

THE CAMPAIGN TO SAVE OLANA

AN ORAL HISTORY BY DAVID HUNTINGTON

Based on an Interview of
David C. Huntington
by Charles B. Hosmer

Dorothy Heyl, Editor

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION



David Huntington

John C. Wilmerding, Professor Emeritus of Art History at Princeton University, and a leading authority on Frederic Edwin Church and the Hudson River School of painters, encouraged me to find a transcript of an interview of David Huntington that he had once read at Olana.. Professor Wilmerding, who spoke with awe and wonder of his own first visit to Olana in the 1960's, said that this interview with Huntington should be located, edited and published.. Sara Griffen, the Executive Director of The Olana Partnership, knew exactly what he meant, as she remembered staying up very late one night to read the interview. Sheila Traina typed the barely legible manuscript provided to me by The Olana Partnership into a Word document. This edition is still a work in progress; I would be grateful to learn of any errors or omissions.

This past summer, I had the great pleasure of meeting Huntington's wife, Gertrude Huntington, known as Trudy. She and her children were surprised and pleased to learn about this project, and the recognition it might bring to a man they still love and miss. This is dedicated to Trudy Huntington.

Dorothy Heyl
November 2009

PREFACE

Over 20 years ago, a leading champion for the preservation of historic buildings in America, Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., sat down with David C. Huntington, an art historian who saved one of the great treasures of America's architectural past, Olana. Frederic Edwin Church, the renowned Hudson River School artist, designed and built Olana near Hudson, New York, between 1870 and 1891. After Church's death, in 1900, the house, its studio and contents, and its surrounding property remained intact for the next 60 years. As a result of the efforts led by Huntington in the 1960's, Olana is now a New York State Historic Site, a National Historic Landmark, and one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Hudson Valley and upstate New York.

Hosmer's interview of Huntington, recorded and transcribed, but never edited for publication, was fortuitously timed. In March 1988, Huntington chaired the Art History Department at the University of Michigan, and looked forward to collecting his papers and thoughts on Olana. A few years after the interview, Huntington died suddenly of natural causes, his legacy preserved for art lovers around the world, but the story of his heroic acts in the 1960s largely untold. The brief obituary of Huntington in the New York Times did not mention Olana.

THE CAMPAIGN TO SAVE OLANA

I started at Princeton in September 1941. After Pearl Harbor, I decided—along with most of my classmates—to elect to accelerate, which meant that I went right on through the summer. I would finish the sophomore year by the end of March, 1943. I had done a lot of painting, from age ten on, and I got straight into a major in architecture, taking lots of technical courses in architecture. I left for 30 months in the Air Force and came back in October of 1945.

I resumed my major in architecture as a first-semester junior, and I was miserable—leaning over a drafting board Saturday nights, erasing my mistakes so I could turn in something Monday and get a 3 (which is about a C). One of my fellow students was Robert Venturi, who of course now is one of the greats in world architecture, but at that time I was just impressed by his passionate conviction about architecture and his sense of clarity as to what it was he was doing. I had just nothing like that at all, and I felt, "Am I going to be competing with a guy like that?" That was a good measure, I suppose, for myself. At the same time, I was enjoying the history of art and architecture courses very much. So I switched my major at the end of the first semester of junior year to a major in art and archeology. I finished off in the summer of 1947, and got my BA *in absentia* at commencement in December.

I had several years between college and graduate school. I had been stationed a lot in the West in the service, in Texas and Colorado and California, and seen a great deal of the

*Undergraduate
Education*

*Exploring
the West and
Europe*

West. In the fall of '47, I decided I would go take a look at the world, and I started off alone in a car across the continent.

After several weeks, I found myself in Salt Lake City, stopping along the way to visit friends and relatives across the continent. I looked up a fellow I had known in the service in Salt Lake City, and it ended up that I stayed with his aunt and uncle there, and him, too. He was a medical student at the University of Utah. I started working for a meat packer during the day, part of the time, and for a contractor part of the time.

Then I went on to Seattle to stay with the brother of a friend of mine who had been killed in the war, and he was working at Boeing aircraft. I wanted this experience of working in a factory, and he managed to get me a job in the template shop at Boeing, because I had courses in architectural drawing and draftsmanship. I joined the union, because you had to (anyway, the International Machinists Union), and I went to the union meetings.

I lived with my friends, the Sanders, in Renton for a while. Then I got a room in downtown Seattle in a boarding house, not far from skid row. I had thought that in the evenings at home after work at the factory I was going to do a lot of the reading that I meant to do in college and never got around to. But that didn't work out at all; I was too bushed. And so I just explored the city. I went to union meetings. I went to some meetings which I learned were actually sort of run behind the scenes by communists, apparently. And I went to hear an evangelist and was very glad I had a good education and wasn't just swept away by the appeal to unreason. It turned out to be Billy Graham at the very beginning of his career.

I worked at Boeing for maybe only ten weeks or so, and then I went south along through Oregon and California, seeing much more of the West in the course of the trip. I stopped by Taliesin West on the way back to Princeton. Wright wasn't there at the time, but some people on the staff showed me around. That was around April 1948.

I came back to my home in Princeton and then before long I took off on the GI Bill to study in France. I spent some time in Paris, but I was officially a student at Grenoble in the south of France. I got into Germany the first month that tourists were admitted after the war, and even to Czechoslovakia briefly, and Switzerland and Italy, as well as France. I left Europe in the spring of '49,

I came back to the States and got a job teaching in a summer cram school at the Woodstock Country School in Vermont, sort of a progressive school for kids who had flunked French during the year. I spent the summer there cramming French into them. And then, in September, I went to teach French at Middlesex Academy outside of Boston, in Concord, Mass. That was the most hellish year of my life, dealing with adolescent kids. I realized that this was not my cup of tea, that I had been a jock in secondary school (I think really a socially induced jock), but I just couldn't take athletics that seriously any longer.

It turned out that I was much more interested in scholarly things. In the middle of that year, I began looking around at graduate schools in art history. My interests at the time were in architecture, from the beginning of the 18th century down to the then present. I'd been electrified by a course I had as an undergraduate at Princeton with Donald Drew Egbert, called Modern Architecture. I remember Egbert extolling Alexander Hall at Princeton, which was a Richardsonian building that was deplored still in 1946. Egbert made it out to be an important building, a building that deserved respectful recognition. I got interested in Victorian architecture with him.

I was advised by some of the graduate students at Princeton, whom I'd come to know when I was writing my senior thesis, that Yale was the best place for somebody with interests such as mine. Yale was more hospitable than Princeton to my interests in art history after 1700. My thought at that time was that I would go into architectural history. I started graduate study in art history at Yale in the fall of 1950

Return to Academia

Carroll Meeks and Vincent Scully, two of the major people in the field, were at Yale. My interest in Victorian architecture really accelerated with Meeks and Scully. And a visitor (who would be coming down shortly from Smith) was Henry-Russell Hitchcock, giving a lecture course and also a seminar. It seemed very natural to me, somehow, that people would be looking at Victorian art and architecture seriously. And it amazed me that it took so long for the appreciation of Victorian architecture to take hold more widely.

By my third year as a graduate student, I found that I had gotten much more interested in painting, as well as architecture, and I decided that I'd like to attempt tackling a subject that wasn't even taught in graduate school—19th century American painting. I decided that this was a great opportunity, wide open.

I'd spent so much time in the West, I was interested in how an artist came to grips with new kinds of space on the American continent in the 19th century—unlimited space. There was also a degree of scientific knowledge that was not known before the 19th century, and there was the democratic expansionist ideology of America. The tradition in landscape painting that the Americans had become heir to had developed in Europe in countries that have more or less permanently defined boundaries between countries. Space was limited in Europe, and painting was oriented to a clientele that was basically aristocratic, not democratic.

I went to George Heard Hamilton, with whom I'd done fairly well in a course just the previous semester, and told him that this was the kind of problem that I wanted to work on. He suggested Frederic Church. Hamilton was the kind of person that you did your best not to let on to the fact that you didn't know something. And so I guess I just sort of produced a "yes" and then went off to look at Thieme-Becker, a classic lexicon on painters. I found out that there were three Frederic Churches, but figured out which one he must mean: Frederic Edwin Church, 1826 to 1900, American landscape painter.

