag on promotional items for Pendarvis since the very beginning.[21] The official name change did not come until 1949.[22] That same year, several months after the name change, Neal and Hellum received more good news. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin had approved their request for an official historical marker detailing the story of the Shake Rag and its significance to the Cornish mining history of Mineral Point. The marker was erected in the fall of 1952, a few hundred feet to the southwest of Pendarvis on the newly-minted Shake Rag Street.[23]

Just a few months after the Shake Rag marker was firmly planted in the ground, however, Neal and Hellum received a letter from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and its chief of historical research, Helen Duprey Bullock. Duprey Bullock had some bad news for Neal and Hellum. Their story of the Shake Rag was wrong. Noting that this information would be placed in the growing Mineral Point file at the Trust, Bullock shared with the partners the "Origin of the Name 'Shake Rag'," as delineated by Dr. Robert L. Ramsay, the "state's authority on place-names" in Missouri, a state home to lead mines and a starting place for many of the early miners to Mineral Point. In contrast to Neal and Hellum's myth of the Shake Rag, Ramsey suggested

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[20] 1840 and 1860 U.S. Census, Town of Mineral Point, Robert C. Hoard; and *Michigan Historical Collections*, vol. 37 (Lansing: Wynkoop, Hallenbeck, and Crawford, 1910), 374.
[21] See, for example, mail-order postcards, undated, Marketing and Public Relations, Edgar G. Hellum Papers. See also early correspondence such as: Evelyn Swarthout to Robert Neal, July 13 1938, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[22] "Proceedings of the Regular Meeting of the Mineral Point City Council," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, May 12, 1949.
[23] "Shake Rag Street Is Selected For Historical Marker," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, October 27, 1949; "New Historical Marker," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, October 11, 1951.

that "the term is a mocking nick-name, implying hunger or beggarliness….In Webster's, the Standard, and the Oxford dictionaries, the epithets 'Shakerag' and 'Shagrag' are defined as meaning ragamuffin, tatterdemalion, ragged wretch, or the like." While Neal and Hellum were correct in tracing the name Shake Rag to the British Isles, the original meaning of the name, at least according to the experts, seemed in many ways to be the exact opposite of the vision of wholesome domestic life the partners championed. As Ramsay noted, "The epithet was obviously brought over to America, and then[,] after it passed out of current use[,] all sorts of 'ex post facto' explanations were invented for it, such as a slang term for dancing, rags in broken windows, loose bandana handkerchiefs, etc."[24] To this list of course, we can add women calling their menfolk home for dinner.

Despite the letter from the National Trust detailing the origins of the term Shake Rag, Neal and Hellum's use of the story did not change. On the one hand, they were fully committed to their version of the story. Not only had the story appeared in print, but images of the myth were found throughout their advertising material. Moreover, they had convinced the town of Mineral Point to change the name of one its streets to honor to the tale, even invoking the imprimatur of the state of Wisconsin, by lobbying for and erecting a historical marker detailing the story for visitors. Perhaps most importantly, however, the story of the Shake Rag made Pendarvis House profitable. In the end, it did not matter that Neal and Hellum got the story wrong. The story was merely the backdrop. What visitors came to see – and what they paid for – was the show Neal and Hellum staged in their tiny cottage.

[24] Helen Duprey Bullock to Robert Neal, January 12, 1953, Robert Neal Papers.

Queer Home Fires in the Cold War

The myth of the Shake Rag was an endearing and comforting one. It aligned itself neatly with norms of gender and respectable middle-class domesticity, even if the early Cornish miners were anything but middle-class. Neal and Hellum made wide and profitable use of the myth even well after being told by the National Trust that the story at the center of their restaurant business and preservation project was false. The comfort, the familiarity, the normativity of the myth and its retelling were too much of a draw and a boon to business for the men to alter their business model. The strict division of gender roles and gendered spaces in the myth – with men in the mines clawing at the earth and women at home tending the hearth – were particularly amenable to a culture of post-WWII conservatism. As historian Elaine Tyler May argues, while the Cold War raged in the political realm, U.S. culture increasingly looked "homeward bound," toward a site that "held out the promise of security in an insecure world."[25] It is no coincidence, then, that Pendarvis House, with the domestic tale of the Shake Rag at its center, found its "golden years" in the post-war era.

There is only one problem with this analysis: the domestic world at Pendarvis House involved no actual housewives – Cornish or otherwise – but two queer men. In some cases, this omission baffled visitors. Hellum, for instance, recalled the story of two women visiting from nearby Iowa, convinced that the partners must have had women to help them with the cooking and cleaning:

> [One of the women] said, well, you both should get married and have women. And I said, yeah, but what a drudge it would be for them. "Well, but that's what women are for," [came the reply]. So they went back to Iowa and they sent two names for us to write to. They picked a real good looking one for Bob and [for me] they picked one that

[25] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988 repr. 2008), 1.

> wasn't so good looking but she was a real cook. They just thought it would take women, you see.[26]

There was no shortage of housework, of course. But Neal and Hellum handled it just fine, despite rigid notions of gender roles espoused by visiting Iowans. "When I get up in the morning," Hellum remembered, "the first thing I do is scrub the floors on my hands and knees. And then I have to arrange all the flowers for the tables. And…then Bob assumes the responsibility in the kitchen. I've got the meat all cut up, the potatoes peeled and the onions peeled and everything else, and he'd put the pasty together."[27]

One of the reasons why the Iowa women may have expressed dismay at the absence of female housewives is that, in Hellum's words, they smelled "a rat" – the rat being Neal and Hellum's queerness.[28] As historian Matt Cook points out, the "undomesticated passions" of queer men have long been seen as a threat to what domesticity has come to represent in the twentieth century.[29] "Domesticity," he writes, "is that elusive quality that made 'house' a 'home.' It suggested clearly defined gender roles and emotional, relationship and sexual lives enclosed within four walls."[30] It also became a site of proper and patriotic reproductive citizenship. Neal and Hellum, as we've already seen, disavowed a life based on reproductive futurity, instead dedicating their lives to the past and the preservation of beautiful things. This dedication, as such, was not proper domesticity. As Cook elaborates:

> However tasteful the places they lived, however adept at domestic work in their own homes, in hotels, in the employ of the wealthy, however wrapped up in childcare and other forms of care-giving, queer men have had a deeply equivocal relationship to home.

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[26] Hellum, interview.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 3.
[30] Ibid., 9.

> They could not be fully admitted to a place and an ideology which went to the heart of ideas of home, [national belonging] and good citizenship.[31]

In this way then, what Neal and Hellum were doing at Pendarvis House was less a mimicking of proper, heterosexual, reproductive domesticity, but a queering of it. Indeed, Neal and Hellum were performing a queer version of domesticity for profit and as a way to carve out a queer space for themselves and other queer individuals in small-town Wisconsin.

In his exploration of shifting discourses of race, citizenship, and health regarding Chinese Americans during the first half of the twentieth-century, historian Nayan Shah uses the analytic category of "queer domesticity" to examine the dominant understanding of Chinese bachelor culture in San Francisco's China Town shortly after the turn of the century. For Shah, this queer domesticity was seen in a variety of "prevailing social arrangements…such as multiple women and children living in a female-dominated household, the affiliation of vast communities of men in bunkhouses and opium dens, and common law marriages of Chinese men and fallen white women." These were social formations that, for Shah, upset "strict gender roles, the firm divisions between public and private, and the implicit presumptions of self-sufficient economics and intimacy in the respectable domestic household."[32] Such was the case with Neal and Hellum. Their home, and in many ways their lives, were open to the public. The private space of their home became the public space of a restaurant, and their partnership – both in business and in life – was on display. Moreover, the entire operation was predicated on an inversion of gender roles, an inversion that saw two queer men taking on the role of housewife.

In many ways, the performance of queer domesticity at Pendarvis House by Neal and Hellum was a conscious one. Or, at the very least, a performance that became apparent after the

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[31] Ibid., 3

[32] Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's* Chinatown (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 14

fact. When interviewed late in life, for instance, Hellum remembered that "we glorified everything"

> We did everything – made as good a pasty as you could get, good contents, we had Iowa County beef, we had a good butcher, had good potatoes – good quality, and kept it up. We used old dishes, we had old silverware, and we did everything with finesse. Our little dining room seated twenty people….And pasty, that's peasant food, it's about as close to the ground as you can get. Except we glorified everything.[33]

To take the "peasant food" of Cornish pasty to the level of national renown Neal and Hellum were able to achieve did, indeed, take a fair amount of glorifying – it took a performance.

The pasty itself, as Hellum pointed out, was a rather simple dish. The crust, "the secret" to the whole recipe Hellum intimated, was simply a pie crust of lard, salt, flour, and water. The filling was likewise decidedly plain: meat, potatoes, onions, and white kidney suet to provide moisture. Salt and pepper were the only seasonings used. By contrast, the simplicity of the food itself was balanced by its highly orchestrated service, the glorifying performance that was key to Neal and Hellum's success. The star of the show – the pasty – took center stage right at the start (along with relish and pickle trays). At the appointed time, Neal would enter the dining room with the family-sized pasty on a large serving platter. "This is your pasty," he would say. "It was made especially for your party." The supporting characters would follow: a second course of salad and crackers and a final desert course usually featuring Cornish saffron cake, clotted cream, and fruit preserves.[34] The food was simple, but the meal was glorified; "we had flowers on the table," Hellum remembered, "we had nice china and silverware, we had good waitresses,

[33] Hellum, interview

[34] Mark H. Knipping and Korinne K. Oberle, *On the Shake Rag: Mineral Point's Pendarvis House, 1935-1970* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1990), 28-29.

the rooms were furnished with old things."[35] A Cornish housewife, were there one to be found at Pendarvis House, would not have recognized the cottage for all its finery.

While the pasty, as we shall see, received the bulk of the praise from food critics and other visitors, it was really the personal attention and hospitality shown by Neal and Hellum that stole the show. In a 1990 interview with Hellum, for instance, the local newspaper shared that:

> It wasn't just the food, Edgar said. It was the hospitality, the attention the individual received. "That was the secret of the the whole thing," Edgar said. During the the winter montsh, four fireplaces were always going. In the summer there were flowers everywhere, inside and out. Guests were invited into the kitchen to watch Neal roll a pasty. After supper we sat in the garden and chatted. "It was quite a deal," he said. People left without paying, Edgar recalls, because they felt that they had been guests. They would later return or call on the phone to apologize, saying, "The check will be in the mail."[36]

For one thing, food was served by reservation only. Visitors had to call or write ahead to reserve a meal. If no reservation was made, hungry tourists were turned away - even, as one story has it, when that visitor happens to be a famous U.S. Senator and future president.[37] Likewise, if travelers had a reservation but did not show up on time, their pasty was given away and their meal cancelled. Neal and Hellum ran a tight ship. Such formality was part of the performance that elevated the simple pasty and the cramped quarters of the cottage to the level of fine dining.

The high price of Cornish dinners at Pendarvis House accomplished much the same thing. At the cost of almost four dollars a meal by the 1950s – or about thirty-five to forty

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[35] Hellum, interview.

[36] "Founder of Pendarvis Receives Much Appreciation," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, July 19, 1990.

[37] As the likely apocryphal story goes, Senator John F. Kennedy was in Mineral Point to give a speech at the Mineral Point Opera House. Told of the world-famous pasty, he ventured to Pendarvis House to sample such a delight, only to be turned away for not having a reservation. Chris Jones, "The Hidden History of Mineral Point," *Chicago Tribune*, August 29, 2003; and Mike Muckian, "Gay Couple Credited with Preserving Mineral Point," *Wisconsin Gazette*, October 3, 2011.

dollars today – a meal at Pendarvis House was out of reach for many residents of Mineral Point.[38] The bulk of the visitors to the tiny restaurant on Shake Rag Street came from out of town. Neal and Hellum's appointment books were filled with reservations for people coming from places further afield, like Madison, Chicago, and Minneapolis. The partners received far fewer visitors from nearer places like Dodgeville, Platteville, and Mineral Point, and when those visitors did come, they tended to be more well-to-do.[39] As Fellows puts it, "although Pendarvis House's old-fashioned charm was rooted in local tradition, it was not a business that catered to locals. It was pricey, and Neal's personality imbued it with haughty, discriminating airs…[it was] high-class tea in a low-class cottage."[40] In other words, while Neal and Hellum relied upon a version of the past rooted in Mineral Point, they had to balance that rootedness with the financial need to draw outsiders into Mineral Point.

At the same time, the partners also had to carefully balance the question of their queerness, bridging the gap between the subversive, queer world of the pansy craze and the heteronormative world of reproductive domesticity, especially as it came to be entrenched during the post-war era. This bridging is an example of what queer theorist Eve Sedgewick understands as the "unrationalized coexistence of different models" of sexuality. For Sedgwick, models of sexuality, as they change over time, do not supersede one another and existing in their moment uncontested. Rather, at any given time, understandings of sexuality are "unexpectedly plural, varied, and contradictory."[41] To put it another way, a way which Neal and Hellum would understand, the past is always in the present. The partners, then, were able to leverage this contradictory nature of understandings of sexuality to invoke the crowd-pleasing pansy craze

[38] Menus, Marketing and Public Relations, Edgar G. Hellum Papers; measuringworth.com.
[39] Restaurant Reservation Books, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.
[40] Fellows, *Passion to Preserve*, 196.
[41] Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1990), 44-48.

while simultaneously couching that potentially transgressive performance in post-war conservative ideals of domesticity.

