

**Social Status, the Patriarch and Assembly
Balls, and the Transformation in Elite Identity in
Gilded Age New York**

**by
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Abstract

As exclusive upper-class balls that represented a fraction of elites during the Gilded Age, the Patriarch and Assembly Balls were sites where the Four Hundred engaged in practices of distinction for the purposes of maintaining their social statuses and of wresting social power from other fractions of elites. By looking at things such as the food, décor, and dancing at these balls, historians could arrive at an understanding of how the Four Hundred wanted to be perceived by others as well as the various types of capital these elites exhibited to assert their claim as the leaders of upper-class New York. In addition, in the process of advancing their claims as the rightful leaders of Society, the New York Four Hundred transformed elite identity as well as upper-class masculinity to include competitiveness and even fitness and vigorousness, traits that once applied more exclusively to white middle-class masculinity.

Keywords: Distinction; Ball; Social Fraction; Upper Class; Men; Women

To my family.

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Introduction

On the evening of December 13, 1881, the First Patriarchs' Ball of the New York social season had its grand opening in Delmonico's restaurant. There were 375 exquisitely dressed guests who attended the ball.¹ The ballroom itself was decorated with silver curtains and lighted with an attractive pale straw-coloured light that was popular in Paris at the time. The ballroom was divided into four sections. On one side was the salon that opened into the ballroom where treats such as chocolate, tea, and ices were served. There was a pink light in the salon that distinguished it from the main ballroom floor. On the south side of the salon was a conservatory whose halls were decorated with flowers and plants. Here too, the pink light shone brightly as in the salon. A smaller ballroom extended from the main ballroom, where an orchestra played the music for the night. At 12:30 a.m., supper was served in the restaurant on the ground floor, as ladies retired to dinner on the arms of their gentlemen escorts. At 1 a.m. sharp, the ball officially began. Colonel De Lancey Kane led the first cotillion that signalled the first dance of the night. All around the Colonel were debutantes dressed in elaborate costumes. The famed beauty Fannie Swan wore a low-necked white tulle dress embroidered with daisies. Rosie Webb wore her white tulle dress festooned with bunches of gold grapes. Not to be out-done by these young unmarried socialites, Mrs. Newcomb wore a shrimp-coloured satin dress trimmed with gold and crystal embroidery and begonia leaves and flowers.²

Above is a typical scene at the Patriarch Balls, upper-class entertainments that took place in Gilded Age New York from 1872 to 1897. Accounts of these balls populated the newspapers and Society pages of the period. The Patriarch and

¹ "The Merry Patriarchs," *The New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1881, 2.

² *Ibid.*

Assembly Balls were the most exclusive and highly sought-after elite entertainments in Gilded Age New York. Wealthy New Yorkers who attended these balls were called the Four Hundred, named after the size of Mrs. Astor, a social leader of the Four Hundred's ballroom, which supposedly could only contain four hundred people at one time.³ The efforts of the Four Hundred to keep high society at around 400 members at a time of increasing population among the wealthy in New York was no doubt a very snobbish and exclusive undertaking, aided in large part by the Patriarch and Assembly Balls as sites where social distinction could be performed and reproduced. In their quest for social power, the New York Four Hundred participated in distinctive practices that attested to their cultural, social, and economic capital to be the leaders of the New York upper class. This performance of the practices of distinction showed the transformation in elite identity as espoused by the Four Hundred. Elite identity was rearticulated to involve how money was spent in the upper class. In addition, cosmopolitanism became an elite attribute. Moreover, as a study of the Patriarch and Assembly Balls reveals, upper-class masculinity of the Four Hundred included traditional upper-class traits such as leisure, social skills, decorous behaviour, chivalry, and the appreciation for the finer things in life. It also included competitiveness, a middle-class trait. In particular, competitiveness as a middle-class characteristic was brought into the upper class by the help of upper-class women.

So as to better understand who the Four Hundred were and the significance of the Patriarch and Assembly Balls, a brief description of New York, its many inhabitants, the issues that interested New Yorkers at the time, and the physical changes that took place in New York by the end of the Gilded Age is in order. Just five years before the Civil War began the number of New Yorkers whose assets exceeded \$100,000 was 440 individuals.⁴ By 1892, New York boasted at least 1,368 millionaires, which made up

³ Frederic Cople Jaher, "Style and Status: High Society in Late Nineteenth-Century New York," in *The Rich, The Well Born, and the Powerful: Elite and Upper Classes in History*, ed. Frederic Cople Jaher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 263; Dixon Wecter, *The Saga of American Society: A Record of Social Aspiration: 1607-1937* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 216.

⁴ Frederic Cople Jaher, "Nineteenth-Century Elites in Boston and New York," *Journal of Social History* 6, no. 1 (Autumn, 1972): 37. <http://www.jstor.org/>.

about twenty-seven percent of the nation's millionaires.⁵ The number of inhabitants in New York also increased from 696,115 in 1850 to 2,507,414 in 1890.⁶ During the Gilded Age, New York was the leading port in the country as well as its primary financial centre.⁷ New York dominated American trade due to the advantages of its geography, with a large, protected, and ice-free port throughout most of the year. Two-thirds of America's imports and one-third of the United States' exports passed through New York. In particular, New York merchants built trading houses that bought cotton from the South and transported cotton to Liverpool. On the way back, these ships would be filled with British goods that helped clothe and furnish western farmers, northern workers, and southern plantation owners.⁸ This trade further supported the manufacturing industry. The densely inhabited streets along the East River were a ready source of labour supply for the factories that churned out printing presses, carriages, books, and ready-made clothing that supplied not only its own market but that of the whole nation as well. Along with the burgeoning trade, there were many bankers, insurance agents, and lawyers who set up their offices in New York to help the smooth running of the business machinery. New York was the nation's centre for trade, information, and transportation networks that connected the coasts of Europe and Western Africa to North and South America.⁹ All this economic activity accounted for the rise in the number of millionaires in the city during the Gilded Age.

By 1898, New York was the largest city in America, which boasted more than three million inhabitants.¹⁰ The city of New York had long been an ethnically diverse place with immigrants from different places. The Dutch from the Netherlands as well as some Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal fleeing religious persecution came to settle in the city. Then after New York became a British colony in 1664, the English

⁵ Jaher, "Nineteenth-Century Elites," 38; Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 238.

⁶ Jaher, "Nineteenth Century Elites," 36.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸ Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 17-18.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹⁰ Frederick M. Binder and David M. Reimers, *All the Nations under Heaven: An Ethnic and Racial History of New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press), 93.

came to settle there. After the American independence, immigrants came mostly from Western Europe. The potato blight of the 1840s caused an increase in Irish immigrants to the United States.¹¹ From the 1880s onward, immigrants mostly came from southern and eastern Europe, with Jews and Italians being prominent among them. There were also a small number of Chinese and Arab immigrants in the 1870s.¹² After the Civil War, African Americans from the South immigrated to the North to join those who already resided there.¹³ Between 1820 and 1860, more than five million immigrants arrived in the United States, and two-thirds of this number, almost four million immigrants, debarked in New York City.¹⁴ About two out of every three immigrants entered the United States through Ellis Island, just off the shore of Manhattan, when it opened as a reception centre for new immigrants in 1892.¹⁵

This thesis then is specifically a story about the white upper class during the Gilded Age. At a time when there was so much ethnic diversity in New York City, the WASP establishment was still able to hold on to a tremendous amount of power, although that power did not go unchallenged. As will be seen in chapter one, as vehicles for gaining social power, the Patriarch and Assembly Balls were sites where the redefinition of upper-class identity by the Four Hundred occurred. High society was no longer defined only by birth, breeding, and the vintage of one's wealth, as espoused by the older Knickerbocker elites who were in the upper class since the early 1600s when New York was still a Dutch colony called New Amsterdam. It was also defined by nouveaux-riches practices of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous display of wealth that were meant to impress observers. The Four Hundred, a hybrid of some Knickerbockers and other elites who were in the New York upper class from before the Civil War, thus combined elements from Knickerbocker as well as nouveaux-riches identities to form their very own rearticulation of elite identity based on how one spent one's money as well as on the adopting of cosmopolitan outlooks and practices in entertaining. All this was done in the aid of acquiring if not maintaining their social

¹¹ Binder and Reimers, *All the Nations under Heaven*, 39.

¹² *Ibid.*, 107-108.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

positions as the leaders of upper-class society, to the exclusion of both those Knickerbockers who did not ascribe to their outlook and practices, as well as the nouveaux-riches who did not have the requisite birth and breeding.

In addition, as will be seen in chapter two, in the process of acquiring their social power, or what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu termed becoming “the dominant fraction of the dominant class,”¹⁶ the Four Hundred as a social fraction redefined upper-class masculinity. In particular, upper-class masculinity was redefined by the combination of traditional upper-class identities of leisure and self-cultivation with middle-class masculinities of competitiveness and even vigorousness and fitness in the later period. Overall, the Four Hundred’s playing of the status game through conspicuous consumption, looking to the European aristocracy and to Europe in general for ideas and practices, and performing of leisure, transformed elite identity in Gilded Age New York.

As much as the WASP elites in New York wanted to maintain their position of dominance, New York at the second half of the nineteenth century was rife with challenges to upper-class power. In particular, the domination of Tammany Hall by Irish immigrants was worrisome to New York elites. Tammany Hall was the political machine of the Democratic Party that played a major role in New York politics in the nineteenth century, and many political candidates from Tammany wooed the immigrant vote by giving patronage to voters. Tammany had long had the strong support of Irish immigrants in the city, which was how it managed to stay in power for so long. In 1888 Tammany even had its first New York-born, Irish-American mayor who came from a solid middle-class background.¹⁷ However, Tammany was also known for corruption, and the case of Boss Tweed was an illustration in point. Tweed was indicted of corruption in 1871, after the combined efforts of the Republicans and wealthy businessmen in New York ousted him from power.¹⁸ After Tammany Hall’s power toppled in the 1870s in the wake of the Tweed scandal, “Swallowtail Democrats,”

¹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 293.

¹⁷ Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace, *A History of New York to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1108.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1009-1010.

bourgeois Democrats who were pro-elites versus pro-immigrants, took control of local politics until 1888, when Tammany had a temporary comeback.¹⁹

In addition to this, New York in the late nineteenth century was rife with worker strikes and class antagonisms. Between 1881 and 1900, there were 5,090 strikes in New York involving 33,161 factories and 962,470 workers.²⁰ Labour unions like the Knights of Labour also helped the cause of workers in calling for boycotts and agitating for worker reform, which affected the factory-owning industrialists of New York. Many of the strikes were suppressed by Pinkertons, or private police hired by the wealthy employers, which caused much antagonism between the workers and their employers and soured labour relations.²¹ These uneasy labour relations were watched over anxiously by the New York upper class, which understandably supported the wealthy employers and business interests against the interests of workers. Labour relations thus formed a large part of upper-class discourse in the 1880s and 1890s.²²

In the 1880s and 1890s, the Populist Movement in the United States represented the farmers' interests in proposing to ignite inflation by monetizing silver. This would raise the prices for agricultural goods and help farmers pay off their debts. The interests of the farmers were set against those of the New York upper class which supported the gold standard and preferred a laissez-faire economic policy in which the government did not intervene in the value of money or in the market. As a result, the New York upper class rallied against the Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan in 1896 when the Democratic Party adopted some of the Populists' demands, and happily for upper-class New Yorkers, the Democrats eventually lost the election.²³

Moreover, by the end of the nineteenth century, the American white middle class was becoming more aggressive in defining itself as a class. Much of this class definition was articulated in opposition to the upper class. The middle class decried what they viewed as the upper class' stress on self-centred individualism and the selfish pursuit of

¹⁹ Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 315-316.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 274.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 268, 287.

²² *Ibid.*, 321.

²³ *Ibid.*, 304.

pleasure. The middle class was concerned about the disparity between the wealthy and the poor as well as the tense labour relations between the wealthy employers and the workers.²⁴ They proposed a different vision of society that involved reforms in many areas, such as philanthropy, housing, gambling, drinking, monopolies, railroad freight rates, and juvenile justice. Members of the middle class also reached out to the poorer classes and took an interest in social problems.²⁵ Overall, what was articulated by the white middle class was an ideology of the political centre, which later contributed to the making of the Progressives in the early twentieth century, whose goal was to reshape the other social classes into its very own middle class image of anti-individualism, anti-accumulation and ostentation, more restrained consumption, restrained pleasure, association, and state power.²⁶

Clearly, the issues of class identity and class interests were important during the Gilded Age. At a time when the WASP establishment was under attack from many quarters, the Four Hundred devised ways to keep others out of the very top of the social hierarchy. As sociologist Pierre Bourdieu pointed out in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, taste is one of the most vital stakes in the struggles fought in

²⁴ Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 64-65.

²⁵ It is important to note that a select few in the upper class were involved in philanthropy; however, during the late nineteenth century, upper class involvement in philanthropy was largely concentrated in money donations or the equivalent in goods versus actually going to visit the poorer classes and working to reform the conditions of the poor by interacting with the indigent. The care for those less fortunate often stemmed more from a perspective of noblesse oblige versus from a desire of solving social ills or a desire of uniting society. Especially for those involved in high society, philanthropic work was so limited as to be unremarkable. For more details, please see Jaher, "Style and Status," 278.

²⁶ McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 73-74.

the field of the dominant class and the field of cultural production.²⁷ This thesis is partially about the production or exhibition of taste or cultural capital that can aid in the struggles for social distinction engaged in by different social fractions. The Four Hundred sought to legitimate their taste as a hegemonic discourse in the upper class. As culture is often the site of social struggles, this thesis is about the production of elite culture and about elite identity.²⁸ The taste of the Four Hundred spoke to their identity; both how they perceived themselves and how they wanted others to perceive them. This thesis then is about the making of upper-class power, culture, and identity in late nineteenth century New York.

A Word About the Sources

The primary sources for this thesis are based mainly on Gilded Age newspaper articles and Society pages with a sprinkling of etiquette manuals, diaries, and dance manuals. Since a majority of the sources came from newspapers, a brief explanation about the relationship between the Gilded Age Press and the Four Hundred is in order. The elites of the Gilded Age held an ambivalent relationship to the Press. While some hostesses enjoyed reading their names in the newspapers there were also elites who disliked having reporters hounding them down at their doorsteps and their clubs for

²⁷ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 11. Bourdieu's framework of taste being a mark of distinction for the dominant class and his idea that taste is the battleground for social distinction even within a dominant class composed of different social fractions is particularly useful in thinking about upper-class New York in the late nineteenth century. During a time when different fractions of elites were engaged in a war of social distinction in an effort to claim leadership in the upper class, Bourdieu's sociological study about distinction helps historians in understanding the society, people, and culture of Gilded Age New York. Deploying taste as a means for class distinction was as vivid in 1970s France as it was in late nineteenth-century New York. Taste and the deployment of various types of capital whether social, economic, or cultural are crucial to class formation, culture, and identity, and the Four Hundred were a good example of this. On the note of class formation, Elise Chenier's work "Class, Gender, and the Social Standard: The Montreal Junior League, 1912–1939," *Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (December 1, 2009): 671-710 deserves special mention. In her work, Chenier argues that class was a more useful category of analysis than gender when it comes to Anglo upper-class women in early twentieth century Montreal. In my own work, I have also found that class is an important category of analysis in addition to gender to the extent that upper-class women collaborated with the men of their class to articulate an elite identity.

²⁸ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 318-319; Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 189.

interviews. While there were always concerns about the intrusion of privacy, by the end of the nineteenth century, there was also more awareness of the benefits publicity could bring to the social elite.

As far as the Patriarch Balls were concerned, high-profile entertainments such as these were always flocked with reporters. Reporters were generally allowed into Delmonico's Restaurant and allowed to peek into the ballroom during the ball. Reporters also sent word or messages to the guests inside the ball for comments and gathered their information also from those who would speak with them. With the need to get advertisements for their papers, newspapers by the 1880s started to get interested in news about Society. Newspaper editors realized the potential of Society news in attracting a large readership as well as advertisers. While not everybody bought into the idea of Society, there was a segment of the general American reading public who did not have access to high society yet were interested in reading about the elites and understanding what "success" looked like during the Gilded Age. They also imitated the elites in their dress and manners as stories of social aspiration sprung up in every distant American town or city. Some from a poorer socio-economic background liked to read about Society news because it transported them temporarily into a fantasy-like realm of glitter and gold, away from the daily drudgery of life.²⁹ Then, there were those elites who read Society news and relished in their names being listed. Finally and perhaps most significantly, there were retailers and sellers interested in Society news as a mention of their names or services in conjunction with a Society belle or Society event could bring them more customers. They were also more likely to advertise in newspapers that recorded their involvement with a Society event.³⁰ Given the developments in the advertising industry by the end of the nineteenth century with better graphics and whole page advertisements, advertisements in the newspapers were not only a lucrative but also a burgeoning business.³¹

²⁹ Eric Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York: Money and Social Power in a Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 202-203.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 203-204.