It turned out that Church had actually not gone to the American West. He'd only been as far west as the Mississippi, and Texas, too. But he had gone to Mexico and to Central America, and most importantly, to South America. And of course, he had explored much of the Eastern U.S., and he had gone up as far as Labrador, chasing icebergs, and he had been to the Old World.

In September or October of 1953, I learned that Church's home remained intact in Hudson, New York, and that his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Louis Church, lived there. I think it might have been through a conversation with Russell Hitchcock or maybe a conversation with Mary Bartlett Cowdrey, who was the registrar at the Museum of Art at Smith College. She had done a monograph on William Sidney Mount, and was intending to produce a study on Church.

I wrote to Mrs. Church (Sally Goode Church) and received a letter back from one of her two companions, Mrs. Caldon. She referred me to Mrs. Church's nephew, Charles T. Lark, Jr., a lawyer in New York, who had power-of-attorney. I wrote to Lark, and told him what I had in mind. I don't remember the particulars of it, but I was given permission to visit Olana in December 1953.

The staff at Olana said that I would have to have it appear that I was just there for lunch, and then I would leave by the front door, and say goodbye to Mrs. Church. They told me where I could park my car out of sight on one of the roads that wound around the property, which I promptly did. And then they said, "You just come in the back door, and we'll let you up into the attic through the back stairs." They got a great kick out of my visit.

I went into the house absolutely bewildered by what I saw, not at all expecting such a relic of the 19th century. It was virtually untouched, unchanged since the 19th century. After I looked around on the main floor, I had lunch with Mrs. Church. (She was senile and wanted to feed me much more than I really wanted to eat.)

*Discovering
Church*

*Discovering
Olana*

When I went up into the attic after lunch I was staggered—just the abundance of material that was still there, hundreds of drawings by Church, scores and scores of oil studies by the painter, and cancelled checks, journals, prints that the artist had had, photographs (hundreds upon hundreds of photographs), some paintings by other artists, paintings by the artist himself stored in the attic, and so on.

A couple of months later I arranged with Charles Lark to make a return visit, and then had permission to work. I don't know whether Lark had a notion that maybe my studying the painter would enhance the value of the place. I suspect that must have passed through his mind at the time, but I don't know whether he would have been calculating in that sense.

I spent some ten weeks working at Olana. Lark trusted me and gave me free run of the house. (Of course, I was not to open up anything that was locked and for which a key couldn't be found.) I lived at a hotel in town, that wonderful old General Worth Hotel, a Greek Revival building (which sadly was torn down in the early 60's).

I went out day, after day, after day, going back to New Haven occasionally to visit my wife and also to be on hand when our first child was born on March 9th in 1954, returning to Olana again in the spring. I collected copious notes and took many photographs of the drawings of the house, and many more of the individual objects in the house, particularly things by Church.

The next year, 1954–1955, we lived at my wife's family's house in Swarthmore, outside of Philadelphia, and I began preparing for my dissertation. Yale's practice was that when you were far enough along, you met with a doctoral committee and a visitor from outside. John Bowen, the curator of American painting from the Brooklyn Museum, was the outside visitor. I was asked all kinds of questions about Church and the dissertation, and I really had no idea at the time what eventually it would lead to. I mean, I thought I did, but it turned out that Church proved to be much more interest-

ing and much more complex than I thought at that date. But nobody else knew enough about Church either.

I spent another ten weeks or so that year doing research at Olana, and simply getting to learn about American painting and Church and his times. I'd had no courses at all to prepare for this. I traveled around the country visiting collections and locating paintings by Church. Most of them were still in private collections.

I was visiting Smith College to take a look at Smith's painting by Church, and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, one of my teachers at Yale, said, "Would you be interested in teaching at Smith?" He said that they happened to have a position open for the next year, beginning in the fall of 1955. The idea was that I would finish my dissertation in the summer, but the problem was that I couldn't hit upon a genuine thesis. I taught for a year at Smith and then took one year off, '56-'57, with the understanding with Smith that I would finish the dissertation. I didn't come close to it, but I was reappointed.

Initially, I was teaching in the big survey course, giving lectures and all that, and taking sections. And then I acquired my own course, in '57 or '58, on 18th century art—Italian, French, and English primarily. When Oliver Larkin was on a sabbatical, I gave a seminar in American painting, focusing on Church.

I spent a couple of summers writing stillborn drafts of a dissertation, just getting into it. Somehow it was just sort of sterile, just chronicling. And then I talked to a couple of my colleagues at Smith, one in English and one in History. I told them about my sort of dilemma. One of them suggested R.W.B. Lewis's *American Adam*, and the other suggested Henry Nash's *Virgin Land*, as things I might read. Vincent Scully, one of my advisers, suggested I read D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*.

I was on my way to New York at the time and I picked up a paperback copy of Lawrence's book at Brentano's, and got

Smith College

The Dissertation

on the train back to Northampton. It required a change at New Haven, but I got so enthralled in Lawrence that I forgot to get off at New Haven and went on to New London and then had to turn around and go back to New Haven and back to Smith. By the time I arrived in Northampton, I had finished the book. It really gave me absolutely critical insights into Church's contemporaries, and his moment, as it were, his state of mind. In the winter of 1958, I filled myself with this kind of reading, also reading in American theology, too.

In my basement study, I had photographs of Church's paintings on the walls around me. (Almost all the photographs I had of Church's paintings were ones I had had to take, because the paintings just hadn't been photographed in most places.) And I'd been looking at the plates in a book that had been in Church's library called *The World Before the Deluge*. It was a translation into English from a French text by Louis Figet. I looked at my photo of Church's "Jamaica," and I shouted, "Eureka!"

I ran up the stairs and announced to my wife and my daughter (who was almost four) that the end of the dissertation was in sight, because I recognized that Church's landscapes were Adamic icons, as I called them then. They were a means of psychic self-realization for the American as a new man or new person in a new world. Everything just flip-flopped into place—the major paintings—I saw them all fitting into this pattern. And then I wrote the dissertation quickly, in two summers, and I just became the *amanuensis* with an insight. It was as though I was being guided almost literally with my hand. The dissertation worked out elegantly, beautifully, and somehow authoritatively, and—after all the scary doubts of earlier—with a wonderful sense of conviction and certainty and clarity.

I turned in the dissertation in the winter of '60. One of the members of the committee would not accept it, because – I forgot what his point was now. It turned out that he was not getting tenure at Yale, and he was mad at Yale. He apolo-gized two years later for not having accepted it at the time.

He had been miffed, he frankly admitted. And so I just re-submitted the dissertation at the end of the summer of '60 and got my degree in '61.

I became convinced that Church was really a very significant painter, even though, for the most part, there was still a very patronizing attitude towards any Hudson River School painter. One of the senior studio artists at Smith felt I was just wasting my time working on a Hudson River School painter. And in fact, there was a real sense of annoyance or impatience on his part. If I was going to be teaching American art at Smith and succeeding Oliver Larkin, there was sort of an implicit understanding of my situation at Smith that I would have to deal with something important. For Mervin Jewels, that really meant something in the 20th century, and probably mid-20th century, or 1930 on.

Another one of the studio people at Smith was an abstract expressionist. He really didn't like the fact that the person teaching American art was bogged down in something as irrelevant as Hudson River School painting. And some of my colleagues, too, in art history also were very patronizing about it. Some of them thought I had an obsession with Church, a sort of a fixation on him which they felt was not rational. But I found the students were very responsive to what I was telling them about the painter.

I applied for a Dixon Ryan Fox grant. Edgar P. Richardson was somewhat dubious about my interpretation of Church. I'd given a paper at the College Art meetings and he wrote me that he thought I was oversimplifying Church. He was kindly in spirit, but it did irk me, because I felt that I was showing how *complex* Church was—that Church was producing these icons of American nationalism. It sort of really shook me, but I believed what I was saying.

Richardson was willing to give me the benefit of the doubt, and asked me to meet with Louis Jones, who was the person who really had the final say about the grant. Jones was director of the New York State Historical Association, and ran the program at Cooperstown. My wife Trudy came along,

*Understanding of
Church*

and we met his wife Agnes Jones, too. Lou Jones was very skeptical of my thesis as well, but I think it's because we really liked each other that he okayed the grant. Lou Jones and I hit it off personally; we got along very well.