For many townsfolk, however, the queer nature of Neal and Hellum's performance at Pendarvis House was not, generally speaking, visible. That is not to say Neal and Hellum's queerness was not noticed or acknowledged, but that such acknowledgement was done so through euphemistic language like "fairies" or simply ignored. What happened down on the Shake Rag, for these residents, odd as it may have been, was largely seen as the private affairs of Neal and Hellum. In the words of historian Colin R. Johnson, Neal and Hellum were "just queer folks" on the edge of town, and like the Pixies of Cornish legend, they were largely left alone.[42] While the partners' queerness was tacitly and euphemistically acknowledged by outsiders like Cass, it was also largely ignored by Mineral Pointers. As Cass noted just four years after the opening of Pendarvis House, "practically all of the visitors were strangers from other towns. Not more than a dozen or so Mineral Point residents have taken the time or trouble to go down to Shakerag Street to see what is going on in their midst about which people and papers all over the country are beginning to talk."[43] The cost of a meal at Pendarvis and its high-class affectations certainly explain some of this aversion, so too does the fact that the business catered largely to those from somewhere other than Mineral Point. Fellows also suggests that "there was jealousy of Neal and Hellum's success in achieving so much on the slummiest street in town," and this may have played a minor role as well.[44]

Indeed, from Neal and Hellum's point of view, the partners did not shut out their fellow Pointers as much as the townsfolk shunned Neal and Hellum. As Hellum recalled in the 1990s,

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[42] Colin R. Johnson, *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).
[43] Betty Cass, "Madison Day by Day," *Wisconsin State Journal*, July 25, 1939.
[44] Fellows, *Passion to Preserve*, 196.

perhaps with just a bit of hyperbole, when they first started out, townsfolk "thought we were a couple of crazy kids – 'How are things going out on the Shake Rag,' [they would ask], and we said we're doing the best we can. And we then divorced ourselves from the city. We stayed out on our end of the street and did our thing. And followed the rules and regulations, the building code and all the rest of it."[45] Neal and Hellum were never really "divorced" from the city of Mineral Point. They had to do business in town, for example, purchasing lumber and supplies for their restoration work and foodstuffs for their restaurant, including the increasingly expensive saffron they ordered in large quantities from the local drug store.[46] The local paper, too, featured Neal, Hellum, and Pendarvis House regularly meaning that if the town and the partners had been divorced, at least it was an amicable and mutually supporting one.[47]

I want to suggest, however, that in addition to these factors, Mineral Pointers were reacting to their queer neighbors in ways not unlike populations of similar rural and small-town locales. Another way to think about the relationship between the city of Mineral Point, centered up on High Street, and Neal and Hellum down on the Shake Rag, then, is to think in terms of selective ignorance. That is, to whatever extent the town turned its back on Neal and Hellum, it likely did not do so *because* of the men's queerness, or at least that was not the only reason. Instead, and in some ways, more simply, Neal and Hellum's neighbors just did not want to see the men's queerness. Thinking of Mineral Pointers relationship to queerness in this way is an example of what historian John Howard calls the "heterosexual will to not-know." According to

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[45] Hellum, interview.

[46] Amongst his papers, Neal left a not detailing "The Rising Cost of Saffron." Neal and Hellum worked with the local druggist, "Mr. Metz" for nearly twenty years, buying saffron for $39 per pound. Once the partners could no longer get the costly spice through the local drugstore, prices skyrocketed. In 1964, the partners paid $45 per pound. Three years later, the cost had ballooned to $145 per pound. "The Rising Cost of Saffron," Robert M. Neal Papers.

[47] Neal, for example, regularly gave talks to city volunteer organizations like the Kiwanis Club as early as 1936. *Mineral Point Tribune*, July 16, 1936. Likewise, that same year the *Mineral Point Tribune* proclaimed that "Shake rag [sic] street is fast becoming a famous street in the city." *Mineral Point Tribune*, September 24, 1936.

Howard, this was a form of "quiet accommodation," a "pretense to ignorance" that allowed straight neighbors to simply ignore that part of Neal and Hellum's life they may have found disagreeable.[48] The keys to this understanding, to the possibility of ignorance – either real or based on pretense – were silence and tolerance.

This understanding of Neal and Hellum's queerness and the reaction of Mineral Pointers to it, flies in the face of present-day identity politics of visibility. In this formulation, silence is the opposite of visibility and self-avowal, and toleration the underbelly of acceptance. For Johnson, paying attention to toleration in lieu of acceptance allows us to see "the existence of some forms of queer life, especially those that take shape under circumstances that seem, from our perspective, unlivable on their face."[49] Rather than shrink from silence and toleration, Neal and Hellum leveraged their queerness to the extent they were able, not speaking it directly but not being entirely erased either. As Cass put it in one of her columns, "Always [the partners] held steadfast to their ideal, unmindful of the difficulties of creating enthusiasm for their project, or that they were often referred to as being 'slightly pixilated,' a good Cornish term."[50] Cornish or not, the Pixies of Pendarvis were making their mark even while most of Mineral Point ignored them and let them go about their business. And as the old Cornish folktale about pixies in the mines helped miners strike ore, by leaving Neal and Hellum to their own devices down on the Shake Rag, the town would later reap the benefits of the partners' hard work.

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[48] John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), especially xvi-xvii.
[49] Johnson, *Just Queer* Folks, 109.
[50] Betty Cass, "Madison Day by Day," June 25, 1939.

Artists and Articles, Painters and Print

Harder to ignore than Neal and Hellum, perhaps, especially as their numbers grew during the postwar decades, were the ever-increasing number of artists drawn to the Point. Two of the earliest of these artists to arrive were Max and Ava Fernekes, a married couple who moved from Milwaukee to Mineral Point in 1939 or 1940.[51] Max was especially well-known for his etchings and crayon and watercolor paintings of Wisconsin scenes, especially the old buildings of Mineral Point, while Ava worked in a variety of mediums including ceramic sculpture. In many ways, the Fernekes and Neal and Hellum became two sides of the same coin. The Fernekes art promoted the beauty of the buildings of Mineral Point and its surrounding area while Neal and Hellum's domestic performance brought those buildings and their history to life. Max's etchings, for instance, were featured on postcards, menus, and other promotional material for Pendarvis House, including those with Cornish housewives shaking rags in cottage doorways.[52] As such, the work of Max Fernekes gave visual permanance to the queer performance that was at the heart of Pendarvis House. In return, Neal and Hellum kept the starving artists from literally doing such. If scheduled guests missed their reserved meal, Neal and Hellum "called up Max or Ava and said 'Well, the people didn't show up, so here's a pasty.' We kept the Fernekes going for years with leftovers," Hellum recalled, "when they couldn't afford to eat."[53] More importantly, the Ferneckes began the trend of artists settling at The Point, where housing was cheap and artistic inspiration plentiful. When the artistic settlement was at its peak in the 1970s,

[51] Ray Barth, "The Lived on Love, Faith In Talent," *Capital Times*, October 19, 1977; and "Servies Set for Artist Ferneckes," *Milwaukee Journal*, December 2, 1984.
[52] Marketing Materials, Marketing and Public Relations, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.
[53] Oberle and Knipping, 31.

Max and Ava proudly proclaimed that "We're the original hippies here and everybody looks to us."[54]

It may have been true that the artists building homes, galleries, and colonies in Mineral Point in the 1970s look to Max and Ava as founding "hippies," but the Fernekes were not the first artists Neal and Hellum drew to town. The Swedish playwright, Hans Alin, first came to Mineral Point in 1936, and lived in a stone cottage near Pendarvis House off and on until his final departure in 1965.[55] Less interesting than his early arrival, however, was his publicized queer presence. As discussed in the first chapter, artists – by their very nature of being such and often existing at the margins of mainstream society – have been generally viewed as queer in the twentieth century.[56] Whereas the Fernekes queerness as artists was largely mitigated by their heterosexual marriage, Alin's was more expressly at the fore. In the fall of 1936, for instance, as part of her "Madison Day by Day" column, Betty Cass reprinted an item from the *Chicago Tribune*, detailing Alin's move from Chicago to an unnamed "Wisconsin retreat." Alin was making the move with Raymond Jamieson, of nearby Shullsburg, Wisconsin. The two were working together on translating the Swedish play *Queen Christina* into an English-language Broadway show. As the *Tribune* noted, Alin had recently been in New York, where he hob-nobbed with Marcel Duchamps, and was on his way to Los Angeles after his side trip to small-town Wisconsin.

Cass filled in the details of this side trip in her own column, highlighting in the same way she did for Neal and Hellum, the queerness of the visitors and their venture. "The 'Wisconsin

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[54] Ray Barth, "They Lived on Love, Faith in Talent…" *Capital Times*, October 19, 1977, Fernekes Clippings Folder, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.
[55] Photo of Alin with inscription: "Hans Alin: Last picture taken…on June 10, 1965, minutes before leaving for Madison, Wis; enroute to Stockholm, Sweden," Pendarvis Photos Box, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[56] See, for example: Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

retreat'," she wrote, "is none other than the Cornish settlement which Robert Neal and Edgar Hellum are establishing…" Cass met Alin in the kitchen of Pendarvis, where he was "wearing blue denim jeans, a faded blue shirt open at the throat, and a quiet smile of contentment" as he prepared a dinner of Swedish meatballs for the journalist-guest from Madison. As described by Cass, Alin's clothing and his prowess in the kitchen situated the artist outside of normal masculine conventions. As if to drive the point home, she then described the work habits of the playwrighting duo, Alin and Jamieson. "They are doing the translation sometimes in the plum thicket back of the house [Pendarvis], sometimes on the flagstone terrace outside the kitchen, and sometimes, when the weather chases them inside, in a hidden, fairy-castle room in the old Cornish house next door to Pendarvis." That "fairy-castle room" was in the newly acquired Polperro, which Cass described as "a room from another world…where 'Queen Christina' is being recreated for Americans.[57] Once again, Cass fell back on the euphemistic language of the "fairy," as she did for Neal, Hellum, and Mr. X, to describe to readers in the know the queerness of Alin and Jamieson, their endeavor, and by extension the entire goings-on at Pendarvis House.

The artistic goings-on in Mineral Point were no isolated thing, however. The entire southwestern region of Wisconsin was seen at the time – as it still is today – as a haven for artists. In their coverage of the work of Wisconsin actress Mary Waterstreet, for example, the *Capital Times* of Madison declared that "Miss Waterstreet's Spring Green home is one of the social centers for the colony of artists who are native to southwestern Wisconsin. These include Frank Lloyd Wright, world famed architect; August Derleth, Sauk Prairie novelist and poet; Frank Upatel, Massonite artist; Keith McCuthceon, Arena poet; and Robert Neal, Mineral Point."[58] Frank Lloyd Wright, for instance, visited Pendarvis House on several occasions,

[57] Betty Cass, "Madison Day by Day," *Wisconsin State Journal*, September 20, 1936.
[58] Sterling Sorensen, "Stage and Screen in Madison," *The Capital Times*, July 29, 1940.

reportedly even trading antiques with Neal. After one visit, Wright wanted a set of jars and churns Neal had on display and Neal jumped at the opportunity to trade for two green glass jars he had had is eye on after visiting Taliesin. According to Betty Cass, a deal was struck but not before Neal interjected that, "I'll want the lids to the glass jars also." Wright had to concede that to his jars had long ago been lost. "With the utmost confidence" Neal returned, "One of them is on the floor behind the railing near that Buddha at the top of the stairs in the theater, and the other is on a shelf in a dark corner near the piano."[59] The eye of the collector never rests.

August Derleth was also a regular at Pendarvis House, even though he apparently did not care very much for pasty, preferring beef Truro instead.[60] Appetites aside, Derleth liked Mineral Point so much he penned two books about the place, clearly inspired by the history Neal and Hellum were preserving – and performing – at Pendarvis. *Land of Gray Gold*, for example, was a 1954 young adult novel about a teenaged Cornish immigrant who finds himself transplanted to 1840s Mineral Point after his father's sudden death. Now the breadwinner of the family, Peter Trelawny, the young protagonist, must rely on hard work and quick thinking to save what is left of his family. Thanks to a strong work ethic and a total lack of classism or xenophobia, Trelawny quickly moves from orphaned child laborer to land owner in just over one hundred and fifty pages.[61] It is a decidedly didactic celebration of Americanization and the mythical power of pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps – not exactly high literature or a story Cornish immigrant miners would recognize.

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[59] Betty Cass, "Madison Day by Day," *Wisconsin State Journal*, August 31, 1938.
[60] On Derleth's visits to Pendarvis House, see, for example: August Derleth to Robert Neal, October 15, 1952 and October 20, 1952, Robert M. Neal Papers. On Derleth's dislike of pasty, see: Derleth to Neal, June 29, 1960, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[61] August Derleth, *Land of Gray Gold: Lead Mining in Wisconsin* (New York: Aladdin Books, 1954).

