

Nature walks at Olana developed by
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SUNY ESF Interns, Summer 2010



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meadow walk

One of Frederic Church's intentions in his landscape design of Olana was to create beautiful vistas and open areas that contrasted with deep forests. Although less meticulously maintained after Church's death in 1900, these views are now being restored. **Meadows and clearings not only provide scenic views, but also are unique environments.** This walk will take you along the shale-surfaced Ridge Road and up South Road, which is paved.

The Meadow walk is about 1 mile long. Look for the road markers with the flower symbol (you may notice numbered circles on trees – these do not correspond with this walk).

Watch out for ticks during and after your walk! For more information on ticks and Lyme Disease, pick up informative brochures at the Visitor Center or the Wagon House Education Center.

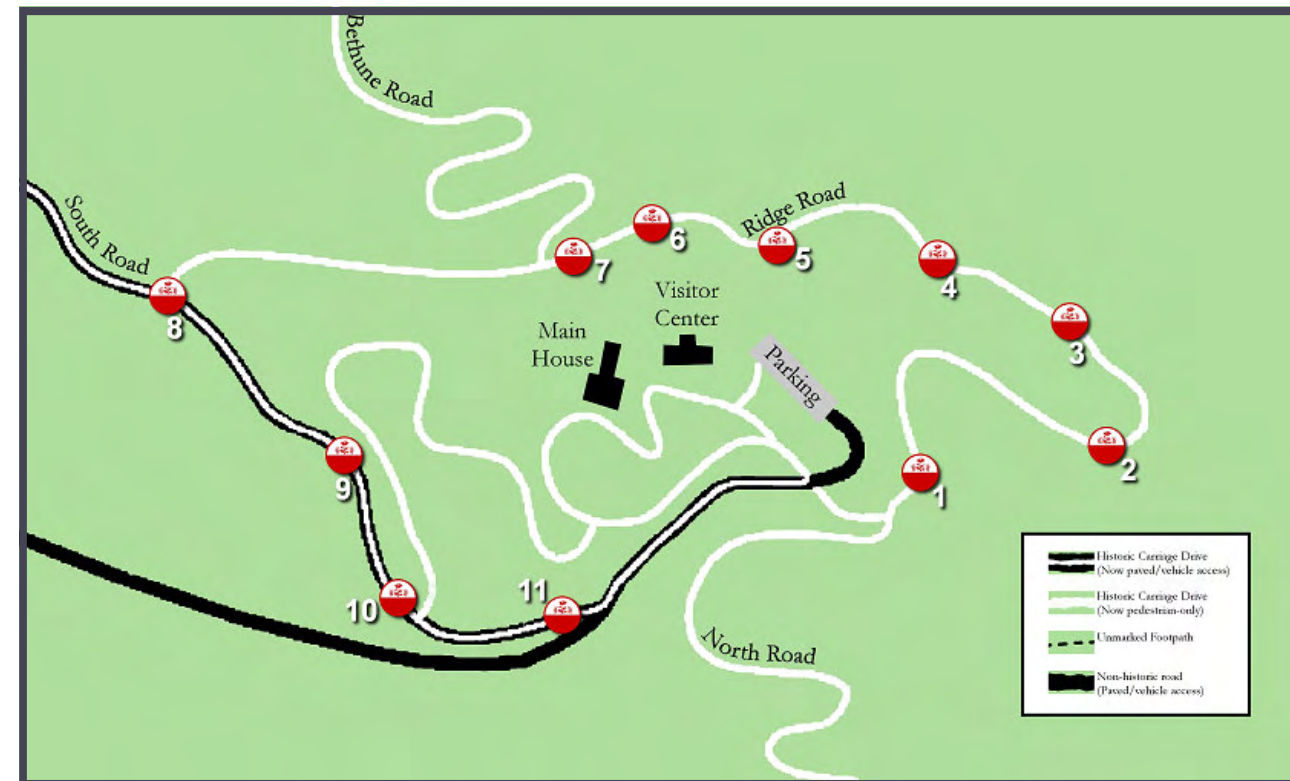
1. Restoring What Once Was

Until recently, this view was blocked by trees that had grown up after many years. **Today, the North Meadow is returning to its condition while Church lived.**



The tree clearing and its environmental impacts are continually monitored by Olana. From here, the large hill you can see in the distance is Mt. Merino. If you look carefully, you may be able to spot the roof of the Sabine-Ferguson House. Dr. Sabine was Church's friend and physician.

Olana's nature walks will be marked soon, but for now you'll need to pay extra-close attention so you don't miss your stop!