*Death of Sally
Goode Church*

In about 1961, I saw Charles Lark and asked him to get in touch with me right away when his aunt died. We had an understanding that he would.

I discussed what might be done about Olana with Lou Jones. He had seen Olana, was very interested in it and wanted to see it saved. He'd made an effort to save the Cole place, which failed. Richardson, too, had been interested in Olana and the hope of saving it. I told Lou Jones that I had had a discussion with Charles Lark, asking that he get in touch with me immediately, just as soon as Mrs. Louis Church died.

I got word in early September '64, that Mrs. Louis Church had died. But it was not from Charles Lark that I got the word. It was from Stuart Feld at Hirsch and Adler. He called me and said, "Do you know that Mrs. Church has died and that the contents of Olana are to be auctioned off?" It really came as a shock to me.

Well, I got in touch with Charles Lark, who had inherited Olana with his sister, who had recently died. Everything had to go through him. I made two points. One was that I wanted to get into Olana to document the place, and the other was I would hope that I could have time to organize an effort to preserve Olana. I think Lark didn't really take that very seriously. I don't think he had any sense of the preservation movement. He warned me that he had four children, and he needed money to send them through college.

*Early
Supporters of
the Campaign*

I got into Olana and began desperately photographing it, and also telling everybody about it who I thought might be interested about this situation. I called Richardson, who was the director at Winterthur at the time. Richardson was eager to give his blessing to that effort. He called attention to the situation to Henry Francis DuPont. But I think

Richardson just didn't have the energy to get involved at that stage in his life, deeply involved, except to give his blessing. He felt it was too late, and I think he really was just too skeptical about the prospect of success.

I'm trying to remember whether Edgar Kaufmann, who was teaching at Columbia, came up to Olana. Later on Philip Johnson got involved, and Lincoln Kirstein, as well, though they didn't come up during the campaign. Kirstein had been there before. Russell Lynes came up. Some of my faculty at Yale—Hamilton, Scully and Kubler—also came up. They felt Olana was important, significant, and that it would really be a cultural scandal to let a place like that just evaporate.

There was a graduate student at Columbia whom I'd asked to take some photographs of Church's "Heart of the Andes" at the Met a year before. I don't recall the fellow's name now, but I told him about the situation at Olana, and he had, for one reason or another, come to know Don Karshan, who was something of a prodigy and sort of a mysterious person. Karshan had been an advertising executive who had "retired" from a career in advertising at about the age of only 35. Karshan had a sort of a museum of prints, a museum without walls. Actually, it was an apartment on West 19th Street, with a superb security system and full of wonderful prints.

Karshan was quite an interesting guy, who had a lot of sort of a certain kind of nerve. I could see why he had been very successful as an advertising man. He maybe just had some of the chutzpah that perhaps I didn't have. He played an important role, even though I've completely lost track of him. He sort of vanished after a while. He took off to live in Paris and was living with Archipenko's widow. Anyway, he was a big help at the critical point in the campaign.

Somehow we got Jim Biddle and Carl Weinhardt involved very, very quickly. Carl was director of the Gallery of Modern Art (Huntington Hartford's gallery). It probably was Carl who approached Jim about serving, but I think Jim was already aware of the situation. Very early on there was a visit to Olana by the Metropolitan Museum staff: the Hovings,

Jim Biddle and his wife, and a lot of the staff came up. I think they came up in a bus from New York, which was of course Jim's doing, since he was at the Met, which was terrific. I think perhaps Hoving made a public statement about Olana.

We had a meeting at the New York Historical Society and Henry Hope Reed was there. He was gung-ho for saving Olana. And I think Christopher Tunnard at Yale got marginally involved in it as well. That might have been what led to the affair at the New York Historical Society

Another important person who got involved early was Richard Wunder, who was curator of drawings and artists' oil sketches and so on at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum. He was working on a catalog on works by Church there, which is now, of course, the Cooper-Hewitt uptown, but it was down at Cooper Union then. They had 2,000 or so sketches, which they got in 1917 from Louis Church. Wunder had just moved on from Cooper Union to become curator at the Smithsonian in what was then the National Collection of Fine Arts. And he interested David Scott, who was the director there, in our cause. Some plans were started to have a big Church exhibition, which matured in 1966, in the winter of '66, while the campaign was still going on.

At a critical point very early on (late September '64, I'm going to guess), I was photographing in the reception parlor to the left, as you come into the house, in the vestibule, that little corner room, madly photographing, and I heard a voice in the hall say, "Do you see this? Do you see that? These have been here for a hundred years. They should stay here. They belong here." I walked out into the hall, and it was Lloyd Boice, talking to the director of the Taconic Park Commission. I'd known Boice's name ever since I first went to Olana in December of '53, but we'd never met. Boice was a local real estate-cum-insurance man who was sort of the manager of Olana.

I was absolutely delighted that this was our first meeting – of all things for us to meet in these circumstances! I had

never had the slightest hint that Boice was somebody who cared about things like this at all. I sort of had the impression of Lloyd Boice as a tough-minded, hard-boiled businessman, a no-nonsense real-estate man, who was only interested in the dollar. That he saw Olana as a culturally significant monument, I thought, "This is wonderful, just in itself." I went out to introduce myself to both men, and when the Taconic Park Commissioner left, Lloyd Boice and I sat down in the kitchen and began planning a strategy. Lloyd and I hit it off beautifully.

Lloyd Boice had very good connections with Albany. He had a friend, Louis Pierro (French-Canadian name), who lived in the Hudson area and was on Nelson Rockefeller's staff. Pierro drove up every day to Albany to work at the state-house. So word very quickly—very, very quickly—got to Rockefeller's office.

The Rockefellers were, in a sense, approached from two directions. I had been in touch with an aunt of mine, my Aunt Elizabeth Dodge—Elizabeth Dodge Huntington, who became Elizabeth Dodge Clark after my uncle died years before, and she remarried. She lived in Riverdale, and she was one of the Phelps Dodge copper family. Also one of my college roommates had been David Dodge, another of the sort of Dodge-dom. Anyway, Aunt Elizabeth's grandfather, I think it would have been, had been one of Frederic Church's friends and patrons, and owned "Morning in the Tropics," which is now at the National Gallery. She was a friend of Laurance Rockefeller, and so she got in touch with him.

Also, I got in touch with Frederick Church Osborn, who was named in honor of the painter. He was living at Garrison, New York, and was a retired banker and a former trustee of the Carnegie Foundation, of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and of Princeton University. I told him about the situation at Olana, and he apparently he spoke with Laurance Rockefeller. (When Frederick Church Osborn died three or four years ago in his nineties, he still owned "Chimborazo" and some other paintings by Church.) It happens that the

*The
Rockefellers*

Lloyd Boice

Osborns and the Dodges are related. There'd been inter-marriages, so there were connections. And also he had worked with an uncle of mine, Ellsworth Huntington. I suppose I was certified by these various connections.

Rockefeller sent down a Mrs. Edith Saville, if I'm right, to look over Olana. She was a lovely woman who must have been approaching retirement at the time. She fell in love with it, but she told me that the governor would not—that he really liked modern; he did not like Victorian. But she also said that the Governor was interested, and would certainly do something to support the effort. And so a good word got back to Rockefeller's office, a good report, I'll say, on Olana.

Word was getting around that the executors were going to sign a contract with Rundel Gilbert, a Hudson Valley auctioneer, on (I think it was) November 11th. Some of the paintings were to be taken down to New York—if they hadn't already been taken down—for slicking up for sale.

Karshan, who was an advertising man, said, "You've got to do something really dramatic. Send telegrams to museum directors all over the country that Olana may be in danger of liquidation, and give them an address." He sort of helped give me nerve, which I've always been grateful to him for. I think he kind of triggered me to do this. I'd been maybe a little too diffident even up to that point, and I think nerve built up and up and up as time went on, as I became more convinced. And the thing began to snowball.