By contrast, the 1960 novel *The Hills Stand Watch*, has a decidedly darker and even queer bent. *The Hills Stand Watch* is the story of an unhappy Cornish immigrant bride, Candace Pengellen, dragged by her husband David to Wisconsin's 1840s lead region. Candace soon finds solace in the American Lieutenant Nathaniel Parr, but also her own demise. At its climax, her relationship with Lieutenant Parr leads the pair to run away together to Washington D.C., where Parr has been granted a political appointment. Just outside of town, between the eponymous hills – the Platte and Belleville Mounds – the love-struck pair come face to face with the flames of desire. The couple is trapped between the mounds by a grassfire, intentionally set by Parr's longtime "travelling companion," a Winnebago man named Soaring Hawk. Soaring Hawk meant only to stop the elopers from escaping, sending Candace back to her husband and taking back his rightful place beside Parr. The fire quickly grows out of control, however, and as Parr tries to save Candace and Soaring Hawk tries to save Parr, all three perish in a conflagration of desire.[62]

In the 1940s, other literary and artistic figures either came to call Mineral Point home or spent time at Pendarvis. According to Cass, it was the restoration work of Neal and Hellum, their work of bringing the history of the place to life both in a material sense and a performative one, that made the place a magnet for the artistic set. "The restoration," she wrote in 1946, "has caused a revival of interest in Mineral Point as a charming place in which to live and several artists, musicians, and writers as others interested merely in a quiet retreat, have purchased old Cornish homes in parts of the town and are restoring and living in them."[63] Georgia Townsend was one of the lesser known artists who came to town. The life-long spinster who first

[62] August Derleth, *The Hills Stand Watch* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1960).
[63] Betty Cass, "Cornish Project at Mineral Point Destined to Be Historical Mecca," *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 17, 1946.

introduced Hellum to Ralph Warner lived near Pendarivs House on Spruce Street, staying connected with Neal and Hellum and maintaining a lively correspondence with the latter's mother.[64]

Pendarvis house also hosted a number of well-known artistic figures, including the literary stars Sinclair Lewis and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. Both were guests at Pendarvis thanks to the organizing work of Cass, work that placed more than a little stress on the Madison journalist. "Ohmigawd," she began a letter to Neal, "I'm sure I'll never look the same even if I do live over this weekend. Sinclair Lewis just called and announced, 'Betty, darling (he calls everyone that, practically) I have a little actress friend in town from New York for the weekend and I'm bringing her to the luncheon.' I hope Mrs. Rawlings has a sense of humor."[65] Apparently, she did, or at least by all surviving accounts the lunch went off with little fanfare. Regardless, Neal, Hellum, and Pendarvis House had become a magnet for artists of all strips and part of a larger community of artists stretched across the rural areas and small towns of Southwestern Wisconsin, setting the stage for the artistic communities that continue to call the Driftless Area home today.

But even if one managed to ignore the small group of artists – queer or otherwise – gathering around Neal and Hellum from the very beginning of their project, it would have been almost impossible to pass over the amount of national press Pendarvis House garnered and the profitability that came along with it. Indeed, if early press coverage of Pendarvis House by Betty

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[64] This correspondence consisted larger of hand-drawn postcards Townsend sent to Milla Hellum, often updating the latter on her son's activities. Georgia Townsend Folder, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.

[65] In addition to the Lewis' uninvited female guest (Lewis was married to his second wife in 1940, though the two would divorce two years later), Cass was sure to send along money for the meal, as to not "appear to be paying you or even discussing it while we are there…or even have to take o you privately so as to embarrass any of the men." The irony of the gender politics was surely one source of Cass' stress and frustration. Betty Cass to Robert Neal, October 12, 1940, Robert M. Neal Papers; Sheldon Norman Grebstein, *Sinclair Lewis* (New York: Twayne Publishing, 1962), 27.

Cass launched Neal and Hellum's business and preservation project, then the media connections Gordon McCormick leveraged for the partners brought Pendarvis and Mineral Point into a whole different orbit. Cass' early local coverage in Madison helped Neal and Hellum find their names in print in Milwaukee and even Chicago papers. To the latter, certainly, McCormick also had an influence. But the figure that really put Pendarvis House on the national map – both literally and figuratively – was a man we now associate with boxed cake mix: Duncan Hines. In the 1940s and 1950s, however, Hines was among the elite when it came to arbiters of taste. He was also a friend and acquaintance of McCormick, a connection that bode well for Neal, Hellum, and the lowly pasty of Pendarvis House.

Hines was an unlikely food critic. Born in Kentucky, in 1880, and raised on his grandparents' farm after the untimely death of his mother, Hines spent much of his working life as a traveling salesman based out of Chicago. Beginning in 1930, while out in the field visiting the various accounts his firm held throughout the Midwest, Hines began to keep a personal list of restaurants he deemed as suitable for dining. Slowly he began to share this list with his fellow businessmen, to the point that, in 1934, a Chicago newspaper got wind of the list and published a story on Hines and his restaurant sleuthing. Soon, the list became a book and Hines went from being a traveling salesman to a nationally-known food critic. Hines' guidebook, *Adventures in Good Eating*, quickly became so popular that he could not personally vouch for all the restaurants it listed. Enter the Dinner Detectives, a select group of Hines' confidants who would scout out new eateries for potential listing and keep tabs on their quality. As it would happen, Gordon McCormick – Mr. X. – was a good friend of Hines and one his top sleuths.[66]

[66] Louis Hatchett, *Duncan Hines: How a Traveling Salesman Became the Most Trusted Name in Food* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2014), especially 60.

Thanks to this connection, Pendarvis House made Hines' select list virtually from the very beginning. In 1957, the partners received a certificate from Hines marking twenty years in the guide book, meaning Pendarvis House was first on the food critic's radar in 1937, just two years after the stone cottage first opened for business.[67] While Hines did visit Pendarvis with his wife Clara on several occasions, the proprietors of Pendarvis House receive no mention in the restaurant's guidebook description. What does garner center stage, however, is the Cornish history on display through the food itself. The 1959 guidebook, for example, reads:

> Pendarvis House is one of the few places in this country where real Cornish meals are served, prepared from old authentic recipes, and where scalded cream…may be had. Their Cornish 'pasty' hearty and appetizing (must be ordered four hours in advance), is served for luncheon or dinner with homemade relishes and pickles, and green salads with fresh herbs. Wild plum, citron or gooseberry preserves with scalded cream, tea and saffron cake, served as dessert.[68]

By removing Neal and Hellum from the meal service at Pendarvis House, Hines un-queered the partners' venture. As we will see in the following chapter, the queerness of Neal and Hellum, so useful in promoting their project and central to their performance of domesticity at Pendarvis House, would become more and more of a liability in the post-war period. As such, although the partners received ever more attention from national press after the war, that attention came with a diminishing emphasis on the partners themselves and greater emphasis on the Cornish past being presented there.

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[67] "Duncan Hines Fifth-of-a-Century Club Member Certificate," Pendarvis Photos Box, Robert M. Neal Papers. The Hines visited Pendarvis on a number of occasions. In 1947, for instance, the Hines made at least two visits to Mineral Point. "Notable People Visit Pendarvis," Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune, September 18, 1947. Clara Hines was particularly taken with the two men and their project and exchanged decidedly personal and friendly letters with the two men. See, for example: Clara Hines to Robert Neal and Edgar Hellum, June 22, [unknown year], Robert M. Neal Papers.

[68] Duncan Hines, *Adventures in Good Eating* (New York: Duncan Hines Institute, 1959), 365

In the early 1950s, for example, one of the nation's most well-known food critics visited Mineral Point and Pendarvis House. Clementine Paddleford was one of the earliest national food writers, penning a column for the *New York Herald Tribune* and upwards of fifty syndicate papers from 1940 to 1967.[69] In contrast to Cass' first column on Pendarvis House almost twenty years before, the queerness – the fairy-ness – of Neal, Hellum, and Pendarvis is largely absent from Paddleford's piece, published in 1952. There are the faintest of possible allusions to the queerness of the partners and their project, with a fire that "snapped and made merry" emitting "from the chimney a violet spiral of smoke," but no real indication of the intimacy of Neal and Hellum's partnership, despite both men being named as founders of the restoration project. Instead, Paddleford's primary focus is the food and, in particular, the Cornish history attached to it. She writes that:

> It was in Chicago I heard about the 'Shake Rag' restoration project. I was told that three cottages had been opened as dining rooms and guest houses for visitors who come from all parts of the country to see this bit of old Cornwall. The thing that determined me to go was that Cornish food was served, prepared by hand-down recipes of the housewives who cooked in these cottage kitchens more than a hundred years ago.[70]

While more explicit allusions to the partner's queerness were absent from Paddleford's review, unlike Cass' columns, by positioning Neal and Hellum as the benefactors of a genealogy of Cornish housewives she is echoing the queer performance and the history of domesticity Neal and Hellum sought to put on stage at Pendarvis House.

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[69] Unlike Hines, whose memory lives on thanks to boxed cake mix, Paddleford's name is less recognizable. Gender may have had a role in erasing the enterprising work of Paddleford, but, perhaps even more than that, following an operation to excise laryngeal cancer, Paddleford had to rely on an artificial voice device – a Jackson tube – to speak. This device, visible without a scarf, and the effect it had on her ability to speak, meant she was unable to make the move from print to television that other food writers and entrepreneurs were undertaking. Kelly Alexander and Cynthia Harris, *Hometown Appetites: The Story of Clementine Paddleford, the Forgotten Food Writer Who Chronicled How America Ate* (New York: Gotham Books, 2008), especially xvi-xviii and 80-81.

[70] Clementine Paddleford, "They Melt in Your Mouth," "How America Eats" Column, *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 18, 1952.

In another publication, however, a small booklet of recipes including Neal's recipe for pasty, Paddleford forecloses the queer possibility inherent in situating Neal and Hellum alongside Cornish housewives. "Shall I let you in on a little secret?" She asks readers leadingly. "The best cooks are men….Some of *This Week's* best recipes have to me from the men: H.O. Frye, General Manager of the Walter Bakery Co. in New England; Robert Neal, interior decorator and restaurant owner of Mineral Point, Wis; T. Leeford (Hank) Givens, publisher of the Santa Ana California Independent. And the list could go on forever…"[71] Although Paddleford treats the phenomena of proficient male cooks she describes with a certain degree of tongue-in-cheek humor, she recuperates any queer unsettling of normal post-war gender roles by proclaiming the superiority of male foodies. In her formulation, men might be new to the kitchen, but their potentially gender transgressive move into that space is erased by their masculine skills and proficiency.

This same sort of erasure of Neal and Hellum's queerness appears throughout much of the national post-war coverage of Pendarvis. When Neal and Hellum are mentioned at all, it is most often in passing, and the focus, as with the Paddleford's column, is most centrally on the Cornish history and food presented at Pendarvis. Whether featured in *Holiday Magazine*, *Gas News*, *Let's See: Resorts and Restaurants*, *Travel Magazine*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *Vogue*, or *Country Gentleman*, the queer performance of Neal and Hellum took a back seat to pasty and stone cottages.[72]

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[71] Clementine Paddleford, "Over Ten Thousand Women Wrote to Ask," *How America Eats* Pamphlet, undated, Box 4, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.

[72] See, for instance: "Midwestern Cornwall," *Holiday* (July 1949); Herbert Kaddy, "Autumn in Wisconsin," *Holiday* (October 1958); August Derleth, "Wisconsin's Gentle Wilderness," *Holiday* (July 1962); "A Guide to Fine Dining in America," *Holiday Magazine* Booklet, 1963; "Turn Back the Years with a Visit to Quaint, Century-old Pendarvis House," *Gas News* (July 1952); "Pendarvis House and Shake Rag," *Let's See: Resorts and Restaurants* (June 1960); "Unusual Buildings," *Travel* (September 1958); "Off-Beat Vacations for Fall," *Cosmopolitan* (August 1956); "The Romance of Staying 'Home'," *Glamour* (May 1962); "Excerpts from Two Answers to the Prix Question, 'Outline a

But while the coverage of Pendarvis House expunged the partner's queer performance, the performance itself never disappeared. It was still there, inextricably linked to the history, the cottages, and to the celebration of the pasty itself. Neal and Hellum may have been removed from the celebration of the Shake Rag in print, but in practice they continued to embody that history in queer and gender transgressive ways. As the country moved into the post-war period, however, the permanence of this performance sat uneasily alongside newer, stricter norms of gender and sexuality. What had been an asset in the partners' work, was becoming more and more of a potential liability. The fairies of Mineral Point had to find a way to balance the usefulness of their queerness and the queerness of their project with these emerging norms. As we will see in the following chapter, this proved an especially difficult task as the two men worked to bring their vision of Mineral Point's past and their ethos of historic preservation up off of Shake Rag Street and into the rest of town.

Travel Feature for Vogue," *Vogue* (August 1955); "A World of Good Eats from Wisconsin," *Country Gentleman* (October 1946). All Clippings in Box 4, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.

Chapter 5

"Those People":
Gender, Queerness, and Historic Preservation

In the spring of 1942, when Chester Holway, a queer journalist at the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, visited Mineral Point on assignment, he missed the "two bright young men" he had come to visit as well as the tea and saffron cake they would have offered him. He was met, instead, with a sign tacked to the front door of Pendarvis House, indicating the cottage would be closed for the day.[1] Holway, however, was simply "content just to peek in the windows" and wander about town. He was quite taken with the surroundings, describing Mineral Point as "a higgledy-piggledy place where every street is a new adventure." But he also remarked on how run-down and derelict the old place had become by the mid-twentieth century. "The old lead mining country looks like the abandoned playlot of a gang of giant boys forever making mud pies and sand castles," he wrote. "They slashed, trenched, piled, and puddled. Then some one [sic] called them home to supper and they left their handiwork. Nobody ever cleaned up."[2] Nobody, that is, until Neal and Hellum began their work in 1935.

In 1942, Holway was already beginning to see what lay ahead for Mineral Point, thanks to the efforts of the two queer men he happened to miss that spring day. "Mineral Point is one of those curious Wisconsin towns," he wrote, "that thought they were all thru and then woke up the other day to discover themselves beginning a new career….Almost before the citizens knew it,

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[1] In 1942, Holway had only just moved into the Duncan House in Cooksville, Wisconsin – Ralph Warner's recently vacated House Next Door. He and his partner Marvin Rainy would live in Cooksville until the 1980s, mentoring the next generation of queer men, namely Michael Saternus and Larry Reed, in order to take over the safeguarding of Cooksville history. Fellows, *A Passion to Preserve: Gay Men as Keepers of Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 166-169.