³¹ William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 42, 44.

It is now necessary to unpack all this information and look at how it relates to an investigation of the Four Hundred. Given the lucrateness of Society news, in general newspaper editors who devoted a section of the paper to Society news had taken the approach of being quite respectful of the Four Hundred so as not to offend them. In addition, these newspaper reports tended to focus on what the elites did, who attended which events, the dress of the participants, as well as the décor and food at these events in order to satisfy the retailers as well as the participants who enjoyed seeing their names in print. Then, vendors were eager to supply the press with details of their services such as the décor and food at the balls. Emphasizing the decor, food, dress, and people of these balls had the added advantage of allowing less well-off readers to fantasize about the life of the wealthy.³² Moreover, added with the fact that Society columnists were elites with access to the highest circles in Society, they had the vested interest of not offending the Four Hundred. These Society columnists had their identities kept secret in order to protect their social statuses as well as continue to supply information to the press.³³ As such, newspaper reports can tell historians a fairly accurate account of what actually happened at these balls. Newspaper columnists who were privy to this elite world and elites themselves were able to present the culture, belief, and self-perception of the elites in a fairly accurate way or at least in a way that did not offend them. Then, the fact that reporters flocked to these balls and were able to at least take a peek if not speak with participants showed that it was not only the organizers of the balls who ascribed to these practices or identities, but the participants themselves also contributed to press reports concerning these events. Then, elite columnists privy to the upper social circles were apt to report comments and observations they heard in Society about entertainments such as the Patriarch Balls.

It is interesting to add however, that Society pages such as *Town Topics* dealt with in this thesis had a different approach to Society journalism. Colonel Mann, the proprietor of *Town Topics* took over a bankrupt Society page that reported on social events from American cities as well as dry accounts of current fashions worn. In order to

³² Homburger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 203-204.

³³ *Ibid.*, 206-207.

make a profit, Colonel Mann took on the guise of a commentator and critic of Society.³⁴ He was often harsh with the Four Hundred and was keen to condemn practices he saw as spoiled or snobbish such as the keeping of late hours in Society. Mann had a wide network of informants from housekeepers and shopkeepers to telegraph operators and even those with a grudge against Society.³⁵ Although not every supposed scandal or rumour printed in *Town Topics* could be trusted, certain elite practices, culture, and attitudes could still be detected in these pages, as Mann was always quick to comment on them. Therefore, by comparing respectable newspaper accounts written by elites privy to Society with Colonel Mann's harsh critique of Society, historians can detect general practices, attitudes, and cultures that emerged in these pages and arrive at a reasonable understanding of what actually happened in Society as well as elements of elite culture such as the keeping of late hours. All this can help historians arrive at a better picture of how the Four Hundred viewed themselves and their identity.

With regard to the etiquette manuals and dance manuals, they also have the potential of helping historians understand values treasured by the elites, which went into identity formation, if not the actual practices of the elites themselves. In order to ascertain elite attitudes and practices other sources such as diary accounts and secondary sources were consulted. Upon consultation, it was apparent that the etiquettes of the day were not only the concern of the etiquette manual writers who were elites themselves but also the concern of the Four Hundred as a whole. The audience of the etiquette manuals were those who were not a part of Society or those from the lower classes who aspired to either enter Society or at least become more "well-bred".³⁶ By comparing the various sources available and checking them for consistency, historians can arrive at a better picture of the Four Hundred. As such, given the limitations of the sources, what can be reasonably derived about the Four Hundred by looking at the Patriarch and Assembly Balls is the matter of elite identity, or at least how the elites would like others to perceive them, of which elite values, practices, and cultures formed a large part. Historians can arrive at a fair understanding of the people who attended

³⁴ Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 204, 207.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 208-209.

³⁶ Mary Cable, *Top Drawer: American High Society from the Gilded Age to the Roaring Twenties* (New York: Atheneum, 1984), 60.

these balls as well as the material culture of the elites such as food, décor, and dress, which can speak volumes about elite identity.

Historiography

The historiography of elite New Yorkers has traditionally focused on looking at how power was wielded and maintained by the upper crust. There is a consensus among historians in the last fifty years that the elite exercised power through social power and social status. However, each historian had a slightly different approach to investigating how the upper class maintained power. For example, in *The Power Elite*, C. Wright Mills looked at elite education, clubs, and associations in maintaining upper-class power.³⁷ A decade later, historian Frederic Cople Jaher followed Mills to look at elite associations and club memberships, but with a particular focus on elite involvement in education, philanthropy, high society, and culture.³⁸ David C. Hammack also argued for the importance of elite clubs and associations in maintaining elite power but focused on those clubs based on ethnicity, religion, and interest.³⁹ In addition, historian Sven Beckert looked specifically at elite economic and political institutions and affiliations as bastions of elite power.⁴⁰ Furthermore, both Maureen Montgomery and historian Eric Homberger examined elite practices and customs, and in particular, the involvement of elites in high society in maintaining elite power.⁴¹ Since Montgomery and Homberger, other historians such as Greg King and Anne Mendelson have argued for the

³⁷ C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1959, 57, 70.

³⁸ Frederic Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 222, 278.

³⁹ David C. Hammack, *Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1982), 69, 72.

⁴⁰ Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 4.

⁴¹ Maureen Montgomery, *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton's New York* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 9, 17; Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 1.

significance of elite practices and participation in Society as crucial in maintaining elite power.⁴²

Yet despite this consensus on the importance of elite social life in maintaining upper-class power, two schools of thoughts emerged among the aforementioned historians regarding upper-class New York. One school of thought that followed Mills argued that upper-class New Yorkers were a unified class while another followed Jaher and argued that upper-class New York was in fact divided. In *The Power Elite*, C. Wright Mills argued that elite educational institutions socialized the upper crust to have shared outlooks, manners, and attitudes. In *The Protestant Establishment*, Digby Baltzell largely concurred with Mills' analysis by adding that the WASP establishment dominated the upper echelons of society as compared to minority groups. In *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896*, Sven Beckert presented a picture of the upper class as unified in the matter of economics and politics. In addition, in the anthology *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century*, various historians argued for the making of a national bourgeoisie with shared practices and interests.

All this is in contrast with the historians who followed Jaher in arguing for a divided upper class in New York. In "Style and Status: High Society in Late Nineteenth-Century New York," historian Frederic Cople Jaher argued that different groups of elites dominated culture, trade, politics, and fashion in New York, depending on one's family background and length of residence in New York. In *Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century*, historian David Hammack argued that the Protestant elites alone could be divided into at least five subgroups based on not only one's family background and how long one had been in the upper class but also based on interests and religious affiliations. In *Mrs. Astor's New York: Money and Social Power in a Gilded Age*, historian Eric Homberger looked in particular at the rise of the Four Hundred in New York, while paying attention to the different groups of elites that existed at the time

⁴² Greg King, *A Season of Splendor: The Court of Mrs. Astor in Gilded Age New York* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009), 6, 8; Anne Mendelson, "Goodbye to the Marketplace: Food and Exclusivity in Nineteenth-Century New York," in *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Sven Beckert and Julia Rosenbaum, 11 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

based on family lineage, wealth, and length of residence in New York. In *A Season of Splendor: The Court of Mrs. Astor in Gilded Age New York*, historian Greg King followed Homberger in looking at a particular fraction of New York elites, the New York Four Hundred. Furthermore, in *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton's New York*, historian Maureen Montgomery, while looking at elite and especially elite women's involvement in Society, was careful to make distinctions among New York elites based on family lineage, wealth, and length of one's residence in New York. It is apparent that historians who wrote about high society and New York elites' involvement in high society largely paid attention to subgroups within the New York upper class, as these differences among elites were crucial in defining who was or was not a part of high society in New York.

It is now important to note a gap in the historiography by mentioning that few historians have paid any sustained attention to the role of women's participation in constructing an elite identity. Only Maureen Montgomery looked at the contribution of women to upper-class identity as well as women's role in the maintenance of social power in the upper class.⁴³ However, Montgomery's account was primarily focused on women, and like other works on the New York elite in the nineteenth century, there was no discussion on upper-class masculinity.

By an analysis of the historiography it is apparent that while much attention is paid to how the upper class wielded and maintained their power as well as whether or not it was divided or unified, very little emphasis is given to elite identity. For historians who argued that the New York upper-class was divided, there was a tendency to classify and categorize elites into different subgroups ordered by family background, ethnicity, religion, or length of one's family in the upper class without a more in-depth look at the implications of these categories on the construction of elite identity.

While in recent years more attention has been paid to elite social life, more needs to be done in this area, especially as to how an investigation of elite social practices can shed light on upper-class identity as well as how the upper crust

⁴³ Montgomery, *Displaying Women*, 6; Maureen E. Montgomery, "Female Rituals and the Politics of the New York Marriage Market in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Family History* 23, no. 1 (January 1998): 48, <http://www.sagepublications.com/>.

maintained or wielded their power. Even though some attention has been given to gender as a category of analysis, more studies also need to be done in this area, especially with regard to masculinity and even femininity. Although Montgomery's account afforded readers glimpses into the role of women in maintaining social power in the upper class, more studies need to be done about upper-class femininity with regard to how these women perceived themselves and their identity.

This thesis will attempt to address these issues by looking at the role of different types of capital whether cultural, social, political, and economic in the formation of elite identity. In addition, this thesis will show, like Jaher and the historians who followed him, that the New York upper-class was indeed divided. In fact there was an intra-class struggle that played into elite identity formation. This thesis will also follow historians like Montgomery and Homberger to look at the involvement of elites in high Society and examine elite social practices. In particular, this thesis will focus on how elite practices in Society spoke to their identity. In chapter two, the question of upper-class masculinity and in a more limited way upper-class femininity will be addressed as well as the close collaboration between upper-class men and women in the construction of an elite identity.

Chapter 1.

Social Power, Elite Identity, and the Patriarch and Assembly Balls as Sites of Bourgeois Distinction

Although the New York Four Hundred did not come into existence until later in the nineteenth century, this chapter first traces the history of Society in New York City from the seventeenth century then discusses the ways in which the New York Four Hundred came to control Society by the end of the nineteenth century. The domination of the New York Four Hundred in high society was aided by “distinctive practices,” or practices that gave them distinction. The exhibition of economic, social, and cultural capital was all meant to work in the favour of the Four Hundred, distinguish them from other elites, and place them above other social fractions in the upper class. This strategy of distinction included taking elements from the different fractions of elites, the Knickerbockers and the nouveaux-riches. It also included looking to the European aristocracy and European culture to legitimate their claim to power. It was through this strategy that the Four Hundred were able to dictate Society and decide who was included and who was excluded. In this process, the Four Hundred also created their very own elite identities in how they wanted to be perceived by others by borrowing elements from nouveaux-riches, Knickerbocker, and also European aristocratic cultures.

One of those rearticulations of elite characteristics involved how money was spent and in particular the spending of money for the purposes of not only leisure but more importantly the advancement of social status. In addition, looking to Europe for its etiquette and culture reflected the cosmopolitan outlook of the Four Hundred in contrast to the more provincial Knickerbocker elites who were more inward-looking. While the Knickerbockers retreated largely from public life and remained within their own social circle, the Four Hundred were more assertive of their social status even to foreigners and the general American public via heightened press publicity. This practising of “distinction” by the Four Hundred went into the creation of an American upper class, or

what historian Eric Homburger has called the creation of an American aristocracy.⁴⁴ The distinctive practices of the Four Hundred went into the making of an elite culture and identity.

Upper-class New Yorkers had long divided themselves into different social fractions. The first white settlers or founders came from the Netherlands during the seventeenth century when New York was still a Dutch colony called New Amsterdam.⁴⁵ The elites of New Amsterdam mostly composed of wealthy Dutch merchants who traded with their home country. There were a few titled Dutch aristocrats who served as administrators of the colony on behalf of the Dutch, but these were few and far between. As such, merchants predominated in the colonial elite.⁴⁶

After the arrival of the British who conquered the Dutch colony in 1664, the colonial upper class then saw the infusion of British aristocrats and navel or military officers in the guises of administrators for the colony. The British elites were well-integrated with the old Dutch elites, as many Dutch elites still held on to their prominent positions by joining the ranks of the military or by becoming lawyers and judges who helped to govern the colony. In addition, many owned vast tracts of land that made them wealthy landlords and gave them some influence in the colony.⁴⁷

During the American Revolution, some Dutch elites even stood on the side of the British. Many of these elites eventually had to leave the colony after the British were defeated. The elites who stood on the American side remained, but those who were also landlords saw the diminishment of their land and the subsequent decrease in their influence because of laws passed against entail and primogeniture.⁴⁸ Thus, the influence of the American Revolution made its impact felt on the New York upper class.

⁴⁴ Eric Homburger, *Mrs. Astor's New York: Money and Social Power in a Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale university Press, 2002), 1, 3.

⁴⁵ Frederic Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 160, 164.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 161, 163.

⁴⁸ Dixon Wecter, *The Saga of American Society: A Record of Social Aspiration 1607-1937* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 84-85.

After the American Revolution, many immigrants came from the British Isles and some came from Western European countries such as Germany. One notable immigrant during this time was John Jacob Astor, the founding patriarch of the wealthy Astor clan.⁴⁹ Astor was a butcher's son from Germany, who came to America as an artisan and made his fortune by selling furs to China.⁵⁰ With the money he made in the China trade, Astor bought large tracts of land in New York, which made the Astor family one of the biggest landlords of New York later in the nineteenth century.⁵¹ The immigrants who came from Western Europe during this time were generally poor artisans and workers. Even the ones who made a fortune in their own lifetimes such as Astor had a difficult time fitting in with upper-class society, which stressed breeding and manners in addition to wealth.⁵²

Those who made their own fortunes before the Civil War were relatively few compared to those who made their own fortunes after the Civil War. Despite this, having men who made large fortunes in their own lifetimes was a relatively new phenomenon, which played into the status anxiety of upper-class New Yorkers who wanted to maintain their power as well as the status anxiety of the nouveaux-riches who sought entrance to the upper class. The New York upper class began to harden the class line along the vintage of wealth, or the length of time one's family had been considered respectable, plus education and outlook as qualifications for entering upper-class society. The differences in education, outlook, and background made nouveaux-riches such as the Astors and later the Vanderbilts ostracized in high society. The thrifty habits of John Jacob Astor as well as Cornelius Vanderbilt were notorious during the early nineteenth century and the supposed lack of refinement these two exhibited according to upper-class standards set these men in opposition to the refined lifestyle and manners prided by the elites in polite society.⁵³ As men who made their wealth during their lifetimes who came from a humble background, the founding patriarchs of the wealthy Astor and

⁴⁹ Wecter, *The Saga of American Society*, 180.

⁵⁰ Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 243-244.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 33, 246.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 243-244.

⁵³ Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 194, 242; Louis Auchincloss, *The Vanderbilt Era: Profiles of a Gilded Age* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989), 17, 19.