I was holed up in a hotel room in Hudson at the St. Charles and made phone call, after phone call, after phone call. I had a horrendous phone bill, \$450 in one month, I think it was. But I was just calling all over the place and sending telegrams all over the country calling for support. I've never said this before, but I felt as if I were somebody with a machine gun in a Swiss Alpine pass, keeping an army from coming through the pass. (And here I am a pacifist!) That I was just sort of waiting for help to come from behind, but nobody else was there yet. That's how I felt! It could have

been the finger in the dike, the same thing. Just—I've got to keep that finger in the dike until help comes, until... anyway, I mean, it depended on me.

We'd worked out a meeting of Lloyd Boice and myself, Carl Weinhardt (to represent Huntington Hartford, or at least to appear to be representing Huntington Hartford, *i.e.*, wealth) and Bob Wheeler (from Sleepy Hollow Restorations, to represent a Rockefeller interest) and Frederick Church Osborn. It was really Osborn who was the mastermind. He could talk their language, because he was a prominent New York banker.

We had an appointment at 11 o'clock on this day in early November of '64 to meet with the executors, Charles Lark (the heir) and Russell Sigler of Banker's Trust in New York. I came armed with something like 30 telegrams from prominent people in the museum world around the country pleading to save Olana. (Some of them knew next to nothing about it.)

And we sat down with these two executors. Osborn got across the idea to Messrs. Sigler and Lark that Bankers Trust would really be embarrassed by what eventually would become evident—that they had moved too quickly in the liquidation of Olana and had not realized its full value. He put the fear of God into them!

What we proposed is that we rent Olana for three months. I think it was \$1,000 a month, or something like that, to help us get started with the campaign. We'd gotten commitments in the meantime from three prominent names—Lincoln Kirstein, Philip Johnson, and Edgar Kaufmann. (I mean, the visibility now was beginning to build up, you see).

Osborn was so adroit in this strategy! We innocent art historians, we had no clout at all. But he had clout! And the fact that there was a Huntington Hartford, and this guy represents the Rockefellers and so on; they realized that there's some power behind this. And the executors said, "Alright, we'll change our plans. And we'll give you three months to

get yourselves organized, and then we'll confer again to decide what to do."

Rundel Gilbert arrived at noon thinking he was going to sign a contract. There were already numbers around objects on the house for the sale, or for the cataloging of the contents. He was told... that they weren't going to sign the contract. Then we really got going.

Very shortly after that successful eleventh-hour meeting with the executors, our family had Thanksgiving at Olana, to celebrate the success. The staff there really got a great kick out of it, although they were sort of divided. One of the staff really sided with Charles Lark. In fact, somebody on the staff overheard Lark say to Sigler (or the other way around), "We have got to cooperate with these people. These are really influential, powerful people!" Reuben Wilsey, who had been sort of the gardener-cook-chauffeur for decades, was still living at the time. He had some illness and I realized he couldn't live for very long. He was very sympathetic to the campaign, and most of the staff was. But there was one, Satterthwaite, her name was, I think, who, for some reason or other, sort of found it all very irksome and annoying. But the others got a great kick out of it, all this activity and so on. Anyway I think we quite quickly got in an elderly couple to house-sit during the campaign, and then the staff was let off.

Right away almost, we got in touch with Joseph Resnick, who was, at the time, the local congressman. He was a Democrat in a district that had normally been Republican (and went back to Republican almost immediately). Before Congressman Resnick came up, there was a visit by the president of the Iranian-American Society, and Richard Ettinghausen, who was the nation's number one student of Islamic Art. Ettinghausen taught at the Institute of Fine Arts in New York and had been on the staff at the Freer Gallery in Washington. The idea was that they would look over Olana and decide whether it was worth a visit on the part of the Iranian ambassador.

Ettinghausen was looking for Islamic antiques and initially was finding very little. Then he found a 16th-century Turkish tile and a 17th-century pewter vessel of some quality and caliber. He turned around abruptly, and he said, "Do you know, this is the first instance of interest in collecting Islamic art in the United States." Now, whether that's so or not, I don't know. But anyway, he committed himself, and he okayed it. So very quickly then, a visit of the Iranian ambassador and Congressman Resnick was arranged. The Chamber of Commerce got involved with this, and the local television station, the papers, of course. There was a big fuss, which was terrific. Resnick got disgusted when Sam Aldrich became involved later on, and pulled out. But meanwhile, we'd had all of the pizzazz of the Iranian ambassador's visit

The campaign had the local establishment behind it, or plenty of it. I had met with the Board of County Commissioners right at Olana, in the dining room. Boice, who was Grand High muck-a-muck of the Elks and had all kinds of connections, had set it up. I talked with the County Commissioners about the importance, the significance of Olana, because if it was going to become a public monument, they were concerned about the loss in taxes and so on. And they wanted to be convinced that it would be compensated for, you see! That was a concern right away, that there was an ambivalence about this place. But they endorsed the effort. The Columbia County Arts and Crafts Society also got into the effort. So local support began building up.

Lloyd Boice had good connections with the Hudson Register-Star. Almost immediately, Raymond Kennedy, who owned the Register-Star, got up to Olana. He got turned on by this—it was something really newsworthy, local. He got a columnist, a fellow named Gus Kramer, to write up Olana and do a feature on me. Lloyd got the owner of the local radio station behind it as well.

Allen Porter was a neighbor of Olana, a charming man who had converted an old church into his home, I guess it was at

Thanksgiving at Olana

The Persian Connection

Local Support

Rhinebeck. He might have been the one who got Russell Lynes and Edgar Kaufmann up to Olana. There may be other routes to those two as well. Anyway, they came up to Olana and immediately were gung-ho to save the place.

The mayor was sort of perfunctorily involved, perhaps, and a good deal of the local power. Lloyd Boice's connections with the Elks and the Boys (the Old Boy Network of Columbia County) made a very substantial difference, I think, in getting the thing off the ground and generating local support, which is very important. Wendy Neefus' sister did a lot of documentation of objects in the house. Ray Kennedy's aunt was a retired librarian; she worked on the library in the house.

One of the consequences of the local support was that it triggered Sam Aldrich's involvement. Almost right away, Ray Kennedy and the fellow who owned the radio station felt that they could get Aldrich involved. Aldrich was working in Rockefeller's office in Albany, and he wanted to run for Congress from this district. Aldrich needed visibility, needed some public attention. Somehow it was Ray Kennedy who made the initial overture to Aldrich, although Kennedy was publicly identified as a Democrat.

Part of the overall strategy was that the Olana campaign would give Alexander Aldrich visibility, publicity. And it was hoped to identify him with a success, so that he could beat Hamilton Fish in the primaries in the Republican Party for Congress. Time Magazine, I think it was, featured a "Tweedle Ham and Tweedle Sam," because they were both so similar, really, in background. Old Hudson Valley aristocracy running for the same office.

It was for him, I think, an important way of making himself known, because he'd been working for Nelson Rockefeller simply as an appointee at various administrative capacities. Later he became Commissioner of Historic Preservation in Parks and so on for the state in the '70s. Elizabeth Aldrich was wonderful in this campaign. She fell in love with the place, and that helped her husband, too. And also she gen-

erated interest. She's a very unusual person. She lives just south of Olana now, a couple of miles. They lived in Old Chatham, not far away.

Aldrich was approached about becoming president of an organization that we wanted to form, Olana Preservation Incorporated. Trudy and I, Al Callan and his wife and Ray Kennedy (who was a bachelor), had dinner with Sam and Elizabeth Aldrich. I gave the pitch about Church and Olana and so on, and the Aldrich's decided to make the plunge. I mean, it took a little while for him to accept the invitation. There was a delay of a week or something like that, in which he really checked it out on his own independently, then decided to go ahead and become president of Olana Preservation.

Aldrich knew somebody who had been the "girl Friday," so to say, of the campaign to raise funds for relief for Florence after the devastation of the '64 flood – Betty Cuninghame. She had apparently done a beautiful job in that. She had a background in art history, too. She was really the person who actually sort of ran the show.

Olana Preservation got some space for an office in Rockefeller Center. A law firm, Milbank, Tweed, sort of took it under their wing, and we were incorporated very quickly. I was designated vice president. We had our meetings in Manhattan at Milbank, Tweed, in Rockefeller Center. Jim Biddle served as treasurer and represented the Metropolitan Museum interest in it.