[2] Chester Holway, "Cornish Town Lies Serene in Wisconsin Hills," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 17, 1942.

their town was on the tourist route." But in 1942 Holway was still in the vanguard of proclaiming the rebirth of Mineral Point. Pendarvis House had only been in business for seven years, and while it was successful, bringing in visitors and their dollars, it had not yet hit its stride. That was still to come, as discussed in the previous chapter, after the interruption of the war years. Yet, in a certain way, Holway foresaw that later, larger post-war commercial success, if only by noting its absence in the early 40s. Instead of fervor for preservation, the Chicago reporter found instead a peculiarly Midwestern laissez-faire attitude regarding Mineral Point's historic properties, writing:

> If these houses, and the dozens like them cascading down the hilly streets, were in New England they would have been snapped up by house-hunting city folk long ago. The flossy magazines would have written rapturously about them, and the doings of their owners would be chronicled in the society columns. Here in the uplands of Wisconsin, they just sit, their yellow stones getting lovelier year by year. They have no classic background to atone for their common birth; they were built only yesterday, by immigrants."[3]

The flossy magazines came in the late 1940s and 1950s, along with an increase in U.S. car culture and the development of restaurant guides and food critics. The move to preserve the architectural gems of Mineral Point, however, came several decades later.[4]

While the town-wide push for historic preservation in Mineral Point did not come until the 1960s and 1970s, the movement began much earlier, with Neal and Hellum applying steady

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[3] Ibid.

[4] In many ways, the two eras are connected. Car culture in the post-war U.S. was inextricably tied to suburbanization and the removal of inner-city "blight" – a code word for old buildings housing communities of color and impoverished neighborhoods. This push for urban renewal was often indiscriminate, razing entire neighborhoods and districts, with little regard for differentiating between poorly maintained structures and architectural gems. Local and national push for legislation protecting historic buildings came, in large part, as a reaction to urban renewal and the loss of such gems. As historic preservation efforts evolved, they also tended to be racialized processes, where neighborhoods of color where razed for freeways and highway expansion and white enclaves saved for historic preservation and gentrification. See, for example: Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) and *Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); and Larry Millet, *Lost Twin Cities* (St Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1992).

pressure on their neighbors and fellow townsfolk throughout the decades following the founding of Pendarvis House in 1935. Holway may only have seen the beginning traces of such a movement amongst the mud pies and sand castles in 1942, but what efforts he did see were largely the work of the two men he just missed that day. This chapter explores the preservation work of Neal and Hellum as it intersects both the history of historic preservation in the United States and the history of sexuality. I argue here, on the one hand and in the same vein as historian Will Fellows, that queer men like Neal and Hellum were instrumental in developing the historic preservation movement both locally and nationally. Women have rightly been given credit for their foundational and ongoing work in preservation, but queer individuals have generally been erased from this history. This chapter situates the work of Neal and Hellum squarely next to the important work of women in the historic preservation movement by demonstrating how the partners' work mirrored the various stages of the wider, national movement.

When, in its early stages, preservation at the national level was largely relegated to private house museums, for example, Neal and Hellum were busy ushering visitors through Pendarvis, Polperro, and Trelawny. As municipalities slowly began to be involved in such museums, Neal and Hellum took the reins of the Mineral Point Historical Society and housed it in Orchard Lawn, the Gundry family mansion. And as wealthy benefactors began to funnel money into outdoor museums, Neal and Hellum were there too, along with Gordon McCormick's backing, expanding their real estate holdings and the visitor experience. And as the preservation movement began to shift away from private residences and museums to public projects involving entire historic districts, the partners were there yet again, acting as the leading

force to place the entire town of Mineral Point on the National Register of Historic Places, the first such municipality in the state of Wisconsin.[5]

In addition to inserting the work of Neal and Hellum into the history of movements for historic preservation, in this chapter I also explore the queerness of these two men – inextricable from their project, as the previous chapters have shown – examining the ways in which that queerness both helped and hampered the partners in their efforts at preserving not just the Pendarvis complex, but the whole of Mineral Point. Of particular interest here, is how shifting ideas of gender and sexuality shaped how the city of Mineral Point approached preservation.

The partners faced little opposition to their preservation efforts initially. But as the scope of those efforts expanded, Neal and Hellum faced an uphill battle when it came to spreading their gospel of historic preservation to the wider community, especially where the city government was concerned. In this effort, their queerness held contradictory meanings. On the one hand, queer men had long been, alongside women, leaders in the historic preservation movement and, as such, Neal and Hellum had experience, expertise, and clout when it came to such matters. Their orientation toward queer time and their queer performance at Pendarvis gave them a certain degree of privileged access to and knowledge of the past. On the other hand, as the men pushed the city council to help in their efforts, that queerness that had earlier served as an asset increasingly became a liability. This was particularly true, as we will see, during the Cold War years, when changing understandings of gender and sexuality stained queerness as subversive and un-American.

[5] For an overview of the generally accepted stages of the history of historic preservation – house museums, outdoor museums, historic districts and the shift from private to public protection – see William Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 1993).

By adding the work of queer individuals as well as the context of the history of sexuality to the story of historic preservation in the U.S., this chapter continues the argument of the previous chapters: that the queerness of Neal and Hellum was inextricable from their project and the places and spaces they created. By the same token, then, this chapter suggests that as Neal and Hellum spread their ethos of historic preservation from the Shake Rag to the whole of Mineral Point, that inextricable queerness came with. In other words, as Mineral Point slowly came to recognize the wealth of its history and historic architecture, the Pixies of Pendarvis were working their magic, fulfilling their promise of sharing the riches of the mine.

Historic Preservation in the United States and Mineral Point

Neal and Hellum were not unique in the preservation work they accomplished in Mineral Point – at least not in the broadest of outlines. While there is certainly much to admire about the Herculean task the two men undertook, they were not alone in such efforts. Rather, they were very much in conversation with and responding to the larger national historic preservation movement. We can trace the broader shifts and trends in the national movement, for example, through the various efforts at preservation undertaken by Neal and Hellum. These connections underscore the fact that Mineral Point was not a rural backwater and Neal and Hellum were not disconnected from the more urban and urbane world around them. Instead, these connections emphasize the circulation of people, ideas, and dollars – many of them, in one way or another, queer.

Historic preservation as a movement in the United States predates Neal and Hellum's work by about a hundred years and, in fact, can be traced back about as far as the founding of the settlement of Mineral Point itself. Historian William Murtagh, for example, traces the earliest

known restoration activity to 1827 and the work done to repair and restore the 1765 Touro Synagogue in Providence, Rhode Island. The Touro Synagogue, however, early as it was in the history of preservation was a bit of an outlier. The restoration work in Rhode Island was largely a family affair, funded by Abraham Touro, a shipping magnate who wanted to preserve the legacy of his father, Issac Touro, who first founded the synagogue. The bulk of these early efforts at preservation, which really gained steam in the middle of the nineteenth century, were beholden to what Murtagh calls "secular piety." That is, as the development of a national identity become more salient throughout the course of the early nineteenth century, the places connected to famous statesmen and patriotic figures took on a quasi-sacred character and an imperative to be saved for the good of the nation.[6]

George Washington, for example, was a figure of primary importance for early preservationists. These preservation pioneers focused on structures both centrally important to Washington's life, such as Newburgh, New York's Hasburgh House, which served for a time as the general's headquarters, as well as those that were incidental, or possibly even fictitious, giving rise to the "Washington slept here phenomenon."[7] While state legislatures and local governments had a hand in organizing and financing some of these sites, such as the Hasburgh House, private citizens were the main drivers of early preservation. This division between private citizen groups and state and federal government bureaucracies, as we will see with Neal and Hellum's work, would remain the norm until the mid-twentieth century.[8]

This split is, in part, due to the early success of private groups, especially those organized by women. Of all the preservation efforts built around secular piety, the work done to preserve

[6] Murtagh, *Keeping Time*, 25-26; 6.
[7] Ibid., 28.
[8] Ibid., 12.

Mount Vernon, Washington's private estate, was one of the earliest and most successful examples, setting a precedent and a pattern that would be followed for next hundred years or so. In 1853, Ann Pamela Cunningham, "a small spinster, frail of health, serious and intelligent," organized the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union. The association organized first across Southern states, then in the North, raising funds and support for reviving the home of the country's first president. In a matter of five years the women had raised $200,000 (or about $5 million in 2016) for their project, and they have never looked back.[9] The Ladies Association still operates Mount Vernon and proudly boasts they have never accepted a dime of government funding, despite efforts on behalf of government entities to take over financial and managerial responsibilities.[10]

Women dominated these early private preservation groups. However, as the spinsterhood of Ann Pamela Cunningham hints at, there was often a queer element in those organizations as well, both female and male. While work on the presence of queer women in historic preservation has yet to be done, historian Will Fellows has traced the heavy influence of queer men in preservation work. For Fellows, the connection between queer men and preservation is an admittedly essentialist one. He sees the connection between queer men and historical preservation as a sort of Jungian archetype that imbues queer men to be religious and secular care givers, combining gender atypicality, domophilia, romanticism, aestheticism, and mindset geared toward historical continuity.[11] While this archetype does describe Neal and Hellum, it would be an oversimplification to claim this as a trans-historic archetype of queer men.

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[9] Ibid., 28-30.
[10] Mount Vernon Ladies Association Website, http://www.mountvernon.org/preservation/mount-vernon-ladies-association/, accessed 1/17/17; measuringworth.com.
[11] Fellows, *Passion to Preserve*, x and 243.

In contrast, as this project has explored the connection queer men and women to the work of historic preservation can be more accurately attributed to historical and cultural factors rather than innate ones. For Cunningham, for instance, her work at Mount Vernon was, in part, driven by an early form of feminism, rather than an innate queer sense of self. As her mother writes to her in a letter, "If the men of America have seen fit to allow the home of its most respected hero to go to ruin, why can't the women of America band together to save it?"[12] Moreover, in Cunningham's case it is also important to note the historical context at play in 1853. The antebellum period saw North and South increasingly polarized and Cunningham, afterall, was saving not just the home of the first president, but the *plantation*. Given this context, it is noteworthy that most of the pre-Civil War fundraising for the project came from the South.[13]

While Cunningham's private and public life may have been driven by a nascent feminism, queer or otherwise, as well as historical context, her dedication to preserving the private residence of a famous statesmen was similarly situated in gendered norms of the time. As the letter from Cuningham's mother indicates, saving a home was not man's work but was, instead, the job of women and normative forms of female domesticity. One of the reasons women's groups were so prevalent in preservation work, then, was precisely because it seemed like appropriate domestic-like work given gender norms of the nineteenth century.[14]

This connection also gave rise to one of the first forms of presenting preservation to the public – the house museum. A house museum, according to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, is "a museum whose structure itself is of historical or architectural significance and

[12] Mount Vernon Ladies Association Website.
[13] Murtagh, *Keeping Time*, 28.
[14] On gender and historic preservation more broadly, see, for example: Julie Des Jardins, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Memory, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

whose interpretation relates primarily to the building's architecture, furnishings and history."[15] Mount Vernon is the oldest, and perhaps most famous iteration of the house museum. Neal and Hellum, of course, had their own version at Pendarvis – albeit one without the presidential provenance.[16] But they also helped shape Orchard Lawn, the former Gundry estate in Mineral Point, into the Mineral Point Historical Society museum. That early process, discussed below, was the first major attempt on the part of Neal and Hellum to spread their ideas of historic preservation to the rest of Mineral Point. In doing so, they encountered one of the major issues in the history of preservation: the ongoing question of government involvement in preservation.

While Neal and Hellum's house museum at Pendarvis focused on the history as Cornish immigration to Mineral Point it differed from most other house museums in the fact that it was more than just one building. In this way, the partners' preservation project looked like a scaled back version of the outdoor museum, a form of displaying preservation to the public that emerged in twentieth century and expanded the focus of house museums. Two of the most successful and famous of these early outdoor museums are Colonial Williamsburg and Deerfield, Michigan. Colonial Williamsburg was the brainchild of Reverend W.A.R. Goodwin, but backed financially by J.D. Rockefeller Jr. The goal of these two men in restoring Williamsburg to its former life as the colonial capital of Virginia, was to educate visitors, especially young visitors, in the "foundations" of democracy and freedom in the U.S. (Glossed over, of course, would have been the equally foundational practices of enslaving Africans and African Americans and dispossessing native peoples.) Deerfield, Michigan had at its heart a similar goal. It was the

[15] Qtd. In Murtagh, *Keeping* Time, 78.

[16] The closest Pendarvis House ever came to having presidential connections was, of course, when then-Senator John F. Kennedy was turned away for not having a reservation. Chris Jones, "The Hidden History of Mineral Point," *Chicago Tribune*, August 29, 2003; and Mike Muckian, "Gay Couple Credited with Preserving Mineral Point," *Wisconsin Gazette, October 3, 2011.*

very personal project of Henry Ford, who after making millions of dollars selling the latest in technologically advanced automobiles, sought to recreate a pastoral village of the past, purchasing and moving dozens of buildings to a new site – Deerfield village, where visitors could experience the purity of yesteryear.[17]

Neal and Hellum's project carried little to none of the patriotic and fundamentalist fervor of either Colonial Williamsburg or Deerfield, Michigan. Moreover, unlike Williamsburg or Deerfield, Neal and Hellum were sometimes frank with visitors that what they were experiencing was not life as the Cornish immigrants would. In a 1954 interview, for instance, Neal explained that, "One thing we always try to make clear to the people who come here to Pendarvis is that the interiors are not as the Cornish originally had them. They are much more elaborate that the way they lived. The furnishings and old furniture that we have here in Pendarvis were used by many of the old setters, but we must remember that the Cornish people were poor, they were frugal, they lived the simplest kind of life."[18] As discussed previously, the partners were far more focused on celebrating a stylized version of the Cornish past, one that more closely matched their collective aesthetic sense and allowed the men to carve out a queer space for themselves by performing a queer sort of domesticity.