Vanderbilt families did not share the same outlook about spending money as upper-class elites with inherited wealth during this time. One notable exception of an immigrant who came before the Civil War but became well-integrated into upper-class society was August Belmont, a German Jew who came to New York to look after the Rothschild business interest there. Belmont's knowledge of the manners and etiquette of the European aristocracy made him refined in the eyes of upper-class New Yorkers, despite the anti-Semitic attitudes common among New York elites.⁵⁴ He was later able to marry the daughter of Commodore Perry, a woman from a respected Anglo-Saxon family, which bolstered his claim to the New York upper class. Together Belmont and his wife were able to carve out a place in upper-class society through their lavish entertainments that purported to teach New Yorkers how to entertain.⁵⁵

After the Civil War, there was an influx of nouveaux-riches in New York City knocking at the gates of Society. Many businessmen profited from the Civil War while the burgeoning manufacturing industry in America saw the rise of industrialists in New York.⁵⁶ The New York upper class dominated by merchants found these industrialists, many of whom had risen from artisan backgrounds, crude.⁵⁷ Many of these industrialists also had different outlooks from the merchants. For example, many industrialists considered themselves artisans and inventors versus refined men of leisure as in the case of the merchants. The industrialists also founded their own institutions like the American and Mechanics Institutes, dedicated to educate workers in trade and craft.⁵⁸

The New York upper class had traditionally been Protestant, specifically Episcopalian for the ultra rich and fashionable. Grace Church was the most fashionable church in New York and pew membership there was coveted and difficult to obtain.⁵⁹ There was a sprinkling of Catholics in the upper class, yet this largely did not belong to

⁵⁴ Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 142, 174.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 176-177.

⁵⁶ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 874-875; Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 146.

⁵⁷ Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 62-63.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 113-114.

the Four Hundred.⁶⁰ America at the end of the Gilded Age saw the decline of Protestantism as new religions such as theosophy and New Thought emerged, which had their origins in Mind Cure, the belief that people could shape their own destinies and achieve total happiness.⁶¹ Yet upper-class adherence to Protestantism remained strong even toward the end of the Gilded Age.⁶² In fact, church membership spoke to the ideas of continuity and tradition, two ideas valued among the upper class. In addition, membership in a certain church could act as cultural capital in a war of social distinction that distinguished the elite of the elite from the rest of the upper class or at the very least distinguish the social fractions within the upper class.⁶³

Membership in upper-class New York in its earliest days was based on wealth, profession, and lineage. The old Knickerbocker elites, or those with a respectable Dutch heritage, were largely mercantile, with a sprinkling of lawyers, doctors, and land owners.⁶⁴ Upper-class status was defined as much by length of respectable residence in New York as by inherited wealth that dated back at least three generations.⁶⁵ The

⁶⁰ For more on Catholicism in the upper class, see David C. Hammack, *Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1982), 69, 305.

⁶¹ William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of the New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books), 226-227. Both New-Thought mind curers and theosophists believed in salvation in this life and were opposed to the traditional Christian idea of salvation after life. New-Thought mind curers and theosophists also studied pagan beliefs and world religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism to find the “meta-spirit” behind all religions. The central tenet of New Thought and theosophy was that thinking positive, creative, and happy thoughts would cause one to gain good things in life and this would “cure” unhappy and under-achieved people. Although mind cure ideology was found more compatible with the business and ecumenical spirit of the times in advocating that wealth was within reach of the individual, there was no evidence that the New York upper class took up these ideas. If anything it was more likely that the Four Hundred rejected these ideas since they valued exclusivity, and for people to achieve wealth or entrance into Society merely by positive thinking would have undermined the claim that only a few select individuals could enter Society. The Four Hundred then, was more interested in the making of an aristocratic Society in New York.

⁶² Hammack, *Power and Society*, 307.

⁶³ For more on upper class church membership please see Hammack, *Power and Society*, 78-79. For more on the exclusiveness and fashionableness attached to pew membership at Grace Church see Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 113-114.

⁶⁴ Jaher, *The Urban Establishment*, 160, 223.

⁶⁵ Frederic Cople Jaher, “Style and Status: High Society in Late Nineteenth-Century New York,” in *The Rich, The Well Born, and the Powerful: Elite and Upper Classes in History*, ed. Frederic Cople Jaher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 266, 270.

length of time one's family had been in the upper class or respectable society guaranteed the individual's knowledge of upper-class etiquette and rituals through the kind of education he or she received as well as the knowledge Society members had about the family.⁶⁶ Society before the Civil War was relatively small and insular, and the intimate knowledge its members had about one another was a safeguard against associating with disrespectable people or potential fortune hunters.⁶⁷ As such, Society was largely static and homogeneous with shared values, outlooks, lifestyles, manners, and etiquette.

In order to hold on to the social power they already possessed, those in the New York upper class sought to control entrance to the upper class by keeping the number in Society low and thereby more coveted.⁶⁸ However, after the Civil War, upper-class society was confronted with the problem of keeping Society small and insular with the influx of the newly rich from different backgrounds. In addition to the industrialists, there was also an influx of businessmen from all over the country who congregated in New York, by now a leading metropolis in the country.⁶⁹ The wealthy in New York numbered in the thousands by the end of the Gilded Age.⁷⁰ It was against this backdrop that the New York Four Hundred was formed under the auspices of Mrs. Caroline Astor and her

⁶⁶ For more on elite education see C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 66-67; Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 169-170; Maureen E. Montgomery, "Female Rituals and the Politics of the New York Marriage Market in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Family History* 23, no. 1 (January 1998): 49-50, <http://www.sagepublications.com/>; Mary Rech Rockwell, "Elite Women and Class Formation," in *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Sven Beckert and Julia B. Rosenbaum (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 156-157; Mary Cable, *Top Drawer: American High Society from the Gilded Age to the Roaring Twenties* (New York: Atheneum, 1984), 38, 42; and Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 36-37.

⁶⁷ Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 142-143.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 185-186.

⁶⁹ Frederic Cople Jaher, "Nineteenth Century Elites in Boston and New York," *Journal of Social History* 6, no. 1 (Autumn, 1972): 49-50, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

⁷⁰ Jaher, "Style and Status," 267.

right hand man Ward McAllister.⁷¹ Caroline herself came from a Knickerbocker family.⁷² Yet she chose to marry an outsider, William Backhouse Astor, the grandson of John Jacob Astor, the wealthiest American at the time of his death in 1848.⁷³ From the time of Caroline's marriage to William in 1854, there had been no lack of marriages between the scions of the Knickerbocker elite and wealthy men outside of the Knickerbocker circle.⁷⁴ Yet the definition of what constituted upper class as narrowly defined by the Knickerbocker elites was unstable, especially in the event of intermarriage with outsiders. Caroline Astor, herself married to an outsider, with the help of Ward McAllister, himself an outsider from Georgia, sought to renew the definition of upper class that could potentially accommodate some outsiders while closing the door to most.⁷⁵ The enormous wealth of the Four Hundred made them formidable forces to reckon with for the older Knickerbocker elites. That coupled with their knowledge of upper-class rituals and etiquette as well as the overlap in membership between the older Knickerbockers and the Four Hundred gave the Four Hundred added legitimacy and influence.

While holding true to the old Knickerbocker ideal of mellowed wealth (at least three generations to be precise) and lineage, the Four Hundred did allow some men to enter Society because of their individual skill and tact. In other words, it made allowances for men with the social skills to navigate Society such as Ward McAllister, his successor Harry Lehr, another self-proclaimed social arbiter who married wealth, and

⁷¹ The term Four Hundred referred to the social fraction under Caroline Astor and Ward McAllister in upper class New York. It was coined by Ward McAllister to the press in 1893, a move which subsequently gave publicity and celebrity to this social fraction. The term had been so popular that it had been used to describe elites in other eastern seaboard cities such as Philadelphia and Boston to show that a similar kind of exclusiveness and upper-class culture in these cities existed at the time. Overall, the Four Hundred was a term used to denote the cream of the crop in Society. See *Town Topics* Vol. XXVIII – No. 8, August 25, 1892, 2.

⁷² Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 237, 239.

⁷³ "New York Millionaires," *The New York Times*, Dec. 26, 1878, 4.

⁷⁴ Wecter, *The Saga of American Society*, 130. It is important to highlight that those who deserted their Knickerbocker social circle such as Caroline Astor to marry outsiders did not endear themselves to the Knickerbockers. The deserters did not increase interaction between the group they left behind and the group they helped to form, and the Knickerbockers and the Four Hundred remained two distinct groups. For more, see Jaher, "Style and Status," 270.

⁷⁵ McAllister, *Society as I have Found It* (New York: Cassell Publishing Company, 1890), 6, 214.

the bon-vivant Wall Street broker William R. Travers.⁷⁶ However, this was true mostly for men, while a socially ambitious woman without the support of her husband was unlikely to have such avenue to social distinction. Moreover, the Four Hundred were not always immune to the attractions of large wealth, such as those of Cornelius Vanderbilt II and J. Pierpont Morgan, who made it on the list of Patriarchs, subscribers of the Patriarch Balls, in the 1880s when the list was enlarged from twenty-five to fifty.⁷⁷ Yet wealth alone was not enough. The railway tycoon Collis P. Huntington, who did not have the requisite social credentials, was shunned by Society despite building a large Romanesque mansion on Fifth Avenue, close to the residence of Cornelius Vanderbilt II.⁷⁸ J. Pierpont Morgan came from a respectable family in New England and the third generation of Vanderbilts had more aristocratic pretensions than the founder of the Vanderbilt dynasty, who was averse to spending his wealth for social gain.⁷⁹ At the very least, true to the idea of mellowed wealth, the Vanderbilt millions had been passed down for three generations by the time Cornelius Vanderbilt II had made it on the list of Patriarchs. Aside from the possession of large wealth, what the Four Hundred all had in common was their active participation in Society by either hosting or subscribing to Society entertainments and entertaining lavishly on a large scale.⁸⁰ Society was the arena where social battles were fought and the participation of the Four Hundred in entertaining and in entertainments attested to that fact.

All in all, the conspicuous display of wealth through lavish entertainment and dress as well as the courting of publicity was the calling card of the Four Hundred, one which was decried by the inward-looking Knickerbocker elites as vulgar and nouveaux-

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Drexel Lehr, *King Lehr and the Gilded Age* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1935), 130-131; "William R. Travers Dead: Final Rest of a Man Universally Popular," *The New York Times*, Mar. 28, 1887, 2; McAllister, *Society as I*, 240-241.

⁷⁷ "At the Patriarch's Ball," *The New York Times*, Dec. 30, 1885, 5; "The Patriarchs at Delmonico's," *The New York Times*, Dec. 21, 1887, 4.

⁷⁸ Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 217.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 271-272.

⁸⁰ The lavish entertaining was done at least by the wives of the Four Hundred if not always by the husbands, who devoted their time to work and other leisure activities such as men's clubs, yachting, and horse racing. However, the wealth of the husbands often helped sustain such entertainments. See *Town Topics*, Vol. XIX – No. 19, May 10, 1888, 6; Maureen Montgomery, *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton's New York* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 23, 128.

riches.⁸¹ To the older elites, breeding was more important than conspicuous display.⁸² However, to the Four Hundred, conspicuous display was just as important if not more important in ensuring one's upper-class status. While the most dominated group of the dominant class, the nouveaux-riches, who were neither a part of the Four Hundred nor a part of the Knickerbockers, were able to participate to a certain extent in conspicuous consumption and the lavish display of wealth, they were nonetheless limited in their knowledge of upper-class rituals and etiquette.⁸³ There was also the problem of lineage, which nothing short of marriage with a person of impeccable lineage could possibly solve.

It was this combination of nouveaux-riches conspicuousness and emphasis on upper class etiquette and rituals combined with newspaper publicity that helped the Four Hundred dominate upper-class society.⁸⁴ The Patriarch Balls, the epitome of

⁸¹ The Knickerbocker elites were "inward-looking" in that they tended to retreat from public life or publicity. They entertained their own small coterie of like-minded friends and relatives comparatively less lavishly than the Four Hundred and lived in uniform and unostentatious Brownstone houses as opposed to the magnificent mansions on Fifth Avenue. Their retreat into their own social circle and their failure to grasp the importance of publicity in the making of social statuses made the Four Hundred the dominant force in upper-class society, whose celebrity was helped by the publicity of the press as by their own conspicuous display of wealth. See Jaher, "Style and Status," 281-282.

⁸² Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), 20-21; Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer, *The Social Ladder* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1924), 30-31; Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (New York: D. Appleton, 1920), 26.

⁸³ There were subsequently etiquette manuals published in the nineteenth century aimed to help social aspirants to enter Society. The authors of these etiquette manuals were deemed traitors of their own classes and generally published these manuals to make money when their economic circumstances were less than ideal. See Mary Cable, *Top Drawer*, 60. However, in the interest of keeping the Four Hundred the dominant fraction of the dominant class, etiquette and rituals plus the conspicuous display of wealth were not enough to ensure that a limited number of people could gain entrance to Society. It was how one spent one's money that was also at stake. The Four Hundred sought to be the social arbiters in how money was spent by the upper class, and the Patriarch and Assembly Balls were one such arena that purported to show how money should be spent in the upper class to show breeding, culture, and hence social dominance.

⁸⁴ For more on the relationship between the upper class and the Gilded Age press, please see Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York* and Amanda Mackenzie Stuart, *Consuelo and Alva Vanderbilt: A Story of a Daughter and a Mother in the Gilded Age* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007). For more on Gilded Age Press, please see Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States through 260 Years: 1690 to 1950*, rev. ed (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950); George H. Douglas, *The golden Age of the Newspaper* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999); and Ted Curtis Smythe, *The Gilded Age Press, 1865-1900* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003).

conspicuous display and upper-class ritual and etiquette, were one such arena where the social statuses of the Four Hundred were made and where upper-class identity was reconceived. While the Four Hundred were composed of members from the Knickerbocker elites as well as a few of the comparatively newer elements to the upper class, who made up the Four Hundred was largely based on invitation to entertainments held by the Four Hundred, of which the Patriarch and Assembly Balls were central. Given the high publicity given to these events, the Patriarch Balls were ideal sites for the Four Hundred to articulate their values as elites and by extension how they wanted others to perceive them or the elite identity they wanted to portray.

At the same time, the Four Hundred did not merely combine nouveaux-riches conspicuous consumption and Knickerbocker stress on etiquette and ritual. The combination of these two elite characteristics produced a new kind of elite identity. This new elite identity was based on how one spent one's money and not merely on spending money lavishly or performing upper-class rituals and etiquette. This of course put up an extra barrier to those attempting to enter the Four Hundred, as not everyone possessed enough wealth to spend on breeding racehorses, buying large country estates, yacht racing, fox hunting in the countryside, building large chateaux-like mansions on Fifth Avenue, buying famous works of art and antiques from Europe, buying the furniture and jewellery of European monarchs, buying or renting cottages at Newport, entertaining European aristocrats, giving daughters substantial dowries to attract impoverished aristocrats for husbands, giving money to British aristocrats to enter court circles or be introduced to the Queen, making annual trans-Atlantic journeys to Europe to sight see, honeymoon, recuperate from illness or buy clothes from noted couturiers, buying and restoring European castles, bringing out one's daughter in a debutante ball, and subscribing to or attending balls and Society entertainments that required buying more than 90 dresses for women each social season.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ *Town Topics*, Vol. XXVIII – No. 19, November 10, 1892, 2; *Town Topics*, Vol. XIX – No. 19, May 10, 1888, 6; *Town Topics*, Vol. XXVIII – No. 16, October 20, 1892, 2; *Town Topics*, Vol. XXVIII – No. 1, July 7, 1892, 2; *Town Topics*, Vol. XXX – No. 5, August 3, 1893, 10; *Town Topics*, Vol. XVIII – No. 21, November 24, 1887, 5; *Town Topics*, Vol. XVIII – No. 23, December 8, 1887, 1; *Town Topics*, Vol. XVIII – No. 24, December 15, 1887, 1.

This specific way of spending money was partly based on Society rituals. For example, when summering at Newport, members of Society appeared twice a day in a phaeton on Bellevue Avenue in a different dress, swam at private Bailey's Beach from a private cabana, lunched on a yacht moored at the harbour or at a fête champêtre at a farm, attended the polo field, dined with a further change in costume, and attended a ball at a cottage on Bellevue Avenue.⁸⁶ Society life in New York was also ritualistic, which involved attendance at the Opera on Monday nights, twice to thrice attendance at the Patriarch and Assembly Balls each winter season, bringing out daughters from late October to December in teas or debutante dances, and attending sports, reading or sewing clubs or entertainments for charity during Lent. Society rituals were so rigidly observed that participation in all these rituals became a marker of one's elite status. On the other hand, the specific way of spending money was meant to bolster the social status of participants. The large amount of money the Four Hundred spent by looking to Europe, a continent long admired for its culture and refinement, was supposed to present a view of the Four Hundred as sophisticated and well-bred, if not patrons of culture. The cultural knowledge the Four Hundred gained from looking to the long traditions and history of Europe was supposed to establish the Four Hundred as the arbiters of taste or the dominant fraction of the dominant class. At the very least, this very purposeful expenditure of money was meant to distinguish the Four Hundred from those who could not or did not spend their money in the same way. How money was spent therefore became a part of the Four Hundred's new articulation of elite identity.