One of the very first things Sam Aldrich brought up was the idea of having the state take over Olana. I wasn't sure about the state as a recipient of Olana. Originally, we had been hoping that the National Historic Trust would acquire Olana. But that would require an endowment, and where was that going to come from? I suppose I knew more about the National Historic Trust, and at that time I think it maybe was viewed more positively than it is now. I think it's been in a somewhat difficult state for the last several years. But the National Trust then, I think, was just sort of getting

*Olana
Preservation Inc.*

New York State

*Alexander
Aldrich*

off the ground and on the up-and-up. Anyway, that was thought of as a possibility, but there was very little purpose in our aiming at that while we were just struggling to keep the campaign afloat. So the possibilities were very carefully thought over, thought through.

When Edgar Richardson came up to Olana at one point he suggested that I get in touch with Wayne Andrews to photograph it. Wayne Andrews came up in early in September, October, and I was teaching full-time at Smith. Somehow Wayne Andrews expected me to attend to him all the time at Olana, and was sort of annoyed with me that I didn't pay him more attention.

I was desperately trying to document the objects in the house. I became aware of the fact that he wasn't taking many pictures, and that what seemed to be guiding him in his choice of what to photograph was pictures that would sell. And so a lot of stuff that might be documented wasn't getting documented.

I hired a local photographer myself, Wendy Neefus, who lived right in Hudson, to come up and take a lot of other photographs of views and rooms, looking to the southwest and the northeast and so on, and not just the things that would sell. I paid her out of my pocket, and ran up a bill of something like \$600 just in getting these photographs taken.

And then Wayne Andrews sent me a bill for the photographs he had taken. We were not yet organized, and I just couldn't pay it. I had a \$450 phone bill and a \$600 bill or something like that for this local photographer. I pleaded with him. I said, "Just give us time to get organized, and you'll get paid. But we're just not ready yet." He wrote to Betty Cuninghame at Olana Preservation, and said that if he had known that I was not going to be acting in good faith he never would had taken the photographs and so on. He was an absolute – well, I won't say it on tape! And then he wrote up this nasty article about the fact that the campaign was badly organized, and we were probably going to fail.

Very early on, Katherine Kuh of the Saturday Review came up to Olana. I think she was a friend of Lou Jones and that was the connection. She and I had an argument in the attic. I think I said something about Church being a more profoundly American painter than Cole. And she would have none of that at all, telling me that Cole was a much more important painter, at least. Well, I think Cole was a good – in some ways, I think maybe one can warm up more to Cole. But I think that Church is more profoundly ideological than Cole is and Church probed the depths of the American psyche in a way that Cole couldn't, because of his background I think. Cole just never could have done what Church did, and Church could not have done what he did, had it not been that he studied with Cole and adapted what Cole did, to service, as it were, different goals, different objectives.

Anyway we had this really rather unpleasant encounter, which seems kind of pointless to me now, all these years later. She had been interested in Cole for some time and knew very little about Church. It didn't figure at all in what she said about Olana, so it doesn't make much difference, except that I guess it was she who asked Wayne Andrews to write the review for the Saturday Review (which panned my book). I don't know if there's any connection there or not.

The New York Times had at least one, if not two, editorials about Olana. When it got really scary, it was Ada Louise Huxtable who said it would be a national disgrace (or something to that effect) if Olana couldn't be saved. When Russell Lynes' thing came out in Harper's, that certainly didn't hurt.

We made enough progress in that first three months so that then Charles Lark and Sigler allowed us to continue with the arrangement of renting Olana by the month.

Receptions were going on constantly. They were fund-raisers and, of course, they also generated publicity too, as well. Almost every reception, I was there. Often I would talk, and Sam Aldrich would talk at these receptions. I lent Aldrich a

Early Press

*Receptions
at Olana*

bunch of slides, and some of them never came back (which you can't blame him for, really).

The receptions, of course, were typically on Saturdays or Sundays, sometimes tandem. Different organizations, sometimes two in one day, would come. Garden clubs and things like that would go to Olana. I think it was estimated that 30,000 people went through Olana in the course of the campaign. I think it was just assumed that everybody who came was making a contribution. Olana Preservation Incorporated was collecting money mostly and generating publicity, scheduling events at Olana, one after another. The crowds that came through the region were wonderful.

*Columbia
County*

The people in the neighborhood really were excited by that fact that here we have a monument that is attracting national attention, and that's considered important by the experts. Columbia County was sort of an impoverished county, and the local people were just so excited about the fact that they had this important monument, which they didn't know much about themselves.

The local support took expression, to a considerable degree, in the form of volunteer service. People served as guides for the crowds that came through, to take through the house. Other people, I think, just sort of stood around to kind of make sure that things didn't get stolen. A few things got stolen, very little during the campaign. Remarkably little, I think, actually was removed from the house, considering they were going all over the house, into the attic and up into the tower. I'm amazed at the number of people in the years subsequently, whom I've met in one context or another, who've said that they visited Olana during the campaign.

*Commuting to
Hudson*

Olana was about 85 miles from Northampton, so usually I would make it in just under two hours, an hour and three-quarters, a good part of it expressway. And I went back and forth a tremendous amount during the campaign.

I talked to the Columbia County Arts and Crafts Society one night and came back to Smith, at maybe 3:00 in the morn-

ing, taught at 9:00 in the morning and had no time to prepare. Or I went down from Hudson to New York, where I gave a talk at the New-York Historical Society to call attention to Olana. Scully did too. (He was much less nervous and performed much better than I did.) Well anyway, I went down to the city and then back to Hudson and then back, I recall, to Smith, arriving at about 6:00 in the morning and began teaching at 9:00 or something like that. I gave a talk at Vassar, sort of in similar hectic circumstances. I forget where else I talked in the Hudson Valley, but oh, it really was a mess.

After a year off, supposedly to write a monograph on Church, I was back teaching in the fall of '64, but cutting lots of classes and being criticized by some people for doing it. It was just when I took over from Oliver Larkin in American art, who had just retired. My daughter overheard some students complaining about Mr. Huntington who was neglecting his teaching, or something like that. And some of my colleagues were critical as well of the amount of time that was going into this. This went on, and on, and on for months, you see, because all of this, of course, cut deeply into my time of teaching at Smith. Those last two years at Smith were... I don't blame that the students were complaining about the fact that I was cutting classes.

Some of my colleagues were very supportive. Russell Hitchcock was strongly behind it. Hitchcock, of course, was one of the pioneers in the study of Victorian architecture, so it's understandable why he was for Olana, even though he was not young. But some of my colleagues at Smith were very critical of my paying so much attention to Olana.

When I was up for tenure in the winter of '66, Phyllis Lehmann, whose specialty was Greece—Ancient Greece—had always has been rather patronizing towards American art. Pete Larkin told me how painful it had been for him to have to be subjected to her condescending attitude towards American art. And I, of course, had to cope with the same thing. It was sort of the attitude that if people

*Reaction at
Smith*

failed everywhere else and couldn't master languages, they went into American art.

I had been at Smith for some time and found Leonard Baskin to be a very arrogant guy. He and I had not hit it off for a number of years, and then two things happened. One was that our sons happened to be good friends. And the second was that I prevailed upon him just to let me tell him about Frederic Church. He invited me and Trudy over to his house, and he and his wife at that time (she died subsequently of multiple sclerosis) had an evening together with Trudy and me. I showed them slides of Church's work and just discussed Church with him. He absolutely came around. He felt I was absolutely right, and he became a very strong supporter.

In the meeting where I was under discussion for tenure, there was a division within the department, because some of the studio people felt, "Well, this guy's going to be bogged down on a Hudson River School painter. And we want somebody in the 20th century." Phyllis Lehman felt that here I was cutting classes to save Olana—which she didn't bother to go see when I invited my colleagues over. Baskin said, "Phyllis, you don't give a shit about Olana. But if one of your temples was endangered you'd cut some classes, too." Apparently that just silenced her just like that, and she withdrew her objections. I was given tenure. But, I felt that sometimes you've just got to do things whether you like it or not. And I couldn't have lived with myself if I hadn't made these sacrifices and taken these chances.

I was willing to risk not getting tenure. I felt Olana was just vastly more important than something like that. I had really come to believe that no matter what people thought – the condescending attitudes— I knew this stuff was important, and it wasn't just because it was stuff I was working on. Objectively I knew it was significant and important, although I couldn't convince some people of that at that time. But I was absolutely persuaded. In a sense what gave me encouragement and nerve was just the absolute conviction that it

had to be done, everything had to be done to save the place.