What Neal and Hellum did have in common with Colonial Williamsburg and Deerfield, however, was the patronage of a wealthy philanthropist. In this case, Gordon McCormick of the McCormick Reaper family. McCormick was not interested in democratic principles or the virtues of patriotism, instead, as discussed previously, he was interested in Neal and Hellum and their project for its own sake. Despite this difference, Neal, Hellum, and McCormick were following the model of other contemporaneous outdoor museums – sometimes quite literally. In

[17] Murtagh, *Keeping Time*, 90-98.
[18] Robert Neal interview with William Scheick, 1954, Robert M. Neal Papers.

the late 1930s, for instance, likely thanks to funds from McCormick, Neal and Hellum visited Colonial Williamsburg where they made important contacts and picked up new ideas. "We went to two or three experts [at Williamsburg]," Hellum remembered, "had private interviews with them, how did they do it, where did they get the material to do it. Of course, they had Rockefeller money, you see – unlimited funds, which we didn't have." The partners may not have had *unlimited* funds, but they did have financial backing from McCormick, which was enough to make more than one observer proclaim Pendarvis as "a sort of Williamsburg West."[19]

But the history of historic preservation and, by extension, the work of Neal and Hellum, had one more stage to yet to achieve, that of the historic district. The development of the historic district was predicated upon the growing role of state and federal governments in the historic preservation movement. Throughout much of the early historic preservation movement in the U.S., the Federal, state, and local governments had little interest using their powers to preserve historic buildings. In the first half of the twentieth century, in particular, the Federal government was far more focused on turning important natural areas into National Monuments and Parks. While women like Cunningham and queer men like Neal and Hellum saved domestic spaces, the state was preserving the wild spaces that, following Theodore Roosevelt's notion of strenuous manhood, preserved the rugged, wild, outdoor spaces, that were going to save men and, by extension the country, from the effeminizing effects of cities, domestic spaces, and modern conveniences.[20] Slowly but surely, however, local governments entered the preservation movement, though not necessarily with the aim of saving the architectural past.

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[19] Hellum, interview; and "Mister Mineral Point," ca. 1970, Robert M. Neal Papers.

[20] Murtagh, *Keeping Time*, 12; On ideas of effeminizing cities, the strenuous life, and the redeeming power of natural spaces, see, for example: Kevin P. Murphy, *Political Manhood: Red Bloods, Mollycoddles, and the Politics of Progressive Era Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), especially 201-205; and Susan R. Schrepfer, *Nature's Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), especially 159-170.

Cities, for example, got into the historic preservation game through the use of zoning regulations. Despite the fact that, according to Murtagh, historic districts had their "antecendents …in the concept of the outdoor museum," such zoning regulations tended to be more about than they were about history. By designating a neighborhood or street as a historic district, cities usually also put into place restrictions on what sort of alterations home and business owners could make to their structures. On a national level, after the passage of the National Preservation Act in 1966, designation as a historic district meant protection *from* federally funded government projects that might have a detrimental effect on the historic nature of an owner's property. In practice, the two types of protection tend to exist together, given building owners protection from federally funded projects, but also requiring individuals to maintain certain aesthetic standards.[21]

As Neal and Hellum would discover, listing a district in the National Register of Historic Places was not an easy task, and was one that required not only strong leadership and vison from private individuals but a local government amenable to the aims of such individuals. In early efforts to spread their gospel of historic preservation to the rest of Mineral Point, for example, the partners learned that their influence would have to exist not only down on the Shake Rag, but up at City Hall as well. Inserting themselves more firmly into city politics, Neal and Hellum were able to help orchestrate the listing of Mineral Point in the National Register of Historic Places, the first such district in Wisconsin. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the important role of queer individuals in saving architectural and cultural history, Cooksville, Wisconsin, the former home of Ralph Warner, Edgar Hellum, and other queer individuals like Chester Holway, was the second district named in the state.

[21] Murtagh, *Keeping Time*, 103-105.

Wrecking Balls and House Museums

On June 8th, 1936, Neal's longtime friend and mentor William Gundry died at the age of eighty-three.[22] As one of three surviving heirs to the Gundry estate, he left behind him a large sum of money and, as the only one of the heirs to remain in Mineral Point, the grandest home in town – Orchard Lawn. Built in 1867, the main house was a breathtaking Italianate structure constructed of locally quarried sandstone, the same stone used in the mining cottages restored by Neal and Hellum. While the stone was the same, the end result was resoundingly different. Whereas the mining cottages were small and unassuming, Orchard Lawn was built to make a statement. Perched on the crest of a hill between High Street and the Ridge Road at the edge of town, the Gundry estate – eleven acres in total – occupied a place of esteem and privilege in Mineral Point. As if the size of the structure were not enough to signal the prominence and wealth of the family, the ornamentation of the main house assured the message was clear. From the Greek Revival front porch (a verandah until 1912), complete with Corinthian columns and a triangular pediment over the entrance, to the sea of detailed brackets and dentils, to the large cupola on the rooftop, the power and pride of the Gundry family was on full display to all in Mineral Point.[23]

When Gundry died early in the summer of 1936, just over a year after Neal and Hellum first opened Pendarvis House, there was no heir apparent to fill the halls and gardens of Orchard Lawn. Gundry was the only immediate family member remaining in Mineral Point. William's brother John Murton Gundry had settled in Cleveland, Ohio, where he was a successful banker. William's youngest sister, Marjorie, also resided in Cleveland with her husband, Harry

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[22] "William P. Gundry Joins the Great Throng 'Over There'," *Mineral Point Tribune*, June 11, 1936.
[23] Frank Humberstone, Jr. and Anne D. Jenkin, *The Homes of Mineral Point* (Mineral Point: Fountain Press, 1976), np; Audrey Stewart Parkinson, *Stone by Stone: Early Mineral Point Buildings* (Mineral Point: Old Stone House, 2000), 72.

Wheelock King.[24] Neither surviving Gundry wished to return to the ancestral home. According to one source, Marjorie King "couldn't bear to have anyone but the family live in their home," so she contracted a demolition crew to take it down.[25] So the grand estate sat empty for nearly four years. More than that, the house was nearly lost forever, until Neal, Hellum, and their supporters stepped in to save it from the wrecking ball.

After William Gundry was buried and the estate boarded up, the first plan to bring the house back to life followed the growing national trend of municipal involvement. The remaining Gundry family looked to the city of Mineral Point to take over Orchard Lawn and turn it into a city-run museum. From the perspective of preservationists, like Neal and Hellum, the deal was a perfect way to save the house. From the perspective of the family, the Gundry legacy in Mineral Point was saved, and, per Marjorie King's wishes, no one would live in the house again. From the perspective of the city, however, there were far too many strings attached. According to the local newspaper, the Gundry heirs insisted that, among other stipulations the family got to name the new museum; that if the city were to divest themselves from the venture, the property would revert to the heirs; that no money could be borrowed against the grounds or the building; that no trees or shrubs be removed without the consent of the board; that the board be selected by include the heirs; that the museum could not be commercialized (even to the extent of selling refreshments); that exhibits be donated rather than purchased; and that the whole estate remain in "first-class repair" and the city foot the bill.[26]

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[24] "William P. Gundry Joins the Great Throng 'Over There'," *Mineral Point Tribune*, June 11, 1936; Hellum, interview.

[25] Humberstone and Jenkin, np.

[26] "Stipulations Gundry Offer Aired Again," *Iowa County Democrat and Mineral Point Tribune*, June 1, 1939. Emphasis in original.

Such a lengthy list of demands likely stemmed from a complicated set of circumstances. For one, the wealthy Gundry heirs no longer lived in Mineral Point and the family no longer held the same level of political or social influence it once did. Such limitations on the city's operation of a museum can be understand as an attempt to maintain control over the property and the family legacy without having to pay for it. Similarly, by maintaining control over the proposed museum board, the family would be guaranteed allies in the day-to-day operations of Orchard Lawn – allies like Neal and Hellum. Neal, in particular, maintained correspondence with the Gundry heirs after their brother's death, and occasional notes hint at the behind-the-scenes planning that lead to such public demands. Shortly after Gundry's death, in the fall of 1936, for example, Marjorie King penned a letter to Neal. "How – or what – do you think of the progress or our *project* for Orchard Lawn?," she wrote. "Is it going through [at city hall] or not? Is the group that wants it working for it? We don't expect to allow this to hang fire too long."[27]

This complicated set of circumstances was also surely reflected in the city's decision to, "after due consideration, not accept the offer" from the Gundry family.[28] As much as the Mineral Point paper tried to claim Gundry as a native son, the rest of the Gundry family were, by small-town standards, outsiders – big-city folks.[29] Moreover, Neal, Hellum, and the supporters they gathered around them – many of them artists, many of them queer – were outsiders too. This disconnect between Neal, Hellum, and fellow preservationists from the power centers in Mineral Point, would be a problem that would plague the partners throughout much of their preservation work. In 1939, this disconnect meant that the city saw Orchard Lawn as a burden

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[27] Marjorie King to Robert Neal, October 25, 1936, Robert Neal Papers. The idiom, to hang fire, perhaps not coincidentally, has its roots in mining culture. A fuse that "hangs" is one that has been lit but has not ignited its charge. Miners would then have to undertake the dangerous task of manually checking the charge itself.
[28] "Stipulations Gundry Offer Aired Again."
[29] "William P. Gundry Joins the Great Throng 'Over There'," *Mineral Point Tribune*, June 11, 1936.

and, per the wishes of Marjorie King, issued a permit to raze the estate. Shortly after the council's decision, King checked in with Neal on the progress of the demolition. "I am wondering," she wrote, if the wrecking is going on at Orchard Lawn. I can't bear to think of it, but it seemed all there was to do."[30] The demolition had begun by the time of King's letter, but as the outbuildings began to come down, a number of Pointers came to realize that they too could not bear to think of their town without Orchard Lawn either. And, with their help, Neal and Hellum came up with a plan to save the grand Gundry estate.

In the broadest outlines, this pattern – of individuals reacting to disappearing architectural gems with renewed preservation efforts – was one that was repeated throughout the larger historic preservation movement. Time and time again, as buildings fell and people realized what was lost could not be replaced, preservation efforts gained steam.[31] In Mineral Point, that meant that the threat of losing Orchard Lawn, while not enough to galvanize the city council to action, was enough to rally a certain class of Mineral Pointers behind Neal and Hellum's preservation efforts. And, is it turned out, the two men needed more help. After the city rejected the Gundry's offer, the family turned to Neal and Hellum, offering to gift them Orchard Lawn. But, as Hellum recalled later in life, "The taxes were $800 a year and, I said, we don't have the first year's taxes, let alone the upkeep. So it was going to be destroyed. Well, then the doctors and lawyers and whatnot down on the street got all excited – my God, they're starting to tear down the Gundry place."[32] And with that fear of losing Orchard Lawn, the preservation movement in

[30] Margery King to Robert Neal, June 8, 1939, Robert Neal Papers.
[31] See, for example: J. Myrick Howard, "Nonprofits in the American Preservation Movement," *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century*, Ed. Robert E. Stipe (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 318.
[32] Hellum, interview.

Mineral Point moved began to make its way beyond the Shake Rag – from the lowliest, plainest of structures to the grandest.

Even with the growing interest in saving Orchard Lawn, the magnificent estate was still almost lost. The wreckers still had a $600 contract from the city and continued to destroy the outbuildings surrounding the main home.[33] To stop that work, Neal, Hellum, and their supporters had to raise enough money to buy out the contract. "We had to pay off the wrecker," Hellum remembered, "so we each one kicked in – and then the second [time] – we had to kick in twice. God, Bob and I sure had to scramble for that money."[34] Less than a month after the city rejected the Gundry family's offer, the partners had gathered together enough donations to buy out the wrecking contract and save Orchard Lawn from the wrecking ball.[35] That last-ditch effort at saving the estate from ruin, however, would not save it from the need for upkeep nor from the always-present needs of the tax collector. To address this issue, Neal, Hellum, and the other saviors of Orchard Lawn banded together to form the Mineral Point Historical Society.

More than saving Orchard Lawn itself, the founding of the Mineral Point Historical Society helped spark city-wide interest in the town's past and began to gesture at the importance of historic preservation to Mineral Point's future. The local historical society was officially organized in early July of 1939, with Neal elected as its president. They immediately set to work developing plans to turn Orchard Lawn into a house museum. Crucially, however, Neal and the historical society would curate the museum not to showcase the Gundry family, but the wider history of Mineral Point and the lead region. This broader focus helped to galvanize the town

[33] Denise Thornton, "Historic Houses," *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 4, 1984.
[34] Ibid. [interview]
[35] "Gundry Est. Proposed for Historic Club," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, June 29, 1939; and "Make Plans for Gundry Restoration," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, July 6, 1939.

behind the project. This was a project about them and their history, and – as traced through the local newspaper coverage – the residents of Mineral Point responded in kind.

Along with information about the new organization's founding, the local paper carried items about fundraising goals – the society set their eyes on raising $2,000 by the first year – as well as a drive to collect items for the museum the society envisioned operating in the old Gundry residence.[36] While the society was not able to reach its fundraising goal, what it lacked in funds it more than made up for in interested residents willing to part with "relics" of the past.[37] By August, Neal had organized the society into a variety of committees. The exhibits committee, chaired by Hellum, was charged with the task of drumming up items for the new museum. Interestingly, Neal's father, Charles, was a member of the committee, perhaps signaling that his father had finally come to realize the importance of the "rubbish" Neal insisted on collecting and refurbishing as a child.[38] At the very least, the presence of Charles on the exhibits committee served as an example of how the broader community of Mineral Point was beginning to rally around its own history.

When the committee began its public drive for artifacts at the start of the new year, Pointers responded in force. Initially, the committee envisioned a drive that would last just a few weeks. Instead, Hellum, Charles Neal, and the rest of the committee were inundated with donations for the next several months. The first item to by noted by the paper was an 1837 banknote, which, by the end of the drive, seemed rather paltry. Many of the items were listed in the local paper, which ran news items on the donations on almost a weekly basis four nearly four

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[36] 7-13-39; $35,000 today, measuringworth.com

[37] The initial call for donations appeared in January of 1940. "Historical Society Seeks Relics as Campaign Begins," January 18, 1940.