The Patriarch Balls were one such site where purposeful spending took place that articulated an elite identity. There appeared to be a general consensus among the Four Hundred about how money was best spent, that is, the spending of money not only for entertainment but also for consolidating one's social power. The Four Hundred were certainly socially ambitious. The Patriarch and Assembly Balls were arenas where the Four Hundred spent their money purposefully for the aim of accruing the social distinctions that granted them the social power to rule New York Society.

⁸⁶ Amanda Mackenzie Stuart, *Consuelo and Alva Vanderbilt: The Story of a Mother and a Daughter in the Gilded Age* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 77.

Everything from décor, food, dining, and dancing to dress and socializing at the Patriarch and Assembly Balls was meant to give the participants at these balls social distinction. The décor at a Patriarch Ball was very elaborate. An 1893 Patriarch Ball is representative. Tall palm trees and a profusion of exotic and expensive flowers imported from the South created a veritable tropical paradise. The large amount of flowers and plants used to decorate a Patriarch Ball could be gleaned from the following account in *The New York Times*:

A dense mass of palms formed a background for clusters of parti-colored chrysanthemums, the few intervals being filled with maidenhair ferns and smilax...From ceiling to floor, the walls of the corridors, the halls, and the minor rooms were curtained with green and beautiful things...Festoons of flowers cut off odd corners, and the delicate fronds of ferns peeped out in all kinds of unexpected places. In the ballroom there were huge garlands of roses hang around the walls...The doors were screened by foliage and the musicians' gallery looked like a miniature hanging garden of Babylon.⁸⁷

Since the Patriarch Balls took place in the winter, fresh flowers were scarce in New York and had to be imported from warmer climates at a large expense. In addition, the stress on tall palm trees also proved an added expense to the subscribers of the ball. Since palm trees were not native to New York and tall ones were even more difficult to procure, florists sometimes went to great lengths to add to the height of their palm trees artificially, an effort which no doubt was reflected on the bill to the subscribers. The profusion of flowers required at these balls sometimes required the inventories from several florists.⁸⁸ However, instead of being daunted by the large expenditure on décor alone, the subscribers never used cheaper artificial flowers or cut down on the décor even in times of economic depression, showing that the possession of enough economic capital to enjoy the best and freshest décor even during the dips in the economy gave the participants an added social distinction. The conspicuous display of wealth at the Patriarch Balls not only distinguished the Four Hundred from those who did not or could not practice this but also showed the Four Hundred to be those economically able to lead upper-class society.

⁸⁷ "Merry Dancers were They," *The New York Times*, Dec. 14, 1893, 5.

⁸⁸ "Balls and Dinner-Dances," *The New York Times*, Jan. 22, 1893, 12.

In addition, flowers were thrown away after every ball or given away to servants.⁸⁹ This painted a picture of conspicuous waste, in keeping with the nouveaux-riches influence of the Four Hundred's re-articulation of elite identity in Gilded Age New York. The upper class as defined by the Four Hundred displayed their wealth ostentatiously. Even practices that would have been considered as wasteful by contemporary observers in the view of the Four Hundred were justified in the pursuit of social power.⁹⁰ Economic prowess, and specifically the conspicuous display of economic capital, was therefore central to the Four Hundred's rearticulation of elite identity. All the expenditures at the balls were meant to display the capital possessed by the Four Hundred whether economic, cultural, or even social, that projected them as the rightful rulers of New York Society.

The food served at the Patriarch Balls also helped to distinguish the Four Hundred as members and social leaders of the upper class. Even food could be used as symbols of class distinction.⁹¹ The Four Hundred were certainly highly conscious of this fact and used the food served at the Patriarch and Assembly Balls to assert their own claim to social power. For one, the staple dishes at a Patriarch and Assembly Ball were canvasback ducks and diamond-backed terrapin.⁹² Both the canvasback ducks and the diamond-backed terrapin were near extinction at the end of the Gilded Age.⁹³ This meant that the procurement of these rare food items required a large amount of economic capital and social capital.

The organizers of the Patriarch and Assembly Balls needed to know not only who to go to in order to purchase these items but also to have the social pull for vendors to sell them these already rare items when there was so much competition for them among

⁸⁹ "Balls and Dinner-Dances," *The New York Times*, Jan. 22, 1893, 12.

⁹⁰ Economist Thorstein Veblen was one such individual who considered such conspicuous display wasteful. See Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 68-69.

⁹¹ Anne Mendelson, "Goodbye to the Marketplace: Food and Exclusivity in Nineteenth-Century New York," in *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Sven Beckert and Julia Rosenbaum, 11, 24 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

⁹² "Launched into Society," *The New York Times*, Dec. 9, 1884, 4; "A Great Social Success," *The New York Times*, Jan. 14, 1892, 8; "Society's Winter Season," *The New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1896, 10.

⁹³ Mendelson, "Goodbye to the Marketplace," 21.

other elite circles.⁹⁴ The fact that the Patriarch and Assembly Balls almost always had these items at every ball for more than twenty-five years attested to not only the economic capital of the organizers who could afford these rare items but also to the social capital they possessed to procure these items in the first place. It was unlikely for a lower-class person or even a nouveau-riche risen from the lower classes to have heard of these dishes let alone know where to procure them or how to cook them without learning this information from someone knowledgeable in this matter.

Furthermore, the fact that the organizers of the Patriarch and Assembly Balls knew to serve terrapin and canvasback ducks spoke to the cultural knowledge of the Four Hundred in relation to the organizing of an upper-class ball. It also bore witness to the knowledge of the Four Hundred in upper-class etiquette, rituals, and even in the latest trend among upper classes in other cities. Terrapins for example, were so popular that there were rivalries among Baltimorean and Philadelphian elites about the best way to cook them.⁹⁵ As an exhibition of the cultural knowledge the Four Hundred possessed about the upper class, the Patriarch Ball in 1895 served terrapin in white sauce, the preferred way of cooking terrapin among Philadelphian elites.⁹⁶ Therefore, in the matter of food, the Four Hundred exhibited three distinct capitals – economic, social, and cultural in the aid of their social ambition.

In addition, the preoccupation the New York Four Hundred had about serving French dishes further exhibited the cultural pretensions of the Four Hundred. This kind of cultural snobbery was meant to help the Four Hundred further assert their legitimacy to rule the New York upper class to their peers and the general public alike. Dishes served by Knickerbocker hostesses in the 1870s and 1880s had simpler and more self-explanatory names in English, such as oysters, ducks, celery and lettuce, and sweetbreads in cups.⁹⁷ In contrast, the Four Hundred served a variety of French dishes at the Patriarch and Assembly Balls. The menu at the February 6, 1894 Patriarch Ball

⁹⁴ “Gay Dancers at Delmonico’s,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1894, 8; McAllister, *Society As I*, 260-261.

⁹⁵ McAllister, *Society As I*, 260-261; “Third in a Gay Series,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1893, 5; “Gay Dancers at Delmonico’s,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1894, 8.

⁹⁶ “The Patriarchs’ Dance,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 15, 1895, 13.

⁹⁷ Mendelson, “Goodbye to the Marketplace,” 22-23.

was a close to thirty course supper all written in French. The dishes included such long and difficult to pronounce names as aspices de foies-gras historie, pluviers et becassines à la gelee, and pâte de gibier aux truffes; those uninitiated in French cuisine and language would have had a difficult time knowing what they were eating let alone consuming the food using the proper utensils and dining etiquette. A section of the menu on February 6 reads:

PATRIARCHS.

MENU.

CHAUD.

Bouillon.

Huitres a la Hollandaise.

Croquettes de poulardes.

Bouchees a la Chevreuse.

Filet de boeuf, Montebello.

Terrapene a l'epicurienne.

The et Café.

FROID.

Galatine a l'Anglaise.

Chapons farcis a la gelit.

Aspices de foies-gras, historie.

Pate de gibier aux truffes.

Pigeonneaux, Chau-froid.

Mayonnaise de volaille.

Salade de homard.

Sandwiches.

Rillettes.

Canapes.⁹⁸

The French menu showed off the upper-class training of the Four Hundred, which had long included foreign languages such as French in the education of the young.⁹⁹ It also

⁹⁸ "Dance of the Patriarchs," *The New York Times*, Feb. 6, 1894, 3.

⁹⁹ "Her Point of View," *The New York Times*, Feb. 8, 1891, 11.

showed the refinement of the Four Hundred in the matter of eating, which surpassed that of the older Knickerbocker elites with their simpler menus. Moreover, it spoke to the more cosmopolitan outlook of the Four Hundred, which was in contrast to the more provincial Knickerbocker elites.

Moreover, the popularity of French chefs and French cooking among the upper class by the end of the Gilded Age was further evidence of the Four Hundred's keen awareness of fashion trends and openness to new ideas as well as their understanding of the potential that French food afforded for playing the status game. At a time when French chefs were expensive to hire and only the richest hostesses enjoyed the services of one in their own homes, upper-class hostesses toward the end of the Gilded Age were advised to entertain in high-class restaurants such as Delmonico's if they did not employ a French chef at home.¹⁰⁰ Delmonico's was the venue of choice for the Patriarch Balls and later the Assembly Balls for many years.¹⁰¹ The choice of Delmonico's for the balls was a deliberate one. Participants at the Patriarch and Assembly Balls could ensure the enjoyment of French cooking prepared by French chefs, the kind of cooking which took time to prepare and artistry and training on the part of the chefs. The time it took to prepare French food showed off the leisurely status of the Four Hundred, who could take long multi-course dinners at an hour when most people would have been in bed. The artistry of the food also showed the Four Hundred's ability to appreciate refined food and thereby add to their cultural capital. Moreover, the identification between venues such as Delmonico's and an upper-class clientele, and the ability to waste time to no apparent purpose,¹⁰² further put an upper class stamp on these balls. These were all further evidence of the Four Hundred's claim to cultural capital as well as their possession of economic capital.

Even the matter of dining exhibited the knowledge the Four Hundred had about upper-class etiquette and rituals, and thereby further cemented the right of the Four

¹⁰⁰ Mendelson, "Goodbye to the Marketplace," 23-24.

¹⁰¹ "The Patriarchs' Ball," *The New York Times*, Feb. 10, 1880, 5; "The Society World," *The New York Times*, Feb. 2, 1883, 5.

¹⁰² Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu spoke of the ability to waste time to no apparent purpose as an upper class trait. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 282.

Hundred to rule New York Society. The upper-class education and training in etiquette, which members learned at a young age, came in handy at these events. The Patriarch and Assembly Balls generally started late in the evening, around ten or eleven o'clock at night. After the guests arrived at the ball, they were shown to dressing rooms divided by sex to get ready for the ball.¹⁰³ Then, once they entered the ballroom, general dancing would ensue until supper time.

Supper time usually started around twelve thirty in the morning and lasted for about an hour.¹⁰⁴ Supper time was declared when a prominent member of the Patriarchs led his lady escort, usually the most prominent woman guest present, into the dining room, followed by the rest of the guests.¹⁰⁵ The gentlemen then escorted the ladies whom they had been dancing with or chatting with into the supper room.¹⁰⁶ According to upper-class etiquette, during dinner, a gentleman sat beside his lady partner and attended to her every need. Then, at the conclusion of the supper, the gentlemen remained standing while the ladies filed out the door.¹⁰⁷

After supper, the cotillion was danced for about an hour and a half, which often lasted until the end of the ball, or around three thirty in the morning.¹⁰⁸ A cotillion leader was first selected by the management committee to lead the cotillion, and the cotillion leader then selected and introduced each figure of the cotillion, gave instructions to the musicians, designated the number of couples required for the proposed figures, urged the tardy dancers, and signalled those who occupied the dance floor too long. In other words, the cotillion leader ensured the success of the cotillion.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ *The Manners that Win* (Minneapolis: Buckeye Publishing Co., 1880), 132.

¹⁰⁴ "The Patriarch's Ball," *The New York Times*, Jan. 10, 1882, 8; "The Last of the Season," *The New York Times*, Feb. 26, 1886, 4.

¹⁰⁵ "The Patriarchs' Dance," *The New York Times*, Feb. 18, 1890; Mrs. John Sherwood, *Manners and Social Usages* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1897), 144.

¹⁰⁶ *Social Etiquette of New York* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1884), 87-88.

¹⁰⁷ Lydia E. White, *Success in Society: A Manual of Good Manners* (Boston: James H. Earle Publisher, 1889), 151-152.

¹⁰⁸ "The Patriarchs' Dance," *The New York Times*, Feb. 9, 1890, 8; "First of the Assembly Balls," *The New York Times*, Jan. 8, 1892, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Allen Dodworth, *Assistant for A. Dodworth's Pupils* (New York: Nesbitt and Co. Printers, 1878), 22.

The organizers of the ball put in much effort to ensure that hierarchy and order were observed. Everything was organized down to the minutest detail to ensure order and the success of the entertainment, so as to make the statement that the Four Hundred were the *crème de la crème* of New York Society. The Patriarch and Assembly Balls were supposed to be formal entertainments conducted in a stately and dignified manner suited to the social status the participants felt belonged to them. There was a measure of self-restraint detected at these balls, and hedonistic enjoyment for its own sake, which was often associated with the *nouveaux-riches*, was not countenanced.

At the last Patriarch Ball of 1885, the Patriarchs and their partners danced “Sir Roger de Coverley” to show the solemnity of the occasion.¹¹⁰ The Patriarchs were each paired with a partner before hand, so even who danced with whom in this particular case was organized before hand to ensure that everything went off in an orderly way.¹¹¹ The Second Patriarch Ball of 1890 also went off in an orderly and organized way with social hierarchy observed at the same time. At 11:30 p.m., the start of the ball, music was promptly played. At 12:30 p.m., Ward McAllister, the manager of the Patriarch Ball, led Mrs. Astor, the most prominent Society woman at the event, to the supper room for dinner. Dinner was served at small tables, and McAllister arranged so that each Patriarch sat at the head of each table with his invited guests. There was also a committee’s table, which included Ward McAllister and Mrs. Astor. After dinner, at exactly 1:30 a.m., Amory S. Carhart, the pre-selected cotillion leader, danced with Mrs. Paget, the daughter of a prominent matron of the Four Hundred as well as the wife of a British man with aristocratic heritage. The cotillion was danced after the British fashion without a break for exactly an hour and a quarter, after which time the ball came to an end.¹¹²

The Knickerbocker influence on the Four Hundred’s rearticulation of elite identity, with its stress on etiquette, rituals, and self-restraint could be seen in dining practices at the Patriarch and Assembly Balls. For example, while there was always a supply of

¹¹⁰ “Sir Roger de Coverley” is a type of country dance associated with rigid etiquette once popular in European Court Balls.

¹¹¹ “The World of Society,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 15, 1885, 3.

¹¹² “Guests of the Patriarchs,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 21, 1890, 8.

alcohol at the Patriarch and Assembly Balls, to be drunk at these entertainments, especially in front of the women was considered bad form, as were other actions such as coming to blows with others, eating unreasonably, blocking the tables, or smoking in the dressing room for men.¹¹³ Given the number of debutantes who attended these events, the amount of alcohol served at these events had to be controlled, since it was improper to launch young girls in the midst of too much alcohol.¹¹⁴ Clearly, maintaining proper upper-class decorum and propriety by showing self-restraint even in the midst of merry-making was central to these entertainments, not least because the chastity of upper-class women, a most precious commodity, was at stake. Anyone caught breaking rules and etiquette would have risked being blackballed from Society and ruined the chance of making beneficial business or family contacts.

In addition, far from gulping down the twenty-plus-course meal according to their own fancy, the Four Hundred were expected to eat in a measured way and pace themselves. Dinner at the Patriarch and Assembly Balls lasted from one hour to an hour and a half.¹¹⁵ According to etiquette manuals of the day, the fork was not supposed to be overloaded with food, but modest mouthfuls were to be taken. In addition, the spoon was not supposed to be put too far into the mouth, so as to look too eager in food consumption. The elbow was supposed to always form a ninety degree angle to bring the food straight into the mouth. Then, the knife was not supposed to be put into the mouth or be used like a fork.¹¹⁶ Aside from the various spoons, forks, and knives designed to eat the different courses, the table was supposed to be cleared of every dish and utensils before the next course was served.¹¹⁷ All these spoke to the upper-class preoccupation with form, as eating was as much form as function in the upper class. The performance of etiquette, ritual, and sensibility of self-restraint was evidence of the cultural capital of the Four Hundred and their upper-class outlook and training, which was meant to help bolster their claim to be leaders of New York Society.