When "The Icebergs" came to light in the summer of 1979 and then at Sotheby Park Bernet (I attended the auction), sold for \$2,500,000, there was a very, very sweet moment for me. It was crass monetary proof of the fact that I was hardly alone in my perception of Church and his importance. And to think of the begrudging tolerance or even disapproval, to which I had been subjected all those years before!

Around this time, George Braziller had its art editor get in touch with me about doing a monograph on Church. Braziller presented the situation to me as something that would help save Olana. I was consumed by teaching and by the campaign into the summer of '65. I spent some time at Olana, that summer, but I did manage to get quite a bit of the text for the book written. This sense of urgency just suddenly stiffened and tensed all my muscles.

After I submitted my dissertation, I had had a second insight into Church, which came from my teaching 18th-century European and English art. I realized that what was taking place in the 18th century was a transposition of the great tradition, which worked in such a way as to produce landscapes that became dramas. You have dramatic landscape earlier, but it builds up and up, so that you really get landscape as history painting. The notion is that the inanimate drama of landscape is a mode of history painting, in which trees and mountains and clouds and water, and what-have-you in a landscape assume the roles of characters. Where in the Renaissance you would have had human figures enacting the drama, now you had inanimate characters essentially drawn from nature enacting the drama, I combined that with my insight into Church's paintings as Adamic icons. And that's what really inspired me to write the book.

I finished the book in October of '65, going down every week to spend time with the editor, Barbara La Penta. The whole book was being rushed at a terrific pace, because understandably they wanted to capitalize on the campaign.

The Book

But I wrote that book with real passion and a sense of urgency. In fact, I suppose it was what really finally unlocked me. Concern about perfection and so on – I simply had to throw that to the winds. This had to get done. And it was very good for me, very needed, I think. I just put down what was the most important thing to say. And I tried to get it down just as quickly and clearly and as forcefully as I could. Braziller got the book out in February of '66.

J. William Middendorf, II, the owner of “The Rainy Season in the Tropics” at that time (and I think he also owned for a brief period “The Andes of Ecuador”), put up some money for the book. Bill Mittendorf was very active in the Republican party, national treasurer of the Republic Party in the Barry Goldwater campaign, I think it was. And then he had an appointment with Ronald Reagan, sort of ambassador-at-large in Latin America. He and I are at opposite poles politically, but we had this in common. Anyway, he gave enough to have 1,000 additional copies published to help the campaign. These copies went to Olana for publicity. Bill Mittendorf is mentioned in the acknowledgments in the book.

The book was panned by Wayne Andrews in the *Saturday Review*. He called it uninspired. He caught a comment that I'd made, which he thought was very clever on his part: that he caught me in an unconscious paroxysm of a Freudian self-revelation when I talked about Thoreau's ejaculation on top of Mount Katahdin. Well, I knew perfectly well what it was: just contact, the sort of the experience of contact with nature that I felt that Church's paintings effected, say in the “Twilight in the Wilderness.” I had related it to Thoreau just as part of the intellectual climate of the time.

One thing that really shook me was that I had thought it was self-evident in the text that I was trying to reconstitute, I'll say, the psychological atmosphere in which Church worked, and hence the hype was that that was the spirit of the times. Wayne Andrews picked that out as just gung-ho enthusiasm for the painter on my part. I realized that I should have

been clear about my whole strategy, which was to get you into the artist and his times, in the very tempo of the writing. I realized that you can't expect everybody to understand what you're trying to do, especially if it hasn't been done before.

Wayne Andrews was nasty, frankly, just nasty. (He was still, I think, angry about not getting paid quickly enough.) It was unpleasant, but it also did damage. It slowed up the progress of the sale of the book, because that was its first review. The book was also reviewed in the *Library Chronicle* or whatever is the standard journal of the librarians. The reviewer said that I overestimated Church's importance. That had to be expected, I think. I mean, it was all so new, you know.

Meanwhile, Wunder had just gotten into his position at the Smithsonian at the National Collection of Fine Arts (now the NMAA). The administration had just changed and they were looking for something interesting to do. It served their interests to have a show on Church and to call attention to the NCFA, which had been languishing for decades. A man named Beggs had been director and was, I guess, essentially a political appointee and a terribly laid-back guy. When I visited him, doing research on Church, and the “Aurora Borealis” (which was in his collection), my memory is that when I walked into his office he was literally working on a crossword puzzle during an office hour!

The exhibition went on to Albany. There'd been cooperation in various ways, with the Albany Institute of History and Art, where I was invited to give a public lecture by the New York Historical Society, which was, of course, useful in generating interest there. Hosting the Church exhibition was something that the Albany Institute could do to help out. Norman Rice was there, and the woman who was director at the time. My recollection is that Vassar had me give a lecture in a series on the Hudson Valley, something like “The Hudson Valley and Culture.” It just happened to be perfect timing in the course of the campaign. That was a way that

*The
Exhibition*

Vassar, by asking me to participate, could help out. The exhibition also went on to Knoedler's in New York. It had three venues. The exhibition helped very considerably with the calling attention to the campaign.

Hilton Kramer gave the exhibition a favorable review in the New York Times, which was quite nice. And he gave my book a little blurb in the catalog for the exhibition, making some favorable comment (at least for him it was quite favorable), like "In an interesting introductory essay by David Huntington" or something like that. And at least he didn't ...Hilton Kramer, he was pretty down on a lot of American Art.

In the course of the campaign, we wanted the New York State Council on the Arts to be involved, and they did give the campaign an endorsement of sorts. But we had appealed to Richard McLanathan, who has written a book about American art. He went to Olana and said, "Well, if you get rid of the junk, it might be worth saving." He completely missed the point of the place. I mean, it's the "junk" that's just integral with it, part of the whole. So I was sort of disgusted with that. We just sort of set that aside...

One thing that certainly should be mentioned is the clear pattern of interest according to age. I remember that it was clearly evident that the younger the person, the more favorably disposed they were to Olana. The Victorian seemed less and less dated and old-fashioned, and more interesting and more attractive. I was one of the oldest people—I was 41 when the campaign began.

Very few people of the older generation were interested. The work of architectural historians certainly had been helpful, because the appreciation for Victorian architecture had already gotten under way in the '40s. There were enlightened people, like Phillip Johnson, Lincoln Kirstein and Edgar Kaufmann, who got involved, even if it wasn't their particular taste.

But I can recall bringing Mrs. J.M. Kaplan, up to Olana. She

apparently had been interested in preservation, and Don Karshan arranged a visit. I met her at the station in Hudson and drove her up the hill. And as soon as her very first glimpse of the house she said, "Oh, how bizarre." The whole visit at Olana was painful. She was obviously just not interested. I think she thought it was vulgar and just full of junk and so on. It was such an uncomfortable time, and she didn't give anything either. Afterwards, I think she even was sort of annoyed that she'd been asked to go up to look it over. But amusingly, her daughter is now active in Friends of Olana and is an enthusiast of the place. But that's indicative of generations.

We were aiming at a figure of around \$470,000 that we needed to raise for everything, for the house and grounds. Receptions went on at full force through the summer of '65, but we were really getting scared, because we just weren't making the kind of progress that we should. We were getting enough money to keep renting the place, and dollars were trickling in. People like Sam Aldrich had a good sense of money and what really was possible, although I think there was a point when he wished he never got into the campaign. I mean, he was really captive to this scary situation. And of course the irony is he lost out in the primaries to Hamilton Fish anyway.

Efforts were made to interest people who had been identified with successful campaigns in the past. Jim Biddle had good connections, of course. You see, Jim Biddle's wife at the time was Lamont Du Pont Copeland's daughter. In December '65, Biddle and I tried to get Henry Francis DuPont to understand the urgency of the situation and I visited him in Wilmington. He said, "Well, that's really – that's not our turf. That's not our territory. That's for the Rockefellers and the Harrimans and the Hudson Valley Families to take care." He gave \$5,000. Afterwards, I felt that I was sort of overanxious. I was annoyed with myself, because I felt I'd communicated anxiety. But at that point I was just afraid that the thing was going to go down the drain.