[38] Hellum, interview; "Neal Names Committees for Society," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, August 31, 1939; and "Historical Society Meets October 6th for Lecture by State Leader," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, September 28, 1939.

months. Pointers sent everything from American Indian artifacts to pioneer instruments to Civil War mementos and even a clock once used by Territorial Governor Henry Dodge.[39] Neal, Hellum, and the rest of the were particularly interested in receiving artifacts related to the region's mining history. The group even hoped to have a replica mine on the property. While the society received some mining-related artifacts, including a large specimen rock collection, and held the interest of mining history experts at the state historical society, the mine itself never came to be.[40] Regardless, the founding of the Mineral Point Historical Society and the development of a museum at Orchard Lawn sparked something in the city as a whole. In its first summer season, the Mineral Point Historical Society Museum attracted 750 visitors, two travelling exhibits, and a handful of lecturers.[41] No longer simply relegated to the artists and the queers down on Shake Rag, the history of Mineral Point had found a new, grander stage.

That stage, however, was still privately owned and, for many in the city, still too connected to others and outsiders. While the initial outpouring of interest and support was notable, it was not enough to adequately sustain the museum and the society in the long term. Neal and Hellum, for instance, were not entirely successful in removing the old Gundry property from city tax rolls. Additionally, the money used to buy out the wrecking company's contract had not entirely come from generous donors. Neal and Hellum had had to borrow from the bank. As the *Democrat-Tribune* described the situation in 1948, "For several years, especially since the war, activities of the Historical Society have not progressed too smoothly." Thankfully, for Neal

[39] The local paper ran articles on relics collected on the following dates: *The Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, January 25, 1940; February 1, 1940; February 8, 1940; February 15, 1940; February 29, 1940; March 7, 1940; March 14, 1940; April 4, 1940, and April 25, 1940.
[40] "City Can be Relic Center Says Schafer," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, October 12, 1939.
[41] See, for example: "Unique Art Exhibit at Local Museum," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, July 11, 1940; "Handicraft Exhibit to be at Museum," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, September 19, 1940; and "Handicraft Exhibit at Museum," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, September 26, 1940.

and Hellum, the city of Mineral Point had forgiven the taxes on Orchard Lawn, "in consideration of the Mineral Point Historical Society giving the City certain street advantages." Moreover, in the immediate pre-war years, Neal, Hellum, and the MPHS board continued to work to broaden the appeal of the museum and get more buy-in from the town's residents. As the paper related it, "The original debt on the building and the accumulation of taxes have been liquidated, and now the directors are desirous of having every organization in the city represented on the board."[42]

As such, the Mineral Point Historical Society determined it was in their best interest to reorganize in the spring of 1948. To do so, the society sought to open up their society and partner with other civic organizations. By doing this, the society sought to draw themselves into the fold and gain legitimacy within the eyes of the city and its leaders. At the first public meeting on the society's reorganization, the MPHS board invited representatives from the American Legion Auxillary, the Odd Fellows, the Chamber of Commerce, the Kiwanis Club, the Rebekahs, the Knights of Colombus, the Farm Bureau, the Eastern Star, the Eagles, and the Masonic Lodge.[43] Going even further, as the *Democrat-Tribune* noted, "All of the original directors are willing and, in some cases, anxious to give up their offices as such,"[44] Many of them did. Neal, however, held on to the presidency, not quite willing to relinquish control of the society just yet.[45]

While Neal remained president of the organization, the size and makeup of the board of directors looked very different. "The community has become aware that we must carry our city projects in unity," the *Democrat-Tribune* began, highlighting the divide between Neal, Hellum, their supporters and the rest of the city, "So, the museum has been opened to the fraternal

[42] "Local Historical Society Plans to Reorganize," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, April 22, 1948.
[43] Ibid.
[44] "Historical Society to be Reorganized," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, April 29, 1948.
[45] "Historical Society Elects," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, May 13, 1948.

organizations of Mineral Point. The original board has been enlarged to take care of the infiltration of officers representing other organizations."[46] When the museum opened that first Memorial Day weekend after the society's reorganization, for instance, tea was served by members of the Woman's Club, the Eastern Star, the Rebekahs, and the Legion Auxillary – many of them wearing "colonial and period dresses" adding "much to the color of the affair." And while Neal gave the afternoon's lecture, on the topic of the museum itself and what it means to the community, the grounds of the estate were now under the control of the local fire department, who intended to "keep the grass cut, and to install play ground [sic] equipment and picnic tables and fireplaces to make the property usable to all."[47]

In the immediate post-war years, Mineral Pointers were even more fully celebrating their town's history than in the late 1930s. And just as before, the citizens of Mineral Point were rallying behind, and now more clearly beside, the queers, the artists, and the outsiders. More and more, Pointers were beginning to see the wisdom in preserving the history of their town. And, crucially, they turned to two queer men to lead that charge, two men who were already understand to have a certain privileged access and knowledge of the past. These two men, then, not in spite of their queerness but because of it, were to lead the way in the first step towards the city reclaiming its storied past.

As the war years passed, however, and the United States found a new foe in the Soviet Union, the queerness that Neal and Hellum leveraged as an asset at Pendarvis House and, in the early years at the Mineral Point Historical Society, began to appear more and more like a liability. In this way, the reorganization of the Mineral Point Historical Society and its museum in 1948, also looks like a loss of control for Neal and Hellum. As the *Democrat-Tribune* urged

[46] "Local Museum Opened May 30," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, June 3, 1948.
[47] "Historical Society Elects," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, May 13, 1948.

when reporting the museum's reopening, "Mineral Point has a wonderful thing [in] the grasp of their hands if each will contribute his share of work and effort to make this museum of note." While partially journalistic convention at the time, the gendering of the labor in the paper's championing of local history is telling. What role would the past play in emerging notions of Cold War masculinity? What about the women and the queer men who had made the museum – and by extension, much of historic preservation before the war – possible in the first place? By 1951, the Mineral Point Historical Society was reported to be "in the best shape financially that it has been since its organization."[48] Neal had stepped down from the presidency two years before, replaced by his close friend and supporter, the artist Max Fernekes.[49] It was a good thing the society was in such a healthy financial condition, no doubt due in part to the influx of broader support and membership, for Neal and Hellum, along with Fernekes and all of those supporting the proprietors of Pendarvis House had their biggest battle ahead. "Those people," as they would come to be called, were going to take City Hall and Cold War masculinity head on.

Ben vs. Bob: Gender, Cold-War Progress, and the Past

In July of 1952 an article appeared in Madison's *Wisconsin State Journal* bearing the headline, "Residents Shaken over Shake Rag Garage." In the piece, readers were presented with a dramatic story that pit Neal, his preservation work, and his supporters against Mineral Point Mayor Benjamin Bollerud. The two men were locked in a debate over their disparate understandings of the local past, and their diverging visions for the political, cultural, and economic future of their small town. Ostensibly, the debate in which these men played leading

[48] "Local Historical Society in Drive for Members," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, August 2, 1951.
[49] "Max Fernekes Heads Local Historical Society," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, May 12, 1949.

roles involved the construction of a municipal garage – a building intended to house various vehicles and machinery owned and used by the township and city of Mineral Point.

Ultimately, however, the lengthy debate over historic preservation in Mineral Point between parties led by Bollerud on the one hand and Neal on the other, was about far more than just whether or not to place a new building on the street that had only recently become known as Shake Rag Street. Rather, the debate was, at its core, about shifting notions of gender and sexuality in Cold War American culture. The fears and anxieties that haunted Cold War masculinity, especially the specters of the queer and the feminine, pervaded the back and forth between the two parties. And since this debate was framed by two differing historical imaginations of early Mineral Point, the debate was at once about gender, sexuality, the Cold War present, the nineteenth-century past, and physical space. More specifically, all of these factors became bound up in that concept that made Neal and Hellum successful restaurateurs and preservationists in the first place – the myth of the Shake Rag.

By 1952, both Bollerud and Neal were regarded by fellow residents of Mineral Point as local historians despite the fact that each man championed a different version of the early history of their town.[50] Mayor Bollerud, for example, preferred to emphasize the earliest English-speaking settlers of Mineral Point: the seasonal, itinerant miners from the Southern U.S. who came to the area starting in the mid-1820s to dig for lead ore in rudimentary and shallow surface mines – the badger holes. By contrast, Neal championed some of the first *permanent* English-speaking settlers to the area – the Cornish, who came largely in the 1830s, primarily in family

[50] On this characterization, see, for example, "'Unfit for Human Use' Biggest Spring in Mineral Point Owned, Forgotten by Uncle Sam," *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 1, 1965; "Mineral Point Historians Pick Neal," *Wisconsin State Journal*, August 1, 1939.

groups, built log and stone structures for year-long residency, and worked the veins of lead ore in underground mines, using hard-rock mining methods they brought with them from Cornwall.[51]

In the broadest strokes, of course, the early histories of "The Point" that each man espoused was correct, but this did not stop Mayor Bollerud from challenging Neal and other detractors of the garage on their leverage of Cornish immigrant history to support their cause. According to the *Wisconsin State Journal*, for example, Bollerud seemed less concerned with Neal's opposition to the garage and more upset that Neal was apparently getting his history wrong, to the detriment of the entire town.

> Going back into history, Mayor Bollerud said the earliest settlers in Mineral Point were not Cornish at all, but Americans from the South. He said "until about four years ago there never was a Shake Rag street in Mineral Point. That street was known as Hoard street from the survey of 1837 until four years ago when those people (residents of the street and operators of Pendarvis House) requested the name be changed."[52]

Bracketing off, for the time being, the characterization of Neal, Hellum, and the other residents of the Shake Rag, as "those people," the question of whether to call the street in question Hoard Street or Shake Rag Street speaks directly to the way in which the competing historical imaginations of Bollerud and Neal were as much about history and space as Cold War understandings of gender and sexuality. As already discussed, Mayor Bollerud was at least partially right when he claimed there never was a Shake Rag street until the late 1940s. Prior to the spring of 1949, the street was officially called Hoard Street, after an American miner. In May of that year, however, at the urging of Neal and Hellum, the city council took up the question of ordinance 217, an ordinance to officially change Hoard Street to Shake Rag Street.

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[51] Writers' Program, Works Progress Administration, *The Story of Mineral Point, 1827-1941* (Mineral Point: Mineral Point Historical Society, 1941; repr. 1979); George Fiedler, *Mineral Point: A History* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1973).

[52] "Residents Shaken over Shake Rag Garage," *Wisconsin State Journal*, July 13, 1952.

The ordinance passed easily, by a vote of seven to one. Then-alderman Benjamin Bollerud was the only dissenting vote.[53] By changing the name, in Bollerud's eyes, Neal and Hellum were usurping a many history with a womanly, domestic one.

As previously discussed, the success of Neal and Hellum's business venture (especially, beginning as it did, in the depths of the Great Depression) relied heavily upon Neal's seemingly inexhaustible ability to promote Pendarvis and the Cornish-settler history that underwrote the entire project. Over the nearly four decades that Neal and Hellum ran Pendarvis and worked on what was often dubbed the "Cornish Restoration," write-ups of the business and the preservation efforts appeared in numerous newspapers in Wisconsin and the Midwest more broadly.[54]

The publicity for Pendarvis, as with Pendarvis House itself, was largely meant for outsiders. Locals were generally excluded from the restaurant because of its high prices and discerning airs.[55] So when it came to public debates over historic preservation, debates that included the question of the Shake Rag garage, this divide between Neal, Hellum, and Pendarvis, and the rest of Mineral Point was laid bare. This divide was perhaps most notable in the waves of letters to the editor of the local paper in support of preservation – letters that, almost without exception came from organizations and individuals from *outside* the town and even the surrounding region.

Letters came from Colonial Williamsburg, for example, as well as the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, imploring the City Council to not build on the Shake Rag. "Granting that progress is essential," J.H.H. Alexander, Superintendent of Colonial Williamsburg conceded,

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[53] "Proceedings of the Regular Meeting of The Mineral Point City Council," *Iowa County Democrat-Tribune*, May 12, 1949.
[54] See, for example, "Cornish 'ollow Restoration and Development Now Consists of Three Houses," *Iowa County Democrat*, June 29, 1939; and "Pendarvis, The Cornish Restoration," January 13, 1959, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[55] Fellows, *Passion to Preserve*, 196.

"and that modernization is the keynote of today, we nevertheless point out the traditional appeal as well as the cash value of landmarks of pioneer times." Attempting to further capitalize on the tourist trade angle, the Director of Education at Colonial Williamsburg, Edward P. Alexander, added, "I am sure that your city will attract more and more visitors each year because of the well planned use of its glamorous past." But these letters fell on deaf ears. The Cold War imperative of progress was just too overpowering. Moreover, what Neal and Hellum were doing by leveraging their contacts outside of Mineral Point amounted to a sort of outside agitation. Indeed, just in case it needed to make this point clear to readers, the *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune* printed these and other letters under the heading, "Outsiders Write Concerning City Historic Places."[56]

In this light, Mayor Bollerud's positioning of Neal, Hellum, and their supporters as "those people" takes on a new light. Bollerud utters this phrase in 1952, as the cultural politics of the early Cold War are becoming ever-more entrenched in everyday American life, including new, more oppressive and divisive ways of thinking about queer sexuality. Framed in this way, we can see how these words are aimed squarely at the queerness of Neal and Hellum, and, by extension, the historical imaginary of the Shake Rag. By the 1950s, for example, queer men and women were increasingly the moral and political targets of state and federal government purges – what historian David Valentine has dubbed the "Lavender Scare." Indeed, in his words, "many politicians, journalists, and citizens thought that homosexuals posed more of a threat to national security than Communists."[57] Likewise, for historian Elaine Tyler May, the heterosexual, nuclear family offered security and certainty during the early Cold War, so that familial

[56] "Outsider Write Concerning City Historic Places," *Iowa County Democrat-Tribune*, March 3, 1948.
[57] David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 2.

ideology, backed by political policy, propped the family up as a safe haven in an uncertain modern world. At the same time, however, this new ideology also heightened awareness of the vulnerability of the family and familial masculinity to, among other things, threats like homosexuality.[58]

Through this lens, then, Bollerud's categorization of Neal and Hellum as "those people" is his voicing a perceived threat to normative culture in Mineral Point. Here are two queer men, in Neal and Hellum, championing a domesticated Cornish-settler history in lieu of the strong, and virile "American" men who first traveled to Mineral Point. In this way, the myth of the Shake Rag, especially as it was performed by two men, constituted an attack on Cold War hetero-masculinity. That same gender-transgressive performance of romanticized domesticated was also, them, a perversion of the Cold War bastion of the heterosexual nuclear family. For Bollerud, not only was Neal's history the "wrong" history, but Neal, Hellum, Pendarvis, and the Shake Rag were a danger to the strength and future of Cold War Mineral Point.