¹¹³ Sherwood, *Manners and Social Usages*, 148.

¹¹⁴ "The Wrath of McAllister," *The New York Times*, May 5, 1889, 4.

¹¹⁵ "Society's Winter Season," *The New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1896, 10; McAllister, *Society as I*, 295.

¹¹⁶ Sherwood, *Manners and Social Usages*, 360, 362.

¹¹⁷ *The Manners that Win*, 169.

Dancing was also an arena where the Four Hundred bolstered their claim to be the social leaders of the New York upper class. The rigid observance of etiquette and rituals showed their knowledge of elite culture. In addition, the importation of ideas from the British aristocracy gave them an additional cultural capital that distinguished them from people who did not have the same cultural knowledge. The debutantes who came to the Patriarch and Assembly Balls all had chaperons to watch over them.¹¹⁸ According to etiquette manuals of the day, a debutante was not supposed to show preferences for any gentleman and was supposed to dance with whoever asked her to dance unless she decided to sit out the entire dance. At the same time, a debutante was not obligated to acknowledge, speak to, or dance with any gentleman not properly introduced to her by the hostess or a mutual acquaintance.¹¹⁹ Even when a young man asked her to dance, the young man was supposed to first address her chaperon and then bring her right back to her chaperon after the dance.¹²⁰ A debutante was not supposed to disappear without the knowledge of her chaperon.¹²¹ Mrs. Burton Harrison, a contemporary commentator on social life and etiquette in New York remarks in her book *The Well Bred Girl in Society* that all the rigid ball etiquette was sometimes taxing on young debutantes who

if they might only fraternize with each other, cross the ballroom hand in hand, go into supper likewise, and, better than all, dance together, without proclaiming themselves wallflowers, what a merry set our debutantes would be! Untrammelled by absurd necessity, the girls who now sit, often grave and spiritless, beside their protectors [chaperons], would then take flight, chirping and chattering like a flock of birds.¹²²

Despite the restriction on the young women, all this etiquette was meant to help ensure that a debutante had the most opportunity to attract the best suitors. The implication here was that any young man who did not follow this etiquette was not well-bred and therefore not worth knowing, and showing preferences by keeping oneself occupied by

¹¹⁸ "Dancing at Delmonico's," *The New York Times*, Jan. 4, 1881, 5.

¹¹⁹ *The Manners that Win*, 143.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 138-139.

¹²¹ Mrs. Burton Harrison, *The Well-Bred Girl in Society* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1898), 14.

¹²² Harrison, *The Well-Bred Girl*, 11.

one gentleman impeded a debutante's chances of attracting other suitors who might have been an even better prospect for the young girl or her family. The idea here is that a young woman should be able to socialize with as many eligible young men from good families as possible and take her pick from those that approached her. Since balls such as the Patriarch and Assembly were sites for upper-class courtship and heterosociability, an activity that had the social positions if not the material wealth of the families involved at stake, the Four Hundred's strict observance of etiquette showed that they were well qualified to host upper-class balls and thereby bolster their claim to social leadership.

In addition, according to upper-class etiquette, when the men and women of the Four Hundred were on the dance floor, they should not dance conspicuously. Ladies, for example, should not carry their trains with one hand, because such actions were considered affected. Nor should ladies dip their knees when dancing, as it was considered ungraceful.¹²³ For the gentlemen, conspicuous actions consisted of holding their partner's hand behind their back, on their hip, or lifted up high in the air. Neither should they move their hands up and down when dancing.¹²⁴ It was in dancing that a person's upper-class breeding and training was evident. Those who danced conspicuously due to carelessness later found that their social careers were either brief or unpromising.¹²⁵ Having gone to upper-class dancing schools such as Dodworth's at a young age helped to distinguish the Four Hundred from those whose wealth were newly acquired. The cotillion, a main feature at these balls, was a relatively difficult dance to learn; it required the mastery of different types of dances such as waltzes, mazurkas, and polkas.¹²⁶ The cotillion was an intricate dance composed of many different figures, which could change any time at the discretion of the cotillion leader.¹²⁷ A person who was not a good dancer, did not know the figures, or did not have the proper training in dance techniques and posture would have appeared either foolish or lost during the cotillion. In addition, the cotillion at a large ball like the Patriarch and the Assembly could

¹²³ Harrison, *The Well-Bred Girl*, 14-15.

¹²⁴ *The Manners that Win*, 169.

¹²⁵ Harrison, *The Well-Bred Girl*, 15.

¹²⁶ Philip J.S. Richardson, *The Social Dances of the Nineteenth Century in England* (London: Herbert Jenkins Ltd., 1960), 50, 100.

¹²⁷ Sherwood, *Manners and Social Usages*, 156, 158.

consist of up to one hundred and seventy-five couples, who took up most of the ballroom.¹²⁸ The ability to carry off a successful cotillion with ease and grace with a large group of dancers amidst a potentially chaotic situation showed the skills and training of the Four Hundred. It was in dancing that the Four Hundred further exhibited their cultural capital.

Aside from the Knickerbocker influence on dancing etiquette, the Four Hundred also imported ideas from the British aristocracy to help bolster their claim to Society leadership. The Patriarch Ball was modeled on the Almack's Ball of the British aristocracy.¹²⁹ This fact helped exhibit the cultural capital of the Four Hundred as knowledgeable in elite entertaining and in particular in how the aristocracy entertained. In addition, the Patriarch and Assembly Balls were called "functions," a term imported from the British aristocracy. This term was subsequently publicized in Society pages and the origins explained by the press.¹³⁰ This no doubt helped publicize the knowledge of the Four Hundred about the British aristocracy and by extension their supposed culture and refinement. Then, the cotillion, the highlight of these balls, was danced for one and a half hours continuously after the British fashion, another fact noted by the press to curious readers.¹³¹ Invitations given out for the 1892 Patriarch Ball were in the style of large square English invitations. Moreover, the cotillion danced on the same night began with the rapid English step.¹³² Most significantly, the cotillion, a dance popular in the British aristocratic and French royal circles, was a staple feature at these balls.¹³³ This spoke to the knowledge the Four Hundred had about European upper classes as well as their own social pretensions. All this helped support the Four Hundred's claim to be the arbiters of taste in the upper class, as the Four Hundred not

¹²⁸"Second Assembly Ball," *The New York Times*, Feb. 19, 1892, 5; "Dancing at Delmonico's," *The New York Times*, Dec. 5, 1882, 12.

¹²⁹ McAllister, *Society as I*, 211-212; "Second Ball of the Patriarchs," *The New York Times*, Jan. 18, 1881, 8. For more on Almack's Ball, see *The Ball; or, A Glance at Almack's in 1829* (London: Henry Colburn, 1829).

¹³⁰ "Society's Winter Season," *The New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1896, 10; "Society Topics of the Week," *The New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1890, 13.

¹³¹ "In Handsome Costumes," *The New York Times*, Jan. 6, 1893, 8; "The Patriarchs' Dance," *The New York Times*, Feb. 18, 1890, 8.

¹³² "A Great Social Success," *The New York Times*, Jan. 14, 1892, 8.

¹³³ Richardson, *The Social Dances*, 52, 99; "The Week in Society," *New-York Daily Tribune*, Jan. 18, 1885, 7; "The Week in Society," *New-York Daily Tribune*, Dec. 7, 1890, 7.

only possessed knowledge about Knickerbocker etiquette and rituals but also those of foreign aristocracies. In addition, the balls being modeled on Almack's of Britain, the British style invitations, the cotillion being danced for one half hour continuously, and the adoption of the term "function" no doubt all helped to impress the foreign visitors, many of them titled aristocrats from Britain, about the supposed culture and refinement of the Four Hundred. They also gave an added distinction to these balls.

In the matter of dress, the Four Hundred took elements from both the nouveaux-riches and the Knickerbocker elites. The ladies at the Patriarch and Assembly Balls were always conspicuously dressed. At the First Assembly Ball on Dec. 16, 1897, some of the notable costumes in the evening included Mrs. Astor's white and black brocade dress with diamond stomacher, diamond necklace, diamond ropes, and diamond tiara and Mrs. John Jacob Astor's dress of mauve velvet, diamond and emerald ornaments in hair and corsage. Mrs. George De Forest, in addition to her diamond aigrette with black feathers, wore a dress made of shrimp pink silk trimmed with insertions of Chantilly lace and garniture of black feathers and pink roses on the front of the corsage. Mrs. William C. Whitney, perhaps the most elaborately dressed matron of the night, had a costume of light blue satin veiled in tulle, with large bunches of roses and autumn leaves on the left side of the skirt. The corsage of her dress was trimmed with puffs of gauze and pink roses. In addition, like the other bejewelled matrons, she had on her necklace of emeralds and diamonds, a collar of pearls, a diamond chain, and an immense diamond star in the hair, which fastened an aigrette of light blue feathers.¹³⁴ The matrons at the Patriarch and Assembly Balls were always dressed to impress. This flaunting of wealth was meant to show the economic capital of the wearers.

However, at the same time, it was not only that a large amount of money was spent on dress. How one spent that money was also crucial to the Four Hundred's articulation of elite identity and their assertion of social power. Dress in the New York upper class had long stressed quality. One chief indicator of quality was where one bought one's dress. Fashionable upper-class couturiers like Worth's in Paris were must-stop destinations during the New York Four Hundred's trips abroad, where numerous

¹³⁴ "Society at the Astoria," *The New York Times*, Dec. 17, 1897, 2.

dresses for the social season or for weddings would be acquired and fitted.¹³⁵ The owner of Worth's also acted as fashion advisor to the wealthy and designed dresses for his customers.¹³⁶ Women of the Four Hundred did not buy their clothes from any shops in New York, as many shops often reproduced fashionable dress designs with cheaper materials.¹³⁷ Although there were shops that catered to an upper-class clientele in New York, they were considered the second best option when one could not go to Paris and be fitted at Worth's or did not have one's own dressmaker.¹³⁸ The women of the Four Hundred either had their own dressmakers or bought their dresses abroad. The buying of dresses abroad not only spoke to the economic prowess of the Four Hundred who could afford to make frequent trips abroad, but it also added to their cultural capital. Having dresses bought from Worth's served as an added distinction that those who could not afford to do so or did not practice this could not receive. It also painted a picture of the Four Hundred as cultured and knowledgeable about fashion, which knew no national boundaries in the quest for the best. As such, it supported the Four Hundred's claim to be the social leaders and arbiters of taste of the New York upper class.

Both the Patriarch and Assembly Balls were attended by largely the same group of elites, namely the New York Four Hundred. There were some foreign titled visitors as well as some distinguished visitors from out of town at every ball. The presence of foreigners was a further evidence of the Four Hundred's cosmopolitanism. The December 9, 1890 Patriarch Ball guest list included Mr. John Fraser of the Royal Horse Guards, England, Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, the Hon. Henry G. Edwardes of the British Legation of Washington, Count Arco Valley, the German Minister, Baron Jean Rarignon, Viscomte de Richmond, Marquise de Talleyrand Perrigord, Baron Speck von Steinburg, Marquise de Choiseul, M. de Songa Rosa, Chargé d'Affaires Italian Legation at Washington, and Alfred Le Guait of the Belgian Legation at Washington.¹³⁹ The guest

¹³⁵ Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan, *The Glitter and the Gold* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1952), 33.

¹³⁶ Cable, *Top Drawer*, 68.

¹³⁷ Harrison, *The Well Bred Girl*, 20-21.

¹³⁸ Cable, *Top Drawer*, 68.

¹³⁹ "It was a Great Success," *The New York Times*, Dec. 9, 1890, 3.

list for the Second Patriarch Ball of 1891 included such out-of-town guests as General Floyd King of Louisiana, Colonel and Mrs. Lyon Gardiner and Miss Gardiner of Gardiner's Island, Lieutenant Philip Van Horne Lonsdale of the United States Navy, Commander and Mrs. T. E. Chadwick of the United States Navy, Mr. Edward Lowndes of the United States Navy, Barton Willing and Miss Willing of Philadelphia, and Mr. J.V.L. Pryun of Albany.¹⁴⁰ The Willings and Mr. Pryun came from a prominent family in Philadelphia and Albany respectively, and were elites and socialites in their respective cities. The fact that notable foreigners and out-of-town guests were present at these balls also helped to attest to the social capital possessed by these elites, who had the social connection to invite these notable people to the balls. The presence of prominent people from within and outside the country helped to attest to the social prominence of the Four Hundred as the rightful rulers of the New York upper class. By the end of the 1880s, every newspaper in New York was devoting increasing space to covering high society, of which the Four Hundred figured most prominently.¹⁴¹ The high publicity and high visibility given to the Four Hundred by the press helped entrench this fraction of elites as the rightful leaders of the New York upper class, at the expense of other groups of elites who were not so visible in public, at least in the minds of the general American public.

All the cultural borrowings from Europe from food, dress, dance, and invitations to décor and guest list spoke to the cosmopolitan outlook of the Four Hundred. The Patriarch Ball in 1881 was lighted with pale, straw-coloured light that was then the fashion in Paris.¹⁴² The Four Hundred were not afraid to flaunt their economic, social, and cultural capitals in the war for social ascendancy versus the more provincial, self-contained, and modest Knickerbocker elites who shied from conspicuousness, and were doomed to decline. The old Knickerbocker elites largely remained within their own social circle instead of associating with either the Four Hundred or the nouveaux-riches.¹⁴³ They entertained their own small coterie of friends and family and chose inconspicuous home gatherings in their uniform Brownstone houses versus holding lavish

¹⁴⁰ "Dancing at Delmonico's," *The New York Times*, Jan. 6, 1891, 8.

¹⁴¹ Homberger, *Mrs. Astor's New York*, 202.

¹⁴² "The Merry Patriarchs," *The New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1881, 2.

¹⁴³ Jaher, "Style and Status," 269-270.

entertainments.¹⁴⁴ Their insularity and inconspicuousness led to their eventual decline in social matters, as they were not able to absorb newcomers let alone dictate fashion.

The attempt of the Four Hundred to become the dominant fraction of the dominant class caused a transformation in elite identity. By combining elements from both traditional upper-class as well as nouveaux-riches identities, the Four Hundred articulated elite identity as centred on how money was spent as well as a cosmopolitan outlook. The combination of nouveaux-riches and traditional upper-class identities was meant to give the New York Four Hundred the cultural, economic, as well as the social capital that legitimized their domination of the New York upper class. This transformation in elite identity was fully evident in the Patriarch and Assembly Balls, long-standing elite entertainments that were highly popular and exclusive in this period. As elite entertainments established for the purpose of defining upper-class society, the Assembly and Patriarch Balls offered an ideal setting to examine elite identity as espoused by the Four Hundred in how they wanted others to view them. The struggle for social power brought into view this transformation in elite identity in Gilded Age New York. In the next chapter, this thesis will look at how the Four Hundred, in their quest for social leadership rearticulated upper-class masculinity along with the help of upper-class women, who actively collaborated with the men in the creation of an elite identity in how the elites wanted to be perceived by others.

¹⁴⁴ Jaher, "Style and Status," 269-270.

Chapter 2.

Social Power, the Patriarch and Assembly Balls, and Upper-Class Women and the Rearticulation of Upper-Class Masculinity

Since the Patriarch and Assembly Balls were heterosocial spaces where upper-class men and women interacted with each other, they were ideal sites for looking at the conception of upper-class masculinity as valued by the Four Hundred. As will be shown later in this chapter, for the purposes of maintaining social power and asserting themselves as the cream of the crop of New York Society, the women of the Four Hundred collaborated with the men of their class to bring competitiveness, a trait associated more exclusively with middle-class masculinity into the upper class. Elite masculinity was now defined by both the more traditional upper-class masculinities of leisure, social skills, decorous behaviour, chivalry, and appreciation for the finer things in life as well as competitiveness. The efforts of upper-class women in seeking to elevate the social statuses of their spouses and families saw the reconstruction of elite identity in the New York upper class.