I guess DuPont was sort of a wily man, I won't say in any nasty sense. He was somebody with experience in the ways of moneyed landocracy, you could say. I think he knew that the Rockefellers couldn't afford to lose on this one. Rockefeller gave \$5,000, living up to what had been said about him that he just didn't like Victorian, but at least doing something. I think he really felt this was Sam's project, and Sam had to sink or swim with it. Really time was running out. The deadline was June of '66, if I'm right. Sam Aldrich was really worried, very obviously worried.

Here's where Don Karshan's sense of practicality figured. Karshan was, in some ways, sort of cynical and, in some ways, very naïve—socially a funny mixture. He mangled words, but was a bright guy, I think, who developed unevenly. He had a wonderful sense, though, of certain things that are practical. And he pointed out that not only Aldrich himself, but the Rockefellers, could not afford to have this thing go down the drain. He was sort of, "Don't worry! We've got 'em in a bind!" But I still was anxious up until the Currier moment.

I learned of New York as really the power center of the country, or the financial heart of the country. You had to go there. That really was the place from which things emanated, I guess you could say.

It was late, scarily late, I might guess, March of '66, when we went with our cause to the Curriers, a lovely young couple, in their New York apartment. I think Jim Biddle arranged for the appointment, but I can't remember whether Jim was present with Sam and me. My sense was that the Curriers had already made up their minds before we walked into the room, but they wanted to give us the good news in person. They said, "We'll give \$100,000." They were already favorable predisposed, and I think they would have done it regardless, but anyway the visit was very nice.

That was the turning point, when the Curriers committed that \$100,000, because we hadn't really raised very much. A lot of other people were just waiting for some one big criti-

cal donation. Once the Curriers had committed that \$100,000, I heaved a sigh of relief.

I would have been a bitter man, I think, if the thing had failed. I really found that just terribly hard to take. The prospect of its failing had just seemed so wrong, I just felt this is so important, and when I thought of how money is spent and what Olana could be got for! I was still very innocent about what would happen to the art market, and how valuable Olana would be, and what a bargain (like the Dana House) it would be for the State of New York in the long run. I mean, 25 or 50 times over what they paid .

The sense of urgency certainly reached the Curriers, and it was incredibly sad that in that interval between their committing themselves to give that \$100,000 and the passage of the bill in Albany, that they were lost in a plane over the Bahamas, They had been interested in quite different causes, causes quite different in nature, having to do with, I think, social work and all sorts of charity-oriented causes. Anyway, after their gift, a lot of other people began pitching in, and money built up pretty fast.

One of my college friends, Whitney North Seymour, known as Mike Seymour, was an assemblyman. And I got in touch with him, and he took up the cause in Albany. It was the local assemblyman, Clarence Lane, who actually was the person who presented the bill on the floor in Albany for the state to put up the balance and acquire the property. By the time that the bill was presented on the floor of the legislature in Albany, in May '66, we had raised only b\$167,000, something like that.

At quite an early date, Karshan, I think it was, or maybe Biddle, had gotten in touch with Life Magazine. Sam's dad, Winthrop Aldrich, was a close friend of Henry Luce, and so there was a connection with Life Magazine through that. I was invited to visit Dotty Sieberling and Mrs. Campbell at Life and showed them a bunch of slides of Olana that were taken in October, for the autumn colors. (I had used the same slides to submit to Progressive Architecture, and then

The Curriers

Legislation

Life Magazine

have Scully run an article on that. They actually reproduced some of my things in *Progressive Architecture*.)

It took a long time, a year and a half, before an article finally came out in *Life*. Originally the issue of *Life* was scheduled for something like a March date in '65, but Churchill died just at the moment it was supposed to come out, we were told, and his death and his funeral took up the space that Olana would have had. That put it off for more than a year and Sam Aldrich was getting desperate. Things were moving fast in Albany apparently. Sam's dad kept getting reassurances, because of his friendship with Henry Luce, that the article was going to be published.

The *Life* Magazine issue came out about the middle of May '66, and the timing was perfect. I don't know what went on behind the scenes there, but I'm sure that Sam Aldrich was right on top of that side of the situation! Sure enough, those 14 pages on Olana in *Life* came out on Friday and on the following Monday, the bill was presented on the floor of the legislature in Albany! It was something like "I have this copy of *Life* magazine with 14 pages on Olana." I think the bill passed unanimously.

The state really moved very quickly at that point, is my recollection. In June of '66 there was a ceremony at Olana with Governor Rockefeller. Lou Jones talked—I can't remember how much I actually said on the occasion. Trudy has a tape of that occasion. There should be one here in the house, I think, taken at the dedication. Sam Aldrich and many other people who had been involved with the campaign were there—the officers of Olana Preservation, the committee. Mrs. Walt Osborn, who lived nearby, was one of the people who came, and Roland Redmond, whom I associate with Claremont. And Ray Kennedy, Jim Biddle, Don Karshan, myself and Sam.

After the state took over, a fellow named Waite was responsible for scraping off the hilltop and removing the water tower that was there and making that parking lot and the road that cuts across the south lawn, the major lawn, and converting

part of the barn into johns and so on. He moved very fast, and I'm very glad that other things that he had in mind did not materialize. He wanted to have a little miniature railroad going up the hill to take people from the foot of the hill up to the top and so on. I think he was on hand for only maybe a year, two at the very most, and then the administration of Olana shifted.

I moved here to Ann Arbor in the summer of '66. People have tried to involve me in preservation work, but I've sort of stayed at arm's length. I mean, it was terribly hard on the family, the campaign. Very hard, with three young kids—my wife had to just take on a lot of what I wasn't doing. There was a real deficiency. It was not good. But I couldn't live with myself if I hadn't acted as I did. I would have been worse in the long run, because I would have just had a bad conscience, I think, and had a sense of failure, which I would have had to live with. And that wouldn't be good for the family.

I always find it very satisfying to go back to Olana. For one thing, just noticing the people outside who are enjoying the place, and the fact that had I not been in the right place at the right time, they probably wouldn't be there. I find that I never get tired of Olana. I never weary of it. I find more and more significance and meaning in Olana, the more that I learn about Church. Olana is really, I'll say, the very distillation of the man in visible terms, terms that can be even, say, experienced first-hand.

By being at Olana, one can come as close as possible to being Church himself, a communicant, as it were, with the experience of the artist, with the mentality of the artist, to get into his mind, into his spirit or into his being, his world view. The more that I feel I understand Church, the more I find myself prepared to profit from being at Olana, to perceive more meaning as I look around the house, or go through the house. There's a subjective element in it as well, an autobiographical element factored in, which is my sense of justification for the effort which I made, and my gratitude to so many other people who made this possible.

After Olana

*Purchase by
New York State*

I get particular pleasure, too, in reports of people who have visited Olana. I still sometimes wince when I hear them stress the view, and ignore the interior of the house. The significance of what goes on internally, as well as externally, at Olana is better and better understood and appreciated and recognized. I also wince when I hear people talk about an Arabian night's fantasy, or Church as an eccentric or idiosyncratic, because I am absolutely convinced that there's something of the archetypal about it, that so much of American culture has been distilled in tangible form, visible form, at Olana. If one regards it as sort of an eccentric Arabian night's fantasy, then one is really missing the point of the place, that it is a celebration, as it were, of America as the meeting of East and West, America as the fulfillment of history, America as the center of the world, and Olana as, let's say, the very distillation of America's significance in that.

About Olana

Olana was a totality. I mean, the whole thing was a state of American mind. And it was in three dimensions, palpable. It was a concretion of the American spirit of a certain moment. And I mean, it wasn't just Frederic Church. It was us; it was we. It was as much America as, say, *Versailles* is France, which is not only Louis the Fourteenth; it's also Frenchness of a certain moment. Or as much as, say, Monticello is. I saw it in that light, that it was a crystallization of what we've been and, just *there*, potentially to remain there, you know, indefinitely for posterity.