2. Opportunistic Plants



Clockwise from top left: Birdfoot trefoil, Oxeye daisy, White campion, Dame's rocket

As you gaze out into the field, you will probably see flowers blooming. **Many plants quickly take advantage of cleared areas.** Small, yellow flowers that grow in clumps are Birdfoot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*). You may also see the familiar Oxeye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) and the nodding flowers of White campion (*Lycnis alba*). Purple or white flowers atop tall stems are called Dame's rockets (*Hesperis matronalis*).

3. Pioneer Tree

What is the most conspicuous feature in this field? **The Eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) standing alone in the field is considered a pioneer species.** When areas are cleared of trees, redcedars commonly grow before other trees get a chance, so we can guess that this area was clear at some point around 100 years ago. Redcedars do well in full sunlight and can withstand dry soil and drought. Birds and other wildlife are attracted by their



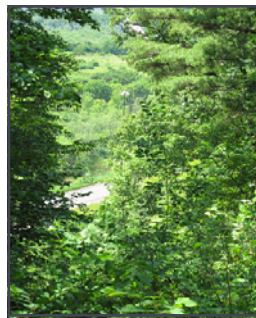
blue "berries" (actually cones), and seek protection in their foliage.

4. A Mountain Vista

This small field provides another pleasing view to the west. **Because Church spent time painting in the Catskills, it is not surprising that he enjoyed the panorama of the mountains from Olana.** From here you can also see the town of Catskill and the Rip Van Winkle Bridge spanning the Hudson River. The bridge was never intended to be in this "picture", though – it was completed in 1935, decades after Church's death.



5. Once There were Lines



Look down this narrow gap toward Route 9G. **Once the path for powerlines to reach the House, this clearing is now being allowed to return to forest.** The poles were removed and the lines were buried underground in 2007. As you can see, it does not take long for some open areas to be reclaimed by brush and trees.

6. An Open View and a Dense Stand

This treeless hill offers a beautiful view of the House, but you may also notice the tall grasses growing in the foreground. **These plants are called Reedgrass (genus *Phragmites*) and they often take advantage of damp, open areas such as this clearing.** They can easily be recognized by their tawny spikelets, or the plume-like clusters on top of the stems. The stems can reach 15 feet in height!



7. Natural Clearing

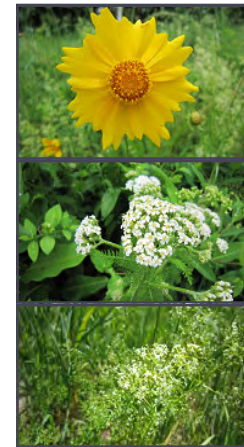


This tree was infested with some type of insect, likely causing its demise. **Trees that die and fall over in forests naturally create their own clearings, which over time may become small fields.** On a larger scale, wind storms can topple many trees at once, allowing meadows to take over where there was once forest.

Continue along Ridge Road until you reach the paved road. From there, turn left. Be aware of cars!

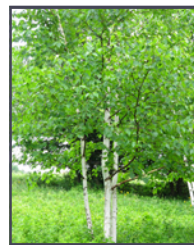
8. Picturesque Park

You likely gazed out over this meadow as you drove through Olana. **Cleared by Church in the 1800s, the field is now known as the Park.** In Church's time, the Park was used as a hayfield and mowed to feed his livestock. Today, the meadow is allowed to grow. Flowers you may see here are, from top to bottom, Coreopsis (*Coreopsis lacineolata*), Common yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), and bedstraw (genus *Gallium*).



9. Artistic Contrast

Do you know what kind of trees have white bark with black markings? If you guessed Paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*), you're correct! **The birches in front of you are young, planted here to replace the ones Church planted during his time at Olana.** This species can be appreciated artistically because the bright bark offers contrast against the rest of the landscape.



10. Red Hill View

Look down the Park and across the Lake to the large bluff. **Although not frequented by visitors, Red Hill is an**



important part of Olana's history. Long before he bought the property, Church sketched from a point on Red Hill overlooking the Catskill Mountains. Later, red shale excavated from the hill surfaced the carriage drives.

11. Once a Greenhouse, Still Green Today

Do you notice anything that seems out of place in this clearing? The pump is what remains from a greenhouse which stood here during Church's lifetime. **Still, there are plants growing here without the help of a greenhouse.** Common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) flowers are an important food source for many bees, butterflies and moths, and Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) caterpillars feed on the leaves. Yellow flag irises (*Iris pseudacorus*) also bloom here in the spring.



Top to bottom: Common milkweed, Yellow flag iris, the old pump from the greenhouse

You have now finished the Meadow walk. Continue along the paved road and on to the House or the parking lot. We hope you enjoyed the walk and will come back to visit the beautiful landscape at Olana.