Before one can trace the rearticulation of upper-class masculinity by the Four Hundred, it is first necessary to look at the changes in American manhood from the colonial era to the end of the nineteenth century. Most of the scholarship on American manhood deals with the American middle class, and at times the delineation between upper-class and middle-class manhood is blurred since scholars have drawn evidence from upper middle-class subjects as well as lower middle-class subjects to make their arguments about the middle class. Scholars tend to either ignore upper-class masculinity or lump together upper- and middle-class masculinities into the American middle class without making much differentiation between them. Moreover, where one draws the line between middle and upper class is sometimes a difficult task to

perform.¹⁴⁵ However, by the end of the Gilded Age, a distinct upper class was detectable; it had a shared culture and consumption patterns that followed the European aristocracy, which in turn was aspired to by some in the middling and even the lower ranks.¹⁴⁶ These extremely wealthy Americans enjoyed privileges which not every American citizen could enjoy as well as “discriminations” that came with their wealth.¹⁴⁷ Together their shared experiences and aspirations produced a shared culture and identity. Instead of blending in with the masses and making themselves appear inconspicuous, wealthy Americans like the New York Four Hundred actively tried to keep themselves apart from the rest in declaring themselves the crème de la crème of Society, worthy to lead those less distinguished.¹⁴⁸

This chapter seeks to look at specifically upper-class masculinity. Many members of the Four Hundred, who participated in the Patriarch and Assembly Balls, came from a distinctly upper-class background in that they were at the very top of the social ladder by birth or by inherited wealth.

During the colonial era, the family was the basic unit of society, and each man or woman was accountable to the community for his or her actions. As the head of the family, a man was supposed to represent, govern, and control his family, including his wife and daughters, since women were thought to be less virtuous than the men.¹⁴⁹ As

¹⁴⁵ For more discussions about the difficulty of delineating the boundaries for the middle class see E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

¹⁴⁶ Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 253-254.

¹⁴⁷ In her diary *The Glitter and the Gold*, Consuelo Vanderbilt narrated of an instance when she went to purchase goods for her family at a shop in Newport, the vendor raised his prices once he learned of her Newport address. See Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan, *The Glitter and the Gold* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1952), 28.

¹⁴⁸ Grace Vanderbilt, the successor of Mrs. Astor to New York Society, was heard remarking to a waiter at a restaurant in Paris that she should have gotten better seats than the European aristocrats who patronized the same restaurant, as in America she would have been considered a princess. See Elizabeth Drexel Lehr, *“King Lehr” and the Gilded Age* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1935), 152-153.

¹⁴⁹ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 11, 13. It should be noted that even though each person was accountable to the community for his or her actions, this was a very unequal system. Men were not accountable to women for their actions. Neither were white men accountable to slaves or indigenous peoples. Gender and racial inequality existed at this time.

virtuous heads of the household, men oversaw the education and upbringing of their sons; bringing up sons who became useful and responsible members of the community was a father's primary task. With the stress on family as the basic unit of society, white American manhood was based on one's birth and communal responsibility, and a man derived his manliness from the social positions and the inherent civic responsibilities attached to his family's position in society.

However, toward the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, with widespread commercialism and the beginnings of industrialization, manhood came to be associated with men's work. The work world where men struggled for success was supposed to make youths into men.¹⁵⁰ The self-made man model of manhood came to compete with the older model of manhood based on the family and the community. According to this model of manhood, the kind of work a man did and the financial rewards as well as the social standing that came with a man's profession made him manlier.¹⁵¹ The homosocial world of work where men could work hard, be competitive and aggressive, yet still retain a measure of self-restraint was supposed to be the place where manhood was made, in contrast to the parlour and the home, which was considered a woman's sphere. Hence aggressiveness and competitiveness were considered manly traits and exclusively applied to men.¹⁵² This emphasis on work and the competitiveness and aggressiveness men exhibited at work was even more apparent in the nineteenth century with increased urbanization and industrialization in America. Men spent more and more time away from home to make their fortunes and hence make their social standings as well as those of their families' social standings in the process. Even while not working, men enjoyed spending time with their male peers in associations, clubs, and lodges. In large cities where one could often remain anonymous and free from communal control unlike in smaller communities,

¹⁵⁰ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 21.

¹⁵¹ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 26.

¹⁵² Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 24-25.

the older model of manhood based on the family and the community was breaking down.¹⁵³

In order to curb men's aggressiveness, competitiveness, and self-seeking in the world and to prevent society from breaking down from all the selfish ambitions, women were assigned the virtues of self-sacrifice, gentleness, and nurturance.¹⁵⁴ Whereas men were considered the virtuous ones before the nineteenth century, there was now a role reversal. Women were now considered the virtuous ones so that men could be freed to pursue their selfish ambitions and feel fulfilled as individuals in the process. Because women bore the self-sacrifice and sacrificed themselves for their families, men could be selfish in the realm of work.¹⁵⁵

During the nineteenth century, both men and women were affected by the separation of spheres into the private and the public. Middle-class men resided in the public realm of work, while middle-class women primarily resided over the domestic sphere and took care of all the domestic work including child-rearing. However, it must be noted that upper-class women, who were financially secure enough to hire many servants, nurses, governesses, and tutors, had significantly less housework and child-rearing to worry about and more time for entertaining and decorating their homes to reflect their husbands' economic prowesses.¹⁵⁶ Hence, a slightly different gender dynamic existed in the upper class as opposed to the middle class.

Then, as men spent more and more time away from home to earn a living and relegated the task of educating their sons to their wives unlike before the nineteenth century, women as the virtuous ones had the task of educating their children, including

¹⁵³ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 26-27.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ In the upper class, children were also raised by nannies, governesses, tutors, and even teachers at preparatory schools, which alleviated some of the child raising responsibilities of upper-class women. This reduction of household work and child rearing responsibilities freed upper-class women to participate in Society. See Barbara Welter, *The Woman Question in American History* (Hinsdale: The Dryden Press, 1973), 28; Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," in *Women's Experience in America: An Historical Anthology*, eds. Esther Katz and Anita Rapone, 94-95 (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1980).

boys.¹⁵⁷ They also served as moral compasses for their young sons and inculcated good manners as well as a good conscience and cleanliness. Ironically, boys often had to contradict these virtues in order to survive in a male world.¹⁵⁸ While many women felt at ease in the domestic realm, men sometimes felt restrained in the domestic sphere because they had to “behave properly” and observe all the etiquette and politeness in the domestic realm. This caused some men to spend increasing time away from home in the fraternal lodges and men’s clubs where men could mingle more freely and “be themselves.”¹⁵⁹

However, because mothers were exerting a large amount of influence in boys’ and even young men’s lives, by the end of the nineteenth century, there were increasing anxieties about American manhood becoming too effeminate. Male-only fraternal lodges began to practice secret rituals that spoke to this anxiety about the kind of influence women had on men’s lives. Both fraternal lodges and male-only clubs provided men with a family atmosphere without the responsibilities of being the head of the family.¹⁶⁰ In addition, they provided men with warmth, friendship, and familial support in an all-male setting without women’s influence. The proliferation of fraternal lodges and male-only clubs showed men’s sometimes ambivalent feelings toward women.¹⁶¹ As much as some men craved domesticity and marriage, they also sometimes avoided spending too much time at home or showing too much emotion to their wives and children in order to preserve their manhood.¹⁶²

The increase in white-collar jobs and the decreasing chances men had of owning their own businesses in an age of large corporations also exacerbated anxieties about American manhood. Sitting behind desks in offices for long hours was considered bad for men’s health and physique, as there was a fear that men’s muscles would become flabby and weak without adequate exercise. To help assuage some of these anxieties

¹⁵⁷ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 28; Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 113-114.

¹⁵⁸ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 49, 51.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

¹⁶⁰ Carnes, *Secret Ritual*, 121-122.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁶² Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 148-149.

about manhood, success manuals of the day equated success with the cultivation of manly virtues in the work place versus actual success in work in the form of making large amounts of money or attaining a high position for oneself in society.¹⁶³

The mass immigration of the nineteenth century from Eastern and Southern European countries also exacerbated anxieties about white manhood. The white middle class was concerned about the future of the Anglo-Saxon race and race suicide because of the decline in birth rate in the white middle class. Those whom white middle-class men defined themselves against, such as immigrants and women, were gaining greater visibility in the public sphere, the traditional reserve of white men, which was disconcerting to white middle-class men.¹⁶⁴ Some middle-class women began entering institutions of higher education and agitating for reforms and women's suffrage.¹⁶⁵

As a result, middle-class men advocated for a more aggressive masculinity based on physical fitness and physical prowess by the turn of the twentieth century, defining manhood by "manly" appearances or a vigorous, fit, and athletic masculinity as well as heterosexuality. To achieve this kind of masculine appearances, men indulged in sports and experienced living on farms out west to prove their manhood.¹⁶⁶ Camping and outdoor activities were also favoured leisured activities during this time.¹⁶⁷ This kind of expression and even proving of manliness through sports and athletics was also encouraged in boy's schools and post-secondary educational institutions such as

¹⁶³ Judy Hilkey, *Character is Capital: Success Manuals and Manhood in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 133.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 96, 98.

¹⁶⁵ Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 73, 127; Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: a History of Changing Ideals and Practices 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers, 1978), 127-128; Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 252, 320.

¹⁶⁶ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 63, 126; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1995), 175.

¹⁶⁷ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 156-127.

Harvard and Yale, upper-class bastions of education, where team sports and competitions through sports were encouraged.¹⁶⁸

Since middle- and upper-class women were considered more religious and moral than men in the nineteenth century, they dominated church attendance. Therefore, in order to combat the decline in male church attendance by the end of the nineteenth century, partly due to long work hours as well as the fact that women were considered more religious and moral than men in the nineteenth century, some Christian reformers began advocating for a kind of “muscular” Christianity to draw more male participation in churches.¹⁶⁹ “Muscular” Christianity such as the YMCA, which advocated for healthy outdoor activities for young men and sports activities as a healthy form of socialization, sought to combat the feminization of American Christianity commented on by some contemporary observers.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, under President Theodore Roosevelt, a fervent advocate of an aggressive, fit and vigorous manhood, the United States undertook more aggressive foreign policies and imperialistic ventures to prove the vigorousness and fitness of America as a nation.¹⁷¹ Eventually, the more aggressive masculinity based on physical prowess and fitness was slowly replacing masculinity based on men’s work by the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁷²

Although there is little scholarship on upper-class masculinity,¹⁷³ masculinity in the upper class had long been defined by leisure, social skills, decorous behaviour,

¹⁶⁸ Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 46.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 41, 74.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

¹⁷¹ Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 10, 13.

¹⁷² Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 222.

¹⁷³ There are also very few works on upper-class femininity as much of the scholarship focuses on the middle class and only brought in some upper-class women where applicable. For works on upper-class femininity see Ruth Crocker, *Mrs. Russell Sage: Women’s Activism and Philanthropy in Gilded Age and Progressive Era America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), Maureen Montgomery, “Female Rituals and the Politics of the New York Marriage Market in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Family History* 23, no. 1 (January 1998): 47-67. <http://www.sagepublications.com/>, and Maureen Montgomery, *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton’s New York* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

chivalry, and appreciation for the finer things in life.¹⁷⁴ Since patrician men were freed from strenuous physical labour and had the economic and social privileges to define their own manhood, they defined their manliness around self-cultivation. Being a gentleman of leisure was crucial to the patrician definition of manhood.¹⁷⁵ In order to convince others of their qualifications for leading New York Society, the Four Hundred no doubt asserted their affinity with patrician masculinity. The Four Hundred defined upper-class manhood partly by social skills, self-cultivation, refinement, and leisure. The Patriarch Balls, upper-class entertainments, were organized by men, showing the importance of leisure in the self-definition of upper-class manhood. Upper-class men bred racehorses, bet on them, and raced large yachts. William R. Travers, a noted Patriarch, once owned a famed yacht named Fanny, which was later entered in four different yacht clubs.¹⁷⁶ Pierre Lorillard's racehorse Parole was the biggest winner of the 1878 turf season, which won first place six times, second place three times, and third place one time.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, there were quite a few members of the Four Hundred who did not have a profession, lived on inherited income, and called themselves clubmen or sportsmen.¹⁷⁸ The fact that the Patriarch and Assembly Balls took place late at night, which could start as late as midnight and end as early as 5 o'clock in the morning, spoke to the leisurely status of the men who were unencumbered with work.¹⁷⁹

Men of the Four Hundred also appreciated those with good social skills. Good social skills not only helped ensure someone's popularity and success in Society, it

¹⁷⁴ Sylvia D. Hoffert, *A History of Gender in America: Essays, Documents, and Articles* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc., 2003), 84; David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 206.

¹⁷⁵ Hoffert, *A History of Gender in America*, 84. For more on upper-class masculinity see Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance*, Kim Townsend, *Manhood at Harvard: William James and Others* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), and Nicholas L. Syrett, *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

¹⁷⁶ "William R. Travers Dead," *The New York Times*, Mar. 28, 1887, 2.

¹⁷⁷ "The Turf Season of 1878," *The New York Times*, Mar. 24, 1878, 10.

¹⁷⁸ See the list of the Four Hundred in Dixon Wecter, *The Saga of American Society: A Record of Social Aspiration 1607-1937* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 216-223.

¹⁷⁹ For the start and end time of the Patriarch Ball, see "The Week in Society," *New-York Daily Tribune*, Feb. 19 1888, 7; "The Week in Society," *New-York Daily Tribune*, Dec. 16, 1888, 7.

could also greatly help in the realm of business where personal connections were key. This was why men like Ward McAllister and his successor Harry Lehr, self-proclaimed social arbiters of the Four Hundred and men from relatively unknown backgrounds were able to penetrate upper-class society. Although McAllister and Lehr both married heiresses, they did not start off being very wealthy like the rest of the Four Hundred. However, both men possessed tact and aptitude for Society, which granted them access to New York Society.¹⁸⁰

Decorous behaviour was also stressed among the Four Hundred. It was a well-known fact that Society stressed good form in dress and behaviour.¹⁸¹ For example, when a guest tried to enter a Patriarch Ball after he had had a little bit too much to drink, he was quietly turned away at the door and barred from entrance.¹⁸² In addition, when a gentleman of the Four Hundred drank too much at the New Year's Ball and started acting out, he was quickly sent home in a cab and the whole incident hushed.¹⁸³ Clearly, decorum was crucial to the definition of upper-class manhood. Drunkenness was considered improper even for men, who needed to hold themselves to the strictest decorum at all times. Even if not all the members acted decorously at all times, the appearance of decorum had to be maintained in order for the Four Hundred to legitimate themselves as the rightful leaders of New York.

Upper-class men of the Four Hundred also defined their masculinity by the chivalry they exhibited toward upper-class women. According to etiquette manuals of the day, if a lady asked any attention of the gentleman, such as for him to bring her a glass of water, to take her to a ballroom or a drawing room when she was without an escort, to call for her carriage, or to learn whether a carriage was waiting for her, a gentleman was supposed to make himself useful to her and accept her request graciously.¹⁸⁴ During meal times, the gentleman should see to it that the lady he

¹⁸⁰ Frederic Cople Jaher, "Style and Status: High Society in Late Nineteenth-Century New York," in *The Rich, The Well Born, and the Powerful: Elite and Upper Classes in History*, ed. Frederic Cople Jaher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 268-269.

¹⁸¹ *The American Queen and Town Topics*, Vol. XIII – No. 5, Jan. 31, 1885, 3.

¹⁸² "Saunterings," *Town Topics*, Vol. XIX – No. 3, Jan. 19, 1888, 4.

¹⁸³ "Saunterings," *Town Topics*, Vol. XIX – No. 2, Jan. 12, 1888, 3.