You don't have to believe in the mythology of America as the world's savior. I don't believe in the millennium, but that's not the point. You can understand, say *Hagia Sophia* as a great monument of the early Eastern Christian Church, without having to believe that any great monument is the product of faith. I mean, I don't believe in the ideology of Louis the Fourteenth, but I think *Versailles* is a great monument as an expression of the spirit that tells us a great deal about a culture in a certain stage of its development. And that's how I feel about Olana, that it is a mirror of where we've been. It's a way-station along the history of our sense of identify, as is Monticello, as is Mount Vernon.

Church's fantasy was getting America's act together, and that explains the extraordinary popularity of Church with his contemporaries. He really addressed forms or types of consciousness that were deeply embedded in the American consciousness. I think he probed the consciousness to its very depths and was able to project the archetypes of that consciousness onto canvas. I think that's what's going on at Olana, too.

I compare Olana with effects in his paintings, The east façade of Olana (the entrance façade) has the great soaring tower to the left, to the south, and then the mass housing the dining room and the children's nursery above with an entrance between. That tower, for one thing, makes a statement about man and woman, husband and wife, male and female: the tower phallic and confronting the wide world, as it were: and the block housing the dining room, the woman's realm and, with the nursery overhead, protected by the tower and quiet and relatively serene, submissive, as opposed to the aggressive, dominant tower, as a statement about the institution of marriage, as well as ultimately sort of Adam and Eve.

You step inside the door where the detailing around the front door is a zigzag pattern, zigzags, as it were, embracing rosettes. I see the zigzags as masculine and the rosettes as feminine. You step inside the vestibule, and there is a mirror to the right and left in the vestibule. To the left, the mirror is rectangular in shape; to the right, towards the dining room, the mirror is oval in shape, round for female. There's a chapel-like extension to the south which looks right down the river, sort of a nature chapel. To the west there's a long axis which runs right through the house. That porch was added around 1890, with its motifs on the porch, Indian, evoking the passage to India. Then flanking that on one side are butterflies, and at right is a Mexican piece of furniture, and a little Italian baptismal font, with figures of the crucifixion.

There is the "*pièce de resistance*," the Hindu Indian niche,

upon which is mounted a Chinese or Japanese brass gilded lotus pedestal, upon which is surmounted a Mexican statuette of the Virgin, who stands upon the crescent and a snake. The crescent I take to be (but maybe I'm mistaken) the symbol of victory over sin. And it's such a glorious ecumenical confection in which, of course, Christianity comes out number one in that. All of this, I mean, to me it's just fraught with meaning and message. Whether you believe it or not is a totally difference matter. It's important that he believed it and that many of his contemporaries believed it as well. I mean, I think any sort of mythology that really informs a civilization or a people is worthy of examination and of understanding.

In 1966, I saw Church almost exclusively as of "the party of hope," to use R.W.B. Lewis' term. Now I see some irony in Church. The painting "Cotopaxi," as I see it, is a parable of the plight of the American spirit of the then moment of 1862—that tragedy is necessary, for the preservation of the Union. I think there's something of a tragic perception of history in there, which in my mind, brings Church closer to "the party of irony." Or his "Niagara Falls" of 1857, I see that really as a plea for unity in the country, with a sense of tremendous tension, and the discipline, as it were, to bring that tension under control, to reconcile the multiple components of impulses in the nation, and to bring them into harmony, into order, into discipline. I see it as really a bit of a challenge, almost, to the citizen to be responsible, and to exercise self-control, and to think of the good of the whole, and to subordinate one's will to the good of the whole. So there again I think there's a sense of danger, too, of the necessity, as it were, for a stiffening of the muscles, for a tensing of the muscles, say, a tightening up of the abdomen to prepare for danger, for threats.

That's something that Scully brought out right away when he saw Olana—he feels there's a lot of desperation there. Church's paintings were out of favor and of course, his health also handicapped him; he couldn't paint physically as he had before. I think Scully feels that just building that

world around himself... he sees it as a collective act, literally in the sense of desperation. I still don't quite see it that way, I guess. I think Church really had a grand vision. It's sort of a provincial universality that Church projects. It's very Puritan.

It's very 19th century as well. There is a problem in its datedness, perhaps. I see it as sort of temporally universal, geographically universal. "Locally" is a better way to put it – locally universal, but universal for the last third of the 19th century, or not much beyond 1892 maybe. I think the Chicago Fair interests me partly because I see Olana as a one-man world's fair.

There was a lot of luck, tremendous luck, I think; that I was at Smith at the time; that I finished the dissertation; that I'd had a year off actually to write the book, which I didn't write, but then I was all poised for it, anyway, and full of the stuff, and the urgency was just enough for me to carry it off. Preservation was in the air. The Kennedy mystique was still alive. The Vietnam trauma had yet torn the nation apart. Dick Wunder had just started at the Smithsonian. I think there were just a number of things that were remarkably fortunate that did converge.

And obviously the fact that Mrs. Louis Church lived to be 94 instead of 84 made all the difference. All the difference. Bless her for choosing the moment to die that she did! And they'd saved just about everything and hardly rearranged things at all in the house. That was unbelievable that so little had been changed, altered. Yes, that was another aspect of the unbelievable luck that attended the situation. If she'd died three or four years before, it wouldn't have happened.

I think of the accident that Lloyd Boice cared. I suppose it's not too surprising they would have chosen one of the leading real estate men in the area to manage Olana, but still, what luck that he had all these connections, that he was a well-known local citizen! Ray Kennedy was an officer of the local bank. I seem to remember that that played a role in this, too. You see, a newspaper publisher, a radio station owner, a

*Tremendous
Luck*

real-estate-cum-insurance man, and museum directors, curators. And somehow this collaborative effort, I thought it was just quintessentially American somehow to come out of the people themselves—just public concern and a sense of responsibility. Idealism that is really such an important part of our culture, the tradition of the citizen taking responsibility and not feeling somebody else was going to do it. You've got to do it if it's going to get done. People just joining in, pitching in like that in a common effort.

I think the fact that, just by chance, I happened to be related. Through my aunt there was a connection with Laurance Rockefeller and a connection with Frederick Osborn, whom I'd already met anyway. I made the most of everything I could make the most of, just maximized whatever could be maximized! And there was so much in the whole situation that was just sort of endemic. I mean, I was kind of riding on the surface of the situation and maybe just able to do some things with what happened on the surface, which was lucky.

You discover certain qualities if you're put in situations. Some things that have been dormant in one's make-up, that just haven't been called upon, are called upon by circumstances. Temperamentally I actually had a certain gusto for the situation. On the whole, I enjoy meeting people, and I have always somehow been particularly careful to make people who are not experts (not familiar with, say, the world of art) not to feel that they're inadequate or that they're bores and so on. I try to find the level of people as quickly as I can and deal with them at that level. That just comes very easily and very naturally to me.

I can think of some of my colleagues who, just temperamentally, wouldn't have been nearly as comfortable playing such a role. I mean, talking to the Arts and Crafts Society or the county commissioners and so on, talking over the local radio station, addressing people who are very wealthy but don't know much about art, and so on. I just hit it off with Lou Pierro on Rockefeller's staff, and had sort of an easy rapport

with a tremendous variety of people. That was something that wasn't any particular effort for me on my part. I mean, I'm very glad that it wasn't having to deal with English aristocrats! I felt there were some wonderful things about America that came out in this campaign that we had, the collaboration of politicians and bankers.

I don't really think of it as boasting, but I mean if I hadn't been there at the right place at the right time and, I think, been encouraged to act by so many people—my wife and kids, even though it represented a particular sacrifice for them, and all those people I mentioned earlier on. I really loved the fact that this was a collective enterprise of caring people, of concerned people, people with some vision and some sense of obligation to succeeding generations, an obligation to the future. But if one has a sense of clairvoyance of a sort, a conviction, even if one's convictions maybe represent only a minority point of view at the moment, there is the sense that you will be justified in time. The recognition that the place enjoys, that the artist enjoys does, I suppose, reinforce that sense of justification.

I could not have done it alone, and I find it really quite moving as testimony to some of the great values of this country, the sense of civic responsibility, which I think is one of the products of our democratic institutions, the importance of the individual's feeling that he or she must act. And sometimes if he or she does not act, why, opportunities will be lost, our culture will be impoverished, and we will be all the less for it. So for me it's a tremendous satisfaction to think that this place has been saved for posterity.

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can be found in the Papers of Charles Bridgham Hosmer, Jr.,
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