On July 8th, 1952, at a special meeting of the Mineral Point City Council, city leaders voted by a margin of four to three to allow the construction of a municipal garage on Shake Rag Street. One Alderman was absent.[59] Soon after the Mineral Point municipal garage was built on Shake Rag Street. It still stands there today, largely obsolete and abandoned, almost directly across the street from the Shake Rag historical marker. While Neal, Hellum, and the residents of the Shake Rag lost the argument about the garage, their historical imagination – the idea of Shake Rag and the importance of the early Cornish-settlers – would ultimately prevail. It prevailed because the garage debate marked an important turning point for Neal and Hellum, who now changed tactics. They would take on City Hall from the inside.

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[58] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 88.
[59] "Residents Shaken," *Wisconsin State Journal*, July 13, 1952.

"Tourist Mining," City Government, and The Mineral Point Historic District

Despite the shiny new municipal garage on Shake Rag Street, just over a decade after the contentious debate that pitched Bollerud against Neal, city government against queers and artists, and the ghosts of manly American miners against the stability of Cornish housewives, evidence suggested that Neal's historic imagination was gaining ground in Mineral Point. Most notably, whereas the city had largely been absent or, in the case of the garage debate, antithetical to efforts at preserving the architectural and material history of the town previously, by the early 1960s the city government began to see itself as a leader in this effort. Moreover, and crucially for Neal and Hellum, the city celebrated not the itinerant American miner, but the Cornish. Neal and Hellum had lost the garage battle, but they appeared to be winning the war.

One of the most salient signs of this was a cartoon image of a miner, developed and put to work by the Mineral Point Chamber of Commerce in 1963. Cousin Jack was a friendly cartoon figure with a pick axe, boots, and candle-laden hat, a decidedly happier looking figure than more business-like miner on the state flag. Whereas the miner of the Wisconsin state flag bears a stern and industrious countenance, Cousin Jack beams a broad smile and offers a welcoming wave. He was to be Mineral Point's new ambassador. And, most importantly, unlike the "badger" miner of the state flag, he was Cornish. "A universally known term for a Cornish miner," the Appleton, Wisconsin *Post-Crescent* declared, "Cousin Jack is expected to symbolize and publicize the historic attractions of [Mineral Point], which are notable."[60]

In addition to being notable for his Cornish heritage, Cousin Jack is important because he was born from the efforts not of private citizens, but by the city of Mineral Point. In this way, his birth in 1963 signaled a shift in the work of preservationists in town. The city, at least

[60] House, Charles, "Mineral Point Will Use Cousin Jack Symbol to Publicize Its Historic Sites," *Appleton Post-Crescent*, June 9, 1963.

nominally, was no longer an obstacle to preservation – they were a partner. In the eyes of the city, preservation now meant tourism, and tourism meant much needed income. As the *Post-Crescent* noted, "This old city which had its beginnings with the discovery of lead back in the days when lead mining was a way to wealth has apparently come to the decision that tourist mining is also."[61] Tourist mining, then, was the wave of the future for the city of Mineral Point. And in tapping into this new vein of revenue, the city was taking part in a larger, national shift regarding historic preservation and tourism.

Only, tourism in Mineral Point – like that found at Pendarvis House or Orchard Lawn – had been going on for nearly three decades. As in the rest of the country, queer men like Hellum and Neal alongside the efforts of countless women going back to the Mount Vernon Ladies Association had been undertaking such efforts, often at odds with city governments and leaders like Mayor Bollerud. The *Post-Crescent* noted this irony in Mineral Point. "A quarter century ago, the Women's Club of Mineral Point set up a chapter and verse reconstruction program which might – and should have – been followed, but which was not. Today's program is virtually a duplicate of that one of 25 years ago, which was met only with apathy."[62] Twenty-five years prior to Cousin Jack, Will Gundry was dead, the city refused the Gundry estate, and Neal, Hellum, and their supporters were scrambling for the $600 to pay the wreckers. Patience, in this case at least, was indeed a virtue.

But Neal, Hellum, and others did not simply stand by and wait for the Chamber of Commerce and the city government to come around to their way of thinking. Undoubtedly inspired by the construction of the municipal garage on Shake Rag Street, Neal, for example, decided that if the city government was not going to come around to his way of thinking he was

[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

just going to have to change their minds – as one of them. In 1965, Neal ran for and won a seat as alderman on the city council, serving on, among other committees, the committee on public property.[63] The most profound instances of government's entrance into historic preservation came in 1966, with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act. By the fall of 1970, the three buildings at the heart of Neal and Hellum's collection of buildings – Pendarvis, Trelawny, and Polperro – were nominated for listing as a historic site. The nominators detailed the restoration work done by the two men starting in 1935, arguing that the site represented the historical Cornish architecture of Mineral Point. "Restoration of all three houses was done with the same Cornish methods as the original builders had used," the nomination argues. "The resulting restoration of the three Cornish houses of the Pendarvis complex is both authentic and remarkably well executed, with structural integrity maintained at the highest level."[64]

The same argument was made several months later, when a National Register nomination form was submitted for virtually the entire municipality of Mineral Point. "The present historic district [being nominated] has an area of approximately two square miles and the same boundaries that the borough of Mineral Point had in 1837," the nomination began. "Included are a number of architecturally significant buildings, most of which are built of locally quarried limestone and constructed with the excellent techniques brought by Cornish immigrants – techniques which have been termed a direct continuation of the stone craftsmanship of medieval England."[65] Although some of these connections might be overstated, as subsequent work has shown, by July of 1971, Pendarvis and the whole of Mineral Point were placed on the National

[63] City Council Business Cards, 1965-1968, Robert Neal Box, Robert M. Neal Papers. Neal was also elected to the City Planning Commission from 1980-1983. Official Notice of Election to City Planning Committee, April 16, 1980, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[64] National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form, Pendarvis, Received October 8, 1970.
[65] National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form, Mineral Point Historic District, Received January 14, 1971.

Register of Historic Places.[66] The work of historic preservation, fueled by queer devotions to the past, nurtured by circulations of networks of queer men across rural, urban, and national divides, and made profitable through queer performances of domesticity had gone from being a bizarre project down on the Shake Rag to a nationally recognized, city-wide movement.

To further protect their life-long efforts at preservation, Neal and Hellum sold the Pendarvis Complex to the state of Wisconsin. The sale was announced in the spring of 1971, after the Wisconsin History Foundation, acting on behalf of the State Historical Stociety, purchased the Pendarvis buildings and grounds for $90,000.[67] The site was opened up for visitors that same year, 7,000 of which enjoyed the handiwork of Neal and Hellum.[68] The city of Mineral Point looked to these new developments with hopes of a brighter future. "Mineral Point, like many small cities and villages," the *Wisconsin State Journal* explained in 1971, "has felt the pinch of a declining farm economy in recent years. But now, oldtimers, newcomers, and part-time residents all think the turning point has been reached by the arrival of the State Historical Society."[69] Their hopes were well founded, although the economic turnaround was slower to come, and perhaps has never been quite realized, and the attitude toward historic preservation remained one of skepticism. Still, what Neal and Hellum had accomplished in Mineral Point was nothing short of pixie magic.

The play lot of mud pies and sand castles described by Holway back in 1942 looked a bit different thirty years later. In many ways, the attitudes toward the play lot had shifted. Interest in preserving the architecture and the history of the town had spread from a select group of individuals, often with elite or outsider status, to not only the other residents of Mineral Point,

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[66] Stewart Parkinson, *Stone by Stone*.
[67] "Miners' Homes Bought as Historic Buildings," *Wisconsin State Journal*, April 27, 1971.
[68] John Haug, "Pendarvis House Expects Big Visitor Gain," *Capital Times*, April 29, 1972.
[69] Robert L. Franzmann, "Mineral Point Looks to Past for Its Future," *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 9, 1971.

but to the city government as well. Local zoning laws regarding the alteration of historic buildings, protection from Federally-funded highway projects, and the involvement of the state historical society down on the Shake Rag were indicators that the future of Mineral Point's past was on firm footing.

At the same time, the late 1970s and early 1980s saw additional economic factors that solidified the town's move toward historic preservation and tourism. In other words, the rules of the play lot changed as well. First, the last remaining zinc mine in the region ceased operations in 1979.[70] While largely symbolic, this closure marked the end of mining as an economic possibility for Mineral Point and the surrounding region, which by now largely relied on agriculture for its livelihood. This reliance spelled disaster by the early 1980s with the onset of the Farm Crisis. As markets fell due to a variety of factors, small farmers found themselves unable to compete, in debt, and often forced off their farms.[71] If farmers could not pay their debts in town, the town then suffered as well. One result of this downturn in Mineral Point, was the plummeting of property prices, which drew a new population to town - artists. While artists like Max and Eva Fernekes, Hans Alin, Georgia Townsend, and Harry Nohr had been in Mineral Point since the 1930s, the 1970s and 1980s saw a new wave of artists wash over the small town, drawn in by the beauty of the place but also its rock-bottom property values.[72] As the rules of the play lot changed, so too did its players.

Had Holway revisited the town in the 1970s or 1980s, he might have still noted the mud pies and sand castles. Many were being fixed up by artists and other residents in line with

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[70] One of the last major mines in the area to stop production was the Eagle Picher mine in Shullsburg, Wisconsin. Sunny Schubert, "Death of a Mine," *Wisconsin State Journal*, November 1, 1980.
[71] See, for example, Robert Franzmann, "Mineral Point Looks to Past for Its Future," *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 9, 1971.
[72] Eve Studnicka, *Of Some Fair Place*, DVD, 2013.

zoning regulations meant to preserve or restore the town's historic character. But many structures were still in need of repair. Change was slow in Mineral Point. Neal and Hellum knew this first hand. By the time they sold the Pendarvis complex to the Wisconsin State Historical Society, they had been diligently working – sometimes, literally, stone by stone – preserving their town's history and architecture for forty years. They had much to be proud of, and, slowly but surely, the town as a whole began to celebrate their efforts. Neal and Hellum may have officially retired in 1974, but with that retirement the Pixies of Pendarvis had shifted from the margins of their small town to new roles as celebrated leaders and elder visionaries. Neal and Hellum had remade the play lot in their own vision, a vision that at every step of the way bespoke the partners' queerness. The queerness of Neal and Hellum – their fairyness – was not merely part of their story, it *was* their story and, by extension, the story of Mineral Point in the twentieth century.

Conclusion:

Remembering

After Robert Neal and Edgar Hellum sold their collection of historic cottages to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and retired in 1974, the partners moved out of Trelawny, the home they shared for nearly forty years, and into separate houses. Neal had purchased a stone cottage on Jail Alley, just off of High Street, the town's main drag, sometime before the partners left their project on the Shake Rag. "He didn't say that I should come and live with him," Hellum recalled, "so I said hey, I've got to find a house."[1] Hellum did not travel far from the Shake Rag, living just blocks away from the Pendarvis complex in his own stone house on Spruce Street.[2] While retirement separated the men from Pendarvis and, to a certain extent each other, it did not stop them from continuing the work they had found so rewarding there.

Neal, for example, continued to collect and curate the history of Mineral Point and the surrounding region. In his new home on Jail Alley, for instance, he refurbished the cottage and put it on display, featuring it in an article he wrote and published in *Antiques Magazine* in 1974. The piece was largely a photographic survey of historic homes in Mineral Point, with the Pendarvis complex heavily featured. Neal's own handiwork also took center stage, as all of the interior shots – whether from Pendarvis or his new home – were of his carefully crafted interior designs. Neal wrote the text of the piece as well. Not surprisingly, the Cornish history he and Hellum celebrated and performed at Pendarvis for eager visitors still held pride of place. Indeed, the story of the Shake Rag makes yet another appearance, without any qualifications to its apocryphal nature. And tellingly, perhaps, Neal reassured readers at the end of the piece that the

[1] Edgar Hellum interview with Will Fellows, 1995.
[2] Neal made his post-Pendarvis home at 51 Jail Alley, while Hellum lived at 126 Spruce Street. For addresses, see, for example: Personal Correspondence 1982-1983, Edgar G. Hellum Papers.

purchase of Pendarvis by the state and the work of "private individuals has assured the perpetuation and preservation of this Cornish community in the New World while providing an ideal environment for artists, potters, woodworkers, and weavers."[3]

In his retirement and advancing age, Neal knew he would have to pass the mantel of local historian and preservationist to other people. Ideally, putting Pendarvis House in the hands of the State Historical Society would guard against future incursions on Neal and Hellum's beloved Shake Rag Street, incursions like Mayor Bollerud's municipal garage. At the same time, he also found solace in the influx of "artists, potters, woodworkers, and weavers," that would share his aesthetic vision for the future of Mineral Point. Moreover, in 1981, Neal took one more step to ensure that his curation of Mineral Point's past lived on into the future.[4] He donated his collection of historic materials, as well as his own personal papers and Pendarvis business records, to the local public library. That collection formed the nucleus of what would become the Mineral Point Public Library Archives, a boon to researchers, genealogists, and history buffs to this day.