¹⁸⁴ *The Manners that Win* (Minneapolis: Buckeye Publishing Co., 1880), 140.

escorted into the room was first served, before he partook of his own food.¹⁸⁵ Those trying to enter Society had to know these etiquettes if they wanted to be accepted.¹⁸⁶ However, sometimes women could also take advantage of upper-class men's chivalry. Mrs. Burton Harrison narrated an instance when a young woman, fearing she appeared like a wall flower at the ball, engaged a young man in conversation for a longer time than desired by the young man, who only wanted to greet her in passing before moving on to greeting other people.¹⁸⁷

Upper-class socialite Elsie Clews Parsons offered a critique of upper-class chivalry in her book, *The Old Fashioned Woman: Primitive Fancies about the Sex*:

For "the chivalry of American manhood" to be properly protected, American women have also to be "protected." And so American men punctiliously go on taking the outside of a walk – a habit which seems to have held over from the days when there were no sidewalks and to give a person the wall was indeed a courtesy. In certain circles men also support a woman's elbow across the curbs. They insist on paying her carfare or other expenses even when she prefers to pay them herself. They never sit while she stands, forcing her, like royalty, to sit down when she would rather stand. In cars, playhouses, or churches they always take the end seat on the theory that although it is the pleasantest it is also the most exposed. They will have a woman go first – through a door or into a lifeboat – whatever inconvenience or tragedy such precedence may cause her. They even "help" her over a fence when obviously they should but turn their back on her – or take her into their arms.¹⁸⁸

Whether upper-class women always welcomed the chivalrous acts of upper-class men, the men prided themselves on their chivalry toward upper-class women. Chivalry then, was a way to flatter upper-class men's masculinity, and signified men's power over women. It also hinted at women's exclusion from the public sphere, as they needed to be always accompanied and looked after by upper-class men in public places.

¹⁸⁵ *The Manners that Win*, 141.

¹⁸⁶ Mary Cable, *Top Drawer: American High Society from the Gilded Age to the Roaring Twenties* (New York: Atheneum, 1984), 60.

¹⁸⁷ Mrs. Burton Harrison, *The Well-Bred Girl in Society* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1898), 12-13.

¹⁸⁸ Elsie Clews Parsons, *The Old-Fashioned Woman: Primitive Fancies about the Sex* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), 305-306.

Aside from decorum and chivalry, dancing was also another area where men of the Four Hundred exhibited their penchant for self-cultivation and refinement. The position of the cotillion leader based on dance as well as leadership skills was a coveted one. Young men in the Four Hundred vied with each other for these positions and there was a certain amount of jealousy engendered when one was not selected to be a cotillion leader.¹⁸⁹ Apparently, dancing was a valued skill cultivated among the Four Hundred in their pursuit for refinement. The more cultivated or skilful one was in dancing, the more it bolstered the manhood of upper-class man. Those who danced well became socially popular in Society, and upper-class men were often jealous of each other when one had the honour of being a cotillion leader while another did not.¹⁹⁰

Yet despite this penchant for leisure, cultivation, and refinement, upper-class manhood was also defined by competitiveness, a defining trait of middle-class masculinity at the time. Like the importation of nouveaux-riches practices seen in chapter one, the Four Hundred also imported middle-class competitiveness to bolster their own social statuses. However, instead of being merely competitive with each other, upper-class men also enlisted the help of upper-class women to compete with one another.

The Patriarch and Assembly Balls were “competitive” entertainments. Wealthy New Yorkers competed with each other to get invited to these balls and even members of the Four Hundred themselves competed with each other to sit at the head table. The Patriarch Balls for years had kept the foreigners and the most prominent guests at a separate table where a better brand of champagne was served. This caused much jealousy in Society.¹⁹¹ The guest list of the Patriarch and Assembly Balls were equally exclusive, disappointing many who could not attend.¹⁹² While the Patriarch and Assembly Balls were attended by the Four Hundred, members of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs were able to invite a certain number of guests, who may not have consisted

¹⁸⁹ Lehr, “*King Lehr*,” 68-69.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁹¹ “The Patriarchs’ Dance,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 24, 1895, 8.

¹⁹² “The Departed Patriarchs,” *The New York Times*, Apr. 11, 1897, 18.

of the immediate families and relatives of the Four Hundred.¹⁹³ The out-of-town guests were invited in this manner to join the Four Hundred in their revelry. In addition, despite the small number of invitations available to those outside of the Four Hundred as in the event of a member's absence overseas, there were no shortages of wealthy New Yorkers who wanted to be invited to these balls. Ward McAllister's autobiographical account of his life as a leader of the Four Hundred told of a typical day spent answering calls from anxious mothers who wanted their daughters invited to the Patriarch and the Junior Patriarch Balls, since it increased their daughters' chances of marrying into the Four Hundred. When McAllister interviewed his lady visitors about their family backgrounds, he sarcastically concluded that "the family always went back to King John, and in some instances to William the Conqueror."¹⁹⁴ The guests who did attend and had the favour of the Four Hundred and therefore the future possibility of being invited to other Society events had to show why they were worthy of being invited to these balls, while the Four Hundred had to assert why they belonged to the Four Hundred or were the supposed cream of the crop of Society.

Much of this assertion was done by women and through their personal initiatives, sexuality, and dress, with the tacit approval of the men, who realized that their wives' competitive efforts also benefited their own social standings. According to upper-class socialite and anthropologist Elsie Clews Parsons, who often attended entertainments like the Patriarch Balls, married upper-class men and women did not converse with, sit with, or dance with their spouses at these entertainments.¹⁹⁵ This proved convenient to Victorian husbands who used their wives to network for them and gain them social popularity. This also meant that wives had to rely on their own social skills, assertiveness, initiatives, and intelligence to win admirers and become social successes without their husbands by their sides. According to Victorian codes of propriety, a wife who laughed at her husband's joke was in fact laughing at her own joke and hence

¹⁹³ The Matriarchs referred to the organizers of the Assembly Balls.

¹⁹⁴ Ward McAllister, *Society as I have Found It* (New York: Cassell Publishing Company, 1890), 231.

¹⁹⁵ Parsons, *The Old-Fashioned Woman*, 52.

flattering herself.¹⁹⁶ Therefore, wives and husbands were considered one unit, and the conduct, popularity, and respectability of one reflected on the other.

Sometimes all that was required to win admirers were graciousness, gracefulness, and tact.¹⁹⁷ At other times, it required more assertive and aggressive actions on the part of the women to win admirers. Some women used wit, snobbishness, and even acerbic criticisms to win followers.¹⁹⁸ Another contemporary upper-class observer, Elizabeth Drexel Lehr, commented on the strategies different aspiring female social leaders used to win followers. For example, Mrs. Ogden Mills, who prided herself for being a descendant of a Knickerbocker family, was cold, sarcastic, and aristocratic. She was often rude to people, and the ruder she was the more people courted her favour.¹⁹⁹ Mrs. Belmont, on the other hand, was bold, spirited, and depended on her forceful personality to cause others to submit to her will.²⁰⁰ Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish, in contrast, was sarcastic, witty, and inclined to novel entertainments.

There were other strategies employed by Society women to gain social prestige, such as flirting with members of the opposite sex, which could also win admirers, particularly male admirers.²⁰¹ In order to accomplish this, upper-class women had to carefully negotiate their sexuality. The décolleté gowns required for formal evening entertainments like the Patriarch and Assembly Balls showed off the figures of the women, causing them to appear attractive to members of the opposite sex.²⁰² This was not only important for debutantes and unmarried women, who wanted to attract spouses, but it was also important for married women, especially young married women who wanted to attract attention to themselves and gain the admiration of others through their figures.²⁰³ While flirting was not particularly encouraged for married women as it was

¹⁹⁶ Parsons, *The Old-Fashioned Woman*, 52.

¹⁹⁷ Harrison, *The Well-Bred Girl*, 81-82.

¹⁹⁸ "Woman's Pet Vice," *Town Topics*, Vol. XIX – No. 2, Jan. 12, 1888, 13.

¹⁹⁹ Lehr, "King Lehr," 147-148.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁰¹ "Saunterings," *Town Topics*, Vol. XIX – No. 4, Jan. 26, 1888, 3; "Married Flirts," *Town Topics*, Vol. XIX – No. 22, May 31, 1888, 14; Florence Adele Sloane, *Maverick in Mauve: The Diary of A Romantic Age* (New York: Doubleday & company Inc., 1983), 32-33.

²⁰² "Saunterings," *Town Topics*, Vol. XXVIII – No. 26, Dec. 29, 1892, 2.

²⁰³ Cable, *Top Drawers*, 67.

countenanced for unmarried women, having an attractive and well-dressed wife increased the esteem of the husband in the eyes of his peers for having married a beautiful and charming wife of whom he could be proud and who could help him become popular in the process.²⁰⁴

Dress was also one area where upper-class women could show their skills in order to win popularity. At the Patriarch Ball of December 1888, Miss Florence Hurst wore the typical blonde costume of blue. Miss Mabel Wright, another noted blonde beauty, wore a blue and silver brocade dress with white tulle skirt, and Miss Romaine Stone, a brunette wore a simple yellow crepe gown trimmed with yellow daisies.²⁰⁵ Since blondes often wore blue, which brought out their complexions and brunettes often chose yellow to bring out their complexions, upper-class women who attended the Patriarch and Assembly Balls knew how to dress to impress in order to gain social popularity.²⁰⁶ Part of looking beautiful on the part of upper-class women was to know what colour best suited their complexions and what colour clashed with their complexions so as to avoid looking unattractive. Blondes were cautioned against wearing yellow, orange, red, and purple by etiquette manuals of the day, while brunettes were cautioned against wearing stone-gray clothing.²⁰⁷ Upper-class women were not merely good at conforming to the expectations in etiquette manuals of the day, they also realized the importance of making an entrance and being admired by upper-class men. Their landing a wealthy and well-bred husband and winning admirers in Society partially depended on their knowledge of dressing to impress. As historian Maureen Montgomery noted, “The time spent as a debutante could be fraught with trying to remain within acceptable boundaries of behaviour in public, boundaries that they were encouraged to explore during the controlled opportunities for heterosociability, when there was considerable pressure to secure the communally desired outcome of marriage. This was the period in women’s lives when their opportunities for display were

²⁰⁴ Lehr, “*King Lehr*,” 122.

²⁰⁵ “The Week in Society,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, Dec. 16, 1888, 7.

²⁰⁶ For advice on what complexion best matched what coloured dresses see *The Manners that Win*, 377-378.

²⁰⁷ *The Manners that Win*, 377-378.

optimal.”²⁰⁸ Elizabeth Drexel Lehr’s account of how Mrs. William B. Leeds gained social success in the New York upper class further illustrates how dressing to impress was important in Society:

By her side stood Mrs. William B. Leeds, young then and imperially beautiful in her white satin dress, her superb diamonds emphasising the delicacy of her colouring, the velvet darkness of her eyes. She too had her night of triumph. Her charm was far more potent than her husband’s millions. Society took her to its heart from that moment.²⁰⁹

Hence, dress which highlighted women’s beauty and sexuality could help in social warfare. Men of the upper class were keenly aware of this and were not averse to using their wives’ charms and sexuality to gain social standing, provided they did not cross the line to be promiscuous. Lehr continued in her account, “William B. Leeds, young, handsome, and ambitious for his beautiful wife, gazed at her in adoration. Her beauty had won the day for him.”²¹⁰

With this stress on women’s appearances and what their appearances could do to win one and one’s family social standing, it was no wonder that the women of the Four Hundred disliked it when the electric lights at the Patriarch and Assembly Balls were too bright, which resulted in the higher visibility of the blemishes, lines, and wrinkles on women’s faces. Adequate lighting could bring out the brilliance of one’s attire, which enhanced the attractiveness of the women, yet too much light gave away blemishes.²¹¹ The men and youth of the Four Hundred were aware of the importance of women’s attractiveness to not only the social success of an entertainment but also the social pretensions of upper-class men and women. One youth wittily called a ball where the bright electric lights brought out the imperfections of the women the “give-away ball.”²¹²

²⁰⁸ Maureen Montgomery, *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton’s New York* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 127.

²⁰⁹ Lehr, “*King Lehr*,” 122.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ “The Week in Society,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, Jan. 22, 1888, 7; “The Week in Society,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, Feb. 19, 1888, 7; “The Second Patriarchs’ Ball,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 29, 1884, 5.

²¹² “Society Topics of the Week,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1890, 13.

Having a debutante daughter who married a socially prominent or wealthy man could help consolidate the position of the Four Hundred and keep wealth and social position within the same few families. If one's daughter married a titled foreigner it was even better, as then the family's bloodline could truly be "aristocratized," and a man and his family could potentially gain entrance to upper-class society even in Europe. As the 1892 *Town Topics* article about Cornelia Bradley-Martin's wedding to Lord Craven mentioned, the marriage between Bradley-Martin and Craven could help Mrs. Bradley-Martin, the mother of the bride and a member of the Four Hundred, gain entrance to London Society. Lord Craven's two aunts, the Countess of Coventry and Countess of Cadogan, "two most powerful women"²¹³ with access to the best houses in London, could introduce the Bradley-Martins to London Society out of gratitude for the sheer fact that the fortune of the Bradley-Martins allowed the young earl to keep his estate.²¹⁴

Upper-class women who behaved according to class-specific codes of dress and conduct were useful to themselves and to upper-class men in maintaining their social statuses. The matter of dress not only articulated the upper-class identity of the wearers but also helped cement the social statuses of the women as well as the men. At the December 1889 Assembly Ball, all the matrons "wore half low corsage, which was the latest decree in fashion though not altogether favoured. The extremely décolleté gown was the exception."²¹⁵ This illuminates the fact that part of dressing class appropriately, at least as far as the Four Hundred were concerned, was to follow the latest fashion. Following fashion meant that the women were trendy and therefore qualified to be those belonging to the cream of the crop of upper-class society. The women of the Four Hundred chose to follow the latest decree in fashion, whether they favoured the half low corsage or not.

The competitiveness at the Patriarch and Assembly Balls was further carried out in the matter of the jewels worn by the women. At a December 1889 Patriarch Ball, the *New-York Daily Tribune* reported:

²¹³ "Saunterings," *Town Topics*, Vol. XXVIII – No. 25, Dec. 22, 1892, 1.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ "The Week in Society," *New-York Daily Tribune*, Dec. 15, 1889, 7.

Mrs. William Astor and Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt wore splendid emeralds, those of Mrs. Astor being combined with diamonds, while Mrs. Vanderbilt, whose gown was of emerald hued tulle and velvet wore jewels only to correspond in color. Mrs. Bradley Martin's diamond tiara was the subject of much comment. As a rule, tiaras are made of small and inferior gems which make a good show, but Mrs. Martin's, which was recently made in London, is composed of carefully selected diamonds and many solitaires, the seven points of the tiara being tipped with single gems, each of great beauty. The cost of the ornament was almost a fortune.²¹⁶

Wearing good quality jewellery elevated the social status of the woman wearing it and showed her taste in jewellery. In addition, wearing jewels that engendered much comment made a fashion statement as well as providing the possibility for others to imitate or out-do the jewel-wearer. In an age when the press diligently reported on the toilettes of the women attending these balls, it no doubt gave an added incentive for matrons to be loaded down with costly gems that stirred much comment among their peers and also in the press.

In addition, there were upper-class men of the Four Hundred who not only understood the potential of a wife's dress and appearance in winning a man his social standing, but who also actively participated in choosing their wives' dresses to ensure that they were social successes in order to enhance their own social standings. For example, Harry Lehr, the social arbiter of the Four Hundred who took over Ward McAllister's post after his death, often chose dresses and jewels for his wife to wear at different events. One journalist wrote the following account:

Mrs. Harry Lehr will sport some remarkable toilets at Newport this summer. Everyone may be included in the catalogue that spells 'dreams,' for everyone has been carefully thought out by her liege lord. I ran across him at Worth's recently, where he had the whole establishment in commotion that was heard even out on the Rue de la Paix, while the presiding genius of the temple of clothes was literally tearing his hair out in handfuls in his atelier. The particular creation that was troubling Mr. Lehr's brain, the morning I saw him, was a combination of five colours which he insisted could be made into a unit. When Mrs. Lehr trips across

²¹⁶ "The Week in Society," *New-York Daily Tribune*, Dec. 22, 1889, 7.

the lawn of the Newport Casino in this characteristic get-up she will look like an animated rainbow...²¹⁷

To be part of the Four Hundred, women must firstly follow the latest decree in fashion, which often came from Paris. Then for those more ambitious and wanting to strike out more of a name for themselves among the Four Hundred, they also tried to set the terms of what was considered fashionable, as in the case of Lehr. However, sometimes the effort to impress others through dress could be carried out in the extreme and produce the opposite effect on the observers. The writer of this newspaper article was no doubt critical of Lehr's sartorial creation. Having Mrs. Lehr looking like an animated rainbow may not have produced as pleasing an effect on others as Lehr might have liked, although it certainly made a statement, however gaudy or comical in the eyes of contemporary observers. Lehr, like others equally socially ambitious, were motivated with a need to impress, whether what they did always produced the desired effect or not.

