



## **"Glenbrook"**

### **60 Balmville Road, Newburgh, NY**

**Built in 1856 for David M. Clarkson | Architect: Frederick Clarke Withers\* | 1828 – 1901**

A prominent force in the community of immigrant English architects who helped shape American Architecture in the gilded age, Frederick Clarke Withers arrived in Newburgh, NY from England, in 1852 at the invitation of Andrew Jackson Downing who was working something of a revolution in American architectural taste from his home, Highland Garden. Downing had also engaged Calvert Vaux, and Vaux and Withers partnered on many Newburgh projects until 1856 when Vaux left to join Frederick Law Olmstead in New York City.

Withers, with a deep love for the Middle Ages and competence in Gothic design, was almost instantly successful in the US where his historical accuracy was unusual and much admired. He quickly assumed a place among the leaders of ecclesiastical architecture, and many of his churches survive to this day. Among his contemporaries, Withers' reputation rested primarily on his ecclesiastical buildings and his accurate, yet inventive manipulation of Gothic forms, won him the respect of his American colleagues and endeared him to conservative churchmen. But he also was involved in a variety of secular projects in which he demonstrated initiative and imagination. As a designer of domestic, commercial and public buildings he was dynamic and progressive, eager to present new ideas. He opened his first office on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street in Newburgh in 1856 and, clearly benefiting from the afterglow of Downing's fame, was commissioned by affluent businessmen to design their residences, by public officials to create new municipal buildings, and by numerous private institutions. Working from his Newburgh base, sometimes in partnership with Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmstead, he designed churches, chapels, private homes, insane asylums, hospitals, monuments, bridges, libraries, courthouses, prisons, banks and other institutional buildings up and down the East Coast from Washington DC to New Hampshire; west to Illinois; east to Connecticut; south to Mississippi and extensively in New York City.

In Newburgh, 21 Withers' designs are known, some in collaboration with Vaux, some for homes and buildings now demolished, some for extant buildings and some for projects never completed.

"*Glenbrook*" at 60 Balmville Road, commissioned by David M. Clarkson, was completed in 1856. It reveals the strong influence of Downing. Described as "[a] sensible, unpretending house, a convenient and judicious disposition of rooms... nothing appears to be wanting". The interior ... "indicates a love for domestic life, for refined pleasures and the simple enjoyments of a quiet country home in the midst of a beautiful nature." Nicely balanced with the exterior uncomplicated by window hoods, balconies, or labels, the design projects great clarity and strength. Today, the home remains a fine example of Withers' work despite necessary renovations and upgrades.

Withers enjoyed respectable social status and considerable prestige during his life in America. His background and gentlemanly personality earned him the friendship and esteem of his colleagues and patrons and his two marriages also enhanced his station; his first wife, Emily DeWint, was descended from John Quincy Adams, and his second, Beulah A. Higbee, was a grandniece of Martha Washington.

Withers died on January 1, 1901, the true and enduring merit of his architectural talent fully appreciated by peers and critics alike. Later, when the Gothic Revival was all but forgotten, he continued to be recognized as one of the most important American architects of his time.

*\*Information Excerpted from "The Architecture of Frederick Clarke Withers and the Progress of the Gothic Revival in America After 1850", by Francis R. Kowsky, Wesleyan University Press, 1980*