About the same time, with the Neal's treasures safe for the foreseeable future, illness brought the partners back together under one roof. "But, then," Hellum remembered, Neal "got ill….[The doctors] said that Bob can't live alone. I said, well, then he'll have to move down with me."[5] In the early 1980s, illness brought the men back together as Hellum nursed his partner during Neal's final years. "So, God," he recalled, "we set up a bed and I took care of him for two years. One day he said, 'I don't know why you should do this.' I said, my God, we lived

[3] Robert M. Neal, "Mineral Point, Wisconsin," *Antiques* (August 1974): 248-259.
[4] "Mineral Point Room is Historical Treasure Trove," *Capital Times*, July 2, 1981.
[5] Hellum, interview

together for forty years. You sure as hell don't want to go to a nursing home. I said if I have to crawl on my hands and knees to look after you [I will,] as long as I'm able."[6]

After a lengthy illness, and under the care of Hellum, Neal died in July of 1983. In marking his passing, the local papers celebrated the work Neal had undertaken in his hometown. *The Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune* offered not one, but three obituaries. Quoting Hellum just after Neal's death, the largest of these remembrances, covering over a half page of the paper, proclaimed "Bob Neal – Equal to the Challenge," and considered him "the final authority for historical questions in Mineral Point."[7] Neal and Hellum's partnership was also remarked upon in these obituaries, although contextually that "partnership" most often read as a business one. "Bob and his partner, Edgar Hellum are best remembered for their work in establishing Pendarvis,"[8] read the smallest of the notices, for example. On the other hand, the third and more formal obituary in that same issue noted that Neal was "survived by his partner, Edgar Hellum, a brother, Conger…two nieces...and great-nephews and nieces."[9] By placing Hellum alongside other surviving family members, the context shifts and "partners" begins to reveal the more intimate and queerer side of Neal and Hellum's relationship.

After his retirement form Pendarvis and following Neal's death, Hellum, too, continued in the work that made his life at Pendarvis so rewarding. Hellum was beyond the physical demands of restoring old houses, however. Instead, he turned back to the work of visual art that had so enthralled him as a young man at the Stoughton Chautauqua and sent him to study – however briefly – at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1982, for example, Hellum showcased some of his collage and woodworking skills at the Wisconsin Power and Light

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Jim Jewell, "Bob Neal – Equal to the Challenge," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, July 28, 1983.
[8] "Neal's Challenge," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, July 28, 1983.
[9] "Bob Neal," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, July 28, 1983.

Company office in Mineral Point, where the Mineral Point Artisans Guild recognized him as "Man of the Year-In-Art."[10] Hellum's biggest honor as an artist, however, was to come in 1999 when he was part of a joint exhibition at his old stomping grounds, the Chicago Institute of Arts. The exhibit, *Unparalleled Lives*, featured Hellum's work alongside that of photographer Harold Allen. The work of the two artists was brought together by curators because both men had been students at the Art Institute and because each was noted as having "inspired and supported countless artists, scholars, and preservationists."[11] Sixty years after dropping out of art school, Hellum was being proven wrong – his art was good enough, but so too was his ability to inspire.

Just a few short months after his exhibition in Chicago, Hellum had a stroke. At ninety-four years of age, his final wish was to pass away at his stone cottage on Mineral Point's Spruce Street, a location nicknamed "Hellum's Hollow." Fittingly, as the ambulance transported Hellum back home in his final hours, the driver routed the vehicle past Pendarvis for one final goodbye.[12] On March 19, 2000, Hellum passed away.[13] In remembrances of Hellum's life, unlike those of Neal seventeen years earlier, Neal and Hellum's relationship is made more explicit. In an obituary in the Madison paper, for example, Neal was recognized as not just Hellum's partner, but "his life partner."[14] Likewise, at the memorial service for Hellum, held in Mineral Point, Kori Oberle, the curator at the Pendarvis Historic Site, listed Neal and Hellum's relationship as one of the more admirable elements of his life. "Do you know how very much I admire your ability, your willingness and your great success at taking risks?" she asked rhetorically. "Quitting dentistry college and later art school," she continued, "not knowing

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[10] Rosemary Warner and Bill Arnold, "Pendarvis: Mineral Point Guild Honors Refurbisher of Cottages," undated clipping, Edgar Hellum Box, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[11] *Unparalleled Lives*, Exhibit Catalog, Edgar Hellum Box, Robert M. Neal Papers.
[12] Jeanie Lewis, "Celebration of Life, A Tribute to Edgar," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, June 8, 2000.
[13] "Edgar Hellum," *Mineral Point Democrat-Tribune*, March 23, 2000.
[14] Susan Lampert Smith, "Hellum, Preserver of Mineral Point, Dies," *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 22, 2000.

where you were headed; [Your] river trip, setting out in a 25 year old wood boat with tie-dyed sails in the snow…[and] Loving Bob enough to join your lives together."[15]

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When you open the door of the first of five buildings on display at the Pendarvis Historical Site – after having paid your admission fee and safely navigated the gift shop – you immediately come face-to-face with a near-life-sized cutout of Neal and Hellum, the Pixies of Pendarvis. Standing in the log building – one which Neal and Hellum purchased with Gordon McCormick's money, disassembled, transported, and reassembled at Pendarvis – you are told that the site is organized around three themes: the mining history of Mineral Point, the lives of the Cornish immigrants, and the story of Neal, Hellum and their efforts at historic preservation.

Each of these themes is taken up in turn in the three most prominent buildings at Pendarvis. After meeting the cut-out of Neal and Hellum, for instance, you enter the two-story stone and log building, Polperro, which displays and interprets the history of mining in the region. The next building, Pendarvis, gives visitors a glimpse into the simple and impoverished lives of Cornish immigrants. The third themed building, Trelawny, provides a glimpse into the personal lives of Neal and Hellum. Here, the site displays the cottage as it would have been in the 1940s, when Neal and Hellum used the building as their home. You tour the men's kitchen, which actually tells you more about the Pendarvis House restaurant than the partners personal lives, the dining room, which showcases the china also used in the restaurant, and finally Neal and Hellum's front hall and parlor. Tellingly, perhaps, visitors are not allowed into the parlor or upstairs to view what would have been the more private and intimate part of the house – the

[15] Qtd. In Jeanie Lewis, "Celebration of Life."

bedrooms. As such, tourists see only the public spaces of Neal and Hellum's home and may miss the queerer story the two men shared.

For some tourists, this eliding of Neal and Hellum's queerness is an erasure, a closeting of a relationship whose visibility would be a mark of progressive politics on the part of the State Historical Society and a valuable role model for queer-identified visitors. In 2003, for example, a travel writer from the *Chicago Tribune* wrote of his visit to the Pendarvis Site and his attempt to elicit from a tour guide what he called "The Hidden History of Mineral Point." The tour guide was not very forthcoming. "I know what you are trying to ask," the guide was reported to have said. "And I don't know and I don't care." According to site director Tamara Funk, guides were instructed to keep Neal and Hellum's private life private, as per their wish. The author of the *Tribune* article was not so sure that, one, this was their wish, and, two, that it should necessarily be honored in the present moment.[16]

While the *Tribune* journalist called out what he saw as an intentional closeting of Bob and Edgar, other visitors have dispensed with the question of intent and simply declared Bob and Edgar as gay men. As already discussed, historian Will Fellows' 2004 book, *Passion to Preserve* and Martha Meyer and Rick Kinnebrew's play, *Ten Dollar House*, both explicitly name Neal and Hellum as gay men, despite no documentation of either man using that term to describe their queerness or their relationship.[17] This claiming of Neal and Hellum as gay men would seem to make sense, especially given the argument I have laid out above: that the queerness of Neal and Hellum is inextricable from their work at Pendarvis and in Mineral Point as a whole. If my

[16] Chris Jones, "The Hidden History of Mineral Point," *Chicago Tribune*, August 29, 2003.
[17] Will Fellows, *Passion to Preserve: Gay Men as Keepers of Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); and Rick Kinnebrew and Martha Meyer, *Ten Dollar House*, Broom Street Theater, Madison, Wisconsin, April 11, 2015 and Mineral Point Opera House, May 15, 2016.

point through all of this has been to demonstrate how the networks with which the partners were connected, the performance they staged at Pendarvis House, and their entire attitude and aesthetic style were shot through with queerness such that even the physical place of Pendarvis might be described as queer, then it should seem only right and fitting to claim Neal and Hellum as gay men.

But how accurate is this move? Given the rapidly changing understandings of sexuality as they have been tracked by historians of sexuality and sketched out here, when thinking about the interpretation of a historic site like Pendarivs, to what extent do we need to account for that complicated history? Those who have openly claimed Bob and Edgar as closeted gay men, for example, are working with a model of sexuality that only came into being after the partners were well into their sixties. Fellows and others, in other words, are working within a post-Gay Liberation understanding of queer sexuality – an understanding that grew out of the Gay Liberation movement of the 1970s and has been further articulated in preceding iterations of that movement up to the present. In this way, this understanding is undergirded by the political imperative to be out, to proclaim one's sexuality publicly, and demand equal footing on that basis. For our purposes, what this model means is that visibility and openness surrounding questions of queerness is always and unquestionably good.

Within this framework, then, the elision of Bob and Edgar's personal partnership is an erasure and a closeting of their status as gay men. Going further, speaking that queerness in any other way than directly, is seen as, at best, problematic. Euphamism and allusion – "Fairies" and "Pixies" as subtitutes for gay – are not enough. Under the Gay Liberationist model, Neal and Hellum are either reclaimed openly as gay men or they are closeted figures in need of that very

redemption. Under this model, there is no in-between, and, crucially, the act of claiming Neal and Hellum as gay men is understood as a positive and progressive act.

However, as we have already seen, relying on such an understanding of queerness flattens the experience of queer individuals, especially those in rural and small-town spaces. In this way, following queer theorist J. Jack Halberstam, this model of understanding queerness sits at the foundation of metronormative narratives that assume queer life in rural and small-town spaces is hostile, oppressive, and violent if it is not open, visible, and out.[18] If positive portrayals of queerness need always be portrayals of visibility and full acceptance, we miss the more nuanced experiences that exist within modes of silent accommodation, described by historian John Howard, and the tolerance of village eccentrics, highlighted by Colin R. Johnson.[19] In other words, another way to look at the erasure of Neal and Hellum at Pendarvis is to trace the roots of that erasure to Gay Liberationist thinking itself. If Neal and Hellum's queerness is not out in the open and explicit, according to this line of thinking, then it must not be on display at all. What gets missed is the nuance and the subtlety of earlier models of sexuality that allowed Neal and Hellum to live their lives, generally speaking, in plain sight. If we ignore that history, we ignore the finer points of Neal and Hellum's story.

By all accounts, Neal and Hellum never claimed a "gay" identity – they never subscribed to a Gay Liberation model of understanding queerness. Howard's model of quiet accommodation and Johnson's model of tolerance would have been far more familiar to them. Historically speaking, then, the tour guide who responded to questions of Neal and Hellum's private life with "I don't know and I don't care" may actually be more accurate in her

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[18] J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press.

[19] John Howard, *Men Like That: A Queer Southern History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Colin R. Johnson, *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).

interpretation of the site than the *Chicago Tribune* writer's insistence that the partners be openly avowed as gay men. But is this an appropriate interpretation for a twenty-first century audience? Should contemporary visitors to the Pendarvis site be left to decipher Neal and Hellum's queerness via allusion and euphemism, or should their personal relationship – already on display – be made that much more explicit? How might the site interpret the story of Neal and Hellum through the lens of the history of sexuality and earlier models of understanding queerness? And crucially, under the reign of late capitalism, is that something marketable to a general audience?[20]

I have no direct answers to these questions. I only hope that what I have presented above will add something to the already fascinating story of Robert Neal and Edgar Hellum. By fully situating that story within the context of the history of sexuality, we gain a better appreciation of how and why Neal and Hellum did what they did. By not claiming the two men as gay we regain a queer landscape of the past that, if it still exists at all, most of us would not recognize. This landscape of broad networks stretched across geographic areas, of strategically performed transgression, and of looking to the past for our future is one we should celebrate not only for its own sake, for what it can tell us about the past, but also for what it can do for our present understandings of queerness and difference. Neal and Hellum's story tells us much about the queer possibilities of rural and small-town spaces, possibilities erased and silenced by metronormative narratives of queerness. Their story shows us alternative ways of being, of orienting our lives, of embracing queer styles. Their story can also help us understand why and

[20] These questions have become even more important in recent years as the U.S. National Park Service has turned its attention to identifying, preserving, and interpreting important sites related to LGBTQ history. While the future of this initiative is in questions, given recent political shifts and signals, prior to the most recent election the Park Service released an extensive theme study on LGBTQ historic sites. Tellingly, the study begins in the 1960s with and the efforts of Frank Kameny, one of the most public leaders of the Homophile movement, a precursor to the Gay Liberation Movement that would follow a decade later. Indeed, much – if not most – of the study is built around a gay liberationist framework and lacks a more nuanced and complicated understanding of the history of sexuality. *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History*, Ed. Megan E. Springate (Washington D.C.: National Park Foundation, 2016).

how queer people continue to find home, community, and belonging outside the city, paving the way for urban-based queer movements and communities to better engage with those beyond the city limits. The Pixies of Pendarvis, the Fairies of Mineral Point can tell us all of these things, and more – we only have to follow the advice of the old Cornish folktale: listen to the fairies, give them space to work, do not horde what is sought after, and we will be rewarded with much wealth.

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