However, not all efforts to impress ended in failure. Harry Lehr apparently radiated triumph when his wife's clothes were admired and told his wife that his "work" was bearing fruit and that she was becoming a smart woman.²¹⁸ He kept newspaper clippings praising his wife's various sartorial triumphs. One article noted that another Society lady, Mrs. Henry O. Havemeyer, even imitated the attire of Lehr's wife by wearing turquoise earrings and the same style of hat as her. The article reads:

It is most apparent that Mrs. Henry O. Havemeyer, Jr. is imitating Mrs. Harry Lehr as nearly as possible, and Mrs. Havemeyer might go further and fare worse for a model...Mrs. Lehr is certainly the first of the modish women to realise the beauty of turquoises in profusion, and she had the huge breastplate, collar and earrings long before Mrs. Dick Gambrill purchased her blue gems. Mrs. Havemeyer is booked for Newport this year, and she is a woman of increasing popularity. Her recently accentuated resemblance to the slender Mrs. Lehr may be unintentional, but even at that she had the credit or discredit of being a faithful replica...²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Lehr, "King Lehr," 73-74.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 103.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 103-104.

Thus, women competed with each other not only through dress, but also imitated those who were more socially prominent in fashion in order to gain more popularity. One journalist wrote that “[Mrs. Lehr] was the most remarkably dressed woman in the church,”²²⁰ and that “her entrance, everything considered, caused a subdued sensation.”²²¹ Another journalist noted elsewhere that “at the Horse Show, Mrs. Lehr’s entrance, thanks to Harry’s eye for things sartorial, was awaited like the rise of a curtain. In the years following Mrs. Lehr’s command of fashion continued.”²²² It is thus apparent that men could gain social prominence as well through their wives’ competitive display and high visibility. The fact that other Society women imitated Lehr’s wife and looked to her as a trendsetter gave added social prominence to Harry Lehr and further bolstered his claim to social leadership.

In their effort to articulate an upper-class identity with the men of the Four Hundred, the women of the Four Hundred also organized the Assembly Balls, modeled on the Patriarch Balls organized by the men. The ambitions of upper-class men for social prominence allowed their wives and daughters greater role and visibility in Society. The Assembly Balls were organized in the early 1880s by fifty prominent Society women of the Four Hundred, less than ten years after the Patriarch Ball was first organized.²²³ These women were largely the wives of the fifty Patriarchs. Both the Assembly and the Patriarch Balls had roughly the same guest list.²²⁴ In other words, the Patriarch and Assembly Balls were attended by the same group of elites, although in the case of the Assembly Balls, the organizers were women instead of men. The women of the Four Hundred joined the men of their class in organizing balls that helped exclude newcomers while sidelining the older Knickerbocker elites in an effort to maintain their social power.

The Patriarch and Assembly Balls certainly had their share of similarities, including overlaps in the guest list, the start and end time, the basic program that started

²²⁰ Lehr, “*King Lehr*,” 104.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*, 104-105.

²²³ “Dancing at Delmonico’s,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 12, 1884, 5.

²²⁴ “Society at the Astoria,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 17, 1897, 2; “The Patriarchs’ Ball,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 22, 1896, 5.

with general dancing then supper and the cotillion, the cotillion danced continuously for one half hour after the British fashion, the French dishes and menus with the requisite terrapin and canvasback ducks, the frequency of occurrence each year – two to three times in each social season, the occasional use of favours in the Cotillion, and in the beginning even the venue of choice – Delmonico’s Restaurant. The Assembly Balls also had their share of gorgeously attired and bejewelled women and noted out-of-town and foreign guests.²²⁵ Thus, the women managers of the Assembly Balls kept many of the elements that made the Patriarch Balls a success in the first place.

However, there were also some minor differences between the Patriarch and Assembly Balls that revealed the independent management of the women subscribers as well as the active role of upper-class women in constructing elite identity. One difference between the Patriarch and Assembly Balls was that the Assembly Balls used simpler décor than the Patriarchs’. Since upper-class men had to financially pay for both the Patriarch and Assembly Balls, resources for the Assembly Balls were understandably reduced. Another difference was that the managers of the Assembly Balls also realized the importance of the young people in attending if not enjoying these balls. The managers also gave the younger generation more prominence and more of a leadership role at these balls. There were more newly married young matrons, some in their early twenties, on the committee of organizers like Mrs. Egerton L. Winthrop Jr., Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, and Mrs. Almeric Hugh Paget.²²⁶ Popularity with young people as well as involving the younger generation in the management of the balls helped the younger generation feel a stake at the success of these entertainments, which also could help ensure the long-term survival of the balls. The Patriarch Balls were comparatively more hierarchical and formal. The organizers of the Patriarchs’ distinguished between those with more social prominence and those with less among the guests. That hierarchy and social prominence often came with age. The Patriarchs’, because of the prominence of the older element in Society, had been dubbed the

²²⁵ “The First Assembly Ball,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 16, 1898, 7; “The First Assembly Ball,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 15, 1899, 7.

²²⁶ “Society,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 19, 1897, 15.

“Dowagers’ Ball.”²²⁷ It seemed that the managers of the Patriarchs were more interested in having a dignified ball for the sake of maintaining social power. In contrast, there seemed to be more enjoyment and liveliness at an Assembly Ball, while hierarchy based on one’s social prominence was still observed, as those who received at the Assembly Balls were either drawn from the subscribers to the balls or from other ladies of social prominence, who served as hostesses at these occasions.²²⁸

The women of the Four Hundred did not merely imitate everything the Patriarchs’ did, but made modifications where they saw fit. The managers of the Assembly Balls were the first to move the venue to the Waldorf Hotel in 1896, while the Patriarchs followed in their lead.²²⁹ Although they had limited resources, they still managed to make the Assembly Balls a success and made a name for the Assembly Balls as well as for themselves in the annals of New York social life.

The Assembly Balls organized by the women were so successful that *The New York Times* pronounced that the Assembly Balls were “in point of smartness and exclusiveness counterparts of the dances given by the Patriarchs,”²³⁰ and that “the distinction between [the Patriarch and Assembly Balls] is one of quantity rather than quality.”²³¹ The same kind of culinary and overall enjoyment could be had at the Assembly Balls. When it came to the food, “in point of profusion and good taste,”²³² the Assembly Balls “easily vie[d] with that prepared under the management of [the Patriarchs].”²³³ As counterparts of the Patriarchs, the Assembly Balls or the Matriarchs were managed in a way that did credit not only to the Society women but also to the husbands of the Society matrons who financially contributed to them.

²²⁷ “Society Topics of the Week,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1891, 12; “The Week in Society,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, Dec. 27, 1885, 7.

²²⁸ “Dance of the Matriarchs,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 12, 1894, 5; “The Week in Society,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, Feb. 12, 1888, 7; “The First Assembly Ball,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 9, 1887, 2.

²²⁹ “Society’s Winter Season,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1896, 10.

²³⁰ “Dance of the Matriarchs,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 12, 1894, 5.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

The First Assembly Ball of 1896 was so successful that it even rivalled the Patriarchs' and left members of Society speculating whether the First Patriarchs' Ball to follow it would be able to surpass it in beauty and brilliance.²³⁴ The *Times* article reporting on the event opens with, "The First Assembly Ball...was the handsomest and in many ways the most successful of all the larger functions of the sort given in New York, in many years."²³⁵ The article continues, "The ball proceeded so smoothly as to justify the hopes of its managers and subscribers and to reward them with the consciousness of success."²³⁶ Apparently, the Assembly Ball so overshadowed the other entertainments of the week that there was little left to be said regarding these other entertainments in the *Times* the next morning.²³⁷

The Second Assembly Ball of 1896, which took place at the Waldorf Hotel, was also a complete social success. It even surpassed the successes of the First Assembly Ball. The press was diligent to note that "the managers of the assemblies have succeeded this year in making the dances as important as those of the Patriarchs."²³⁸ The Assembly Balls certainly made a name in New York Society on par with the Patriarchs, as members of Society have been known to cancel their private entertainments on the night of the Assembly Ball so as not to compete with it.²³⁹ Mrs. William Astor, one of the managers of the Assembly Ball and the ruling queen of New York Society, even made a point of attending the First Assembly Ball of every social season for many years.²⁴⁰ The reputation for the Assembly Ball was thus made in Society, as members of the Four Hundred recognized its prominence alongside the Patriarch Balls.

It no doubt gratified both the men and the women of the Four Hundred when they read in the newspapers that the Assembly Balls had been given "under the auspices of the patronesses...including Mrs. Astor, Chairman; Mrs. Henry A. C. Taylor, Mr. Levi P.

²³⁴ "Society's Winter Season," *The New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1896, 10.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ "The Second Assembly Balls," *The New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1896, 16.

²³⁹ "Society Topics of the Week," *The New York Times*, Dec. 25, 1892, 12.

²⁴⁰ "The First Assembly Ball," *The New York Times*, Dec. 15, 1899, 7.

Morton, Mrs. Cadwalader Jones, Miss Whitney, Mrs. Charles A. Post...Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, Mrs. Stephen Rensselaer, Mrs. Henry Payne Whitney, and Mrs. Egerton Winthrop, Jr.”²⁴¹ Seeing their names listed as the patronesses of a successful entertainment gave the women who organized these balls added prestige. Furthermore, the press certainly had been known to be quite generous with compliments by remarking that the Assembly Ball was “managed by a committee of New York’s most competent society women, and was attended by a most representative assemblage.”²⁴² As extensions of their husbands, the wives of the Four Hundred could only bring good repute to their husbands and families while also enjoying a measure of satisfaction at their own skills in organizing a Society ball. In yet another article a *Times* columnist remarks, “[The Assembly Balls] have been managed with much skill and good judgment for some years by a committee of well-known women, including Mrs. Astor, Mrs. Brockholst Cutting, Mrs. H. A. C. Taylor, Mrs. L. P. Morton, Mrs. Cadwalader Jones, Mrs. Charles A. Post, Miss Whitney, and of which Miss Whitney is Treasurer and Mrs. Charles A. Post is Secretary.”²⁴³ Clearly, upper-class women were not merely appendages of their husbands. They felt a stake in the reconstruction of an elite identity and actively participated in this reconstruction by organizing the Assembly Balls that were like the Patriarchs’.

However, despite the successes of the Patriarchs and the Assemblies, the days of large subscription balls were numbered at the end of the Gilded Age. The Patriarchs disbanded due to “lack of interest” on the part of the subscribers in 1897.²⁴⁴ It seemed that men’s interests in formal entertainments like the Patriarch Balls were waning. This was not surprising given that by 1897, the year of the disbandment of the Patriarchs, only one original member of the Patriarchs remained while the other posts were mostly taken over by younger men either related to the Patriarchs or who belonged to the same set.²⁴⁵ However, it seemed that the younger generation of Patriarchs only kept the title of being a Patriarch without much enthusiasm about managing these balls. After the

²⁴¹ “Society at the Astoria,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 17, 1897, 2.

²⁴² “Society’s Winter Season,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1896, 10.

²⁴³ “The First Assembly Ball,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 16, 1898, 7,

²⁴⁴ “The Patriarchs Disband,” *The New York Times*, Apr. 10, 1897, 1.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*; “The Patriarchs’ Dance,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 11, 1894, 9.

death of Ward McAllister, the organizing spirit behind the Patriarch Balls, it was chiefly Mr. Kernochan, a man from the older generation, who took up the reins in organizing and managing these balls. After his sudden and tragic death, no successor came to the fore. When a meeting of the Patriarchs' was called in the spring of 1897, only four people attended. This so discouraged those who attended that they decided to dissolve the Patriarchs at this meeting.²⁴⁶

With the increase of the wealthy in New York, it was more difficult to guard the entrance to Society. Young men were more interested in informal socializing not only with members of the opposite sex but also with each other. With the stress on fitness and vigorousness, young men preferred swimming outdoors in the summer in Newport versus attending formal dances.²⁴⁷ It seemed that the apparent consensus was showing visible cracks by the end of the Gilded Age as well, as some elites began to challenge McAllister and Caroline's vision of how money was best spent. Although money was still spent in entertaining and in acquiring social power, there was now the added incentive to spend in a creative manner that amused the elites no matter how absurd, and Mrs. Fish's monkey dinner in which she invited a monkey to pose as an aristocrat was a testament to that. However, the deathblow came when there was an increase in the number of private ballrooms that could fit a large number of ball-goers among the Four Hundred. Consequently, there was not much need for semi-public balls.²⁴⁸ Alas, the Assembly Balls also did not survive past the early 1900s.

Nonetheless, the legacy of the Patriarch and Assembly Balls remained. The rearticulation of elite identity, those meant to shape others' perception of the Four Hundred and thereby bolster their own social statuses as the *crème de la crème* of Society during the golden age of large subscription balls, made a lasting impact on the upper class. With the help of upper-class women, upper-class masculinity was redefined in the case of the Four Hundred to include competitiveness as well as the more traditional elite identities of self-cultivation and leisure. Upper-class women felt a

²⁴⁶ "The Patriarchs Disband," *The New York Times*, Apr. 10, 1897, 1.

²⁴⁷ Maureen E. Montgomery, "Female Rituals and the Politics of the New York Marriage Market in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Family History* 23, no. 1 (January 1998): 60-61, <http://www.sagepublications.com/>.

²⁴⁸ "Assembly Ball Question," *The New York Times*, Feb. 7, 1898, 7.

stake at the reconstruction of elite identity and actively collaborated with upper-class men in the reconstruction of elite identity in the New York upper class. The women of the Four Hundred were not merely appendages of their husbands; they found some measure of agency in organizing the Assembly Balls if not in socializing or setting Society fashion. In a time when some upper-class women found outlets from the constraints of the domestic sphere by participating in extensive philanthropy, enrolling in higher education, and even entering the professions, the women of the Four hundred found theirs in Society. The redefining of upper-class masculinity depended heavily on the cooperation of upper-class women and the interplay between the sexes.

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Conclusion.

In their quest for social power, the New York Four Hundred redefined what it meant to be an upper-class person during this time period. Elite identity, at least that pertaining to elites who frequented high society, was increasingly tied to how one spent his or her money as well as the inclusion of cosmopolitan outlooks and practices. Upper-class masculinity was also transformed to include competitiveness as well as the more traditional elite identities of self-cultivation and leisure. Much of this competitiveness was carried out by the efforts of upper-class women who actively collaborated with upper-class men in the reconstruction of upper-class identity and who brought competitiveness into upper-class masculinity.

However, this upper-class culture and identity proved short-lived. After the First World War, with the initiation of Café Society, upper-class New York openly courted and imitated celebrities, while in the Gilded Age it was often difficult for actresses or performers to be invited to Society events as honoured guests instead of as part of the entertainment.²⁴⁹ As Edith Wharton writes in her novel *The Age of Innocence*, by the end of the nineteenth century there were some misgivings on the part of upper-class New Yorkers as Society became less exclusive. One of those less exclusive elements which Wharton portrays in her novel was the inclusion of nouveaux-riches with their conspicuous practices in the New York upper class, practices which the Four Hundred had been accused of bringing about in Society by the older Knickerbocker elites.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Frederic Cople Jaher, "Style and Status: High Society in Late Nineteenth-Century New York," in *The Rich, The Well Born, and the Powerful: Elite and Upper Classes in History*, ed. Frederic Cople Jaher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 262.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 261-262.

Perhaps Lawrence Leffert, an upper-class snob in the novel *The Age of Innocence* says it best, “If things go on at this rate, our children will be marrying Beaufort’s [a nouveau-riche’s] bastards.”²⁵¹ As much as the Four Hundred tried to preserve the exclusivity of Society by engaging in “distinctive” practices and wresting social power from the Knickerbockers and nouveaux-riches alike, the inclusion of middle-class value in the upper class, like the inclusion of nouveaux-riches practices in the Four Hundred, nonetheless made way for the increasing democratization of upper-class Society where more people with wealth, celebrity, and even skills and talents could be included more liberally than in the Gilded Age.

²⁵¹ Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (New York: D. Appleton, 1920), 355.

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