

THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies

MARIST



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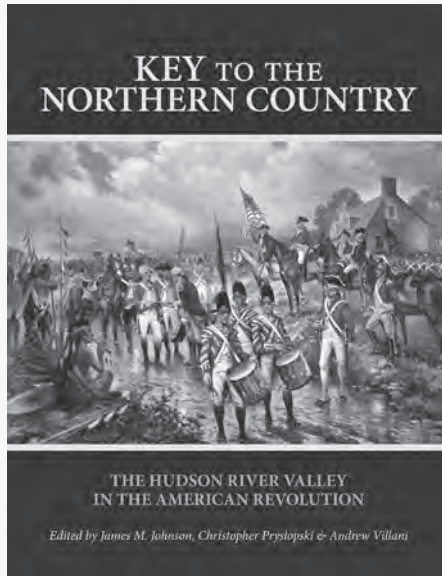
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KEY TO THE NORTHERN COUNTRY
The Hudson River Valley in the American Revolution

Edited by James M. Johnson, Christopher Pryslopski, & Andrew Villani

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From the Editors

Articles in this issue pay tribute to two of the Hudson Valley's most popular historic sites—Olana and Vanderbilt Mansion. Olana is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its preservation by a small group of people who understood the significant role it plays in understanding America's cultural history. At the same time, Vanderbilt Mansion is part of the National Park Service, which is marking the centennial of its establishment. Another article illustrates some of the unusual ways Hudson Valley residents took part in festive occasions in their communities, while two others shine lights on lesser-known aspects of history in and around Albany—its colonial forts and the impact of World War I on Jewish residents of the Capital District. As always, these insights into the region's heritage are accompanied by book reviews and other regular features.



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The Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College is the academic arm of the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area. Its mission is to study and to promote the Hudson River Valley and to provide educational resources for heritage tourists, scholars, elementary school educators, environmental organizations, the business community, and the general public. Its many projects include publication of *The Hudson River Valley Review* and the management of a dynamic digital library and leading regional portal site.

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The Hudson River Valley Review will consider essays on all aspects of the Hudson River Valley—its intellectual, political, economic, social, and cultural history, its prehistory, architecture, literature, art, and music—as well as essays on the ideas and ideologies of regionalism itself. All articles in *The Hudson River Valley Review* undergo peer analysis.

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*On the cover:
View from across the Lake looking towards the Main House at Olana
Photo: ©Larry Lederman, 2010, All rights reserved*

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Governor Nelson Rockefeller signing the Lane-Newcombe Bill at Olana, June 27, 1966, which authorized New York State to buy Olana and open it as a public site.

Left to right: Assemblyman Clarence Lane, Senator Lloyd Newcombe, Governor Nelson Rockefeller, and Alexander Aldrich, president of Olana Preservation (courtesy of the Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, N.Y.)

Saving Olana

David Schuyler

“Olana is the essence of the Hudson River school of painting, one of the most important American contributions to the history of art.”

—*The New York Times*, editorial, June 10, 1966

“Do you know that Mrs. [Sally Good] Church has died?”¹

When in September 1964 David C. Huntington heard these words from Stuart P. Feld, then a curator in the Department of American Paintings and Sculpture at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, he contemplated an ominous development—the sale and possible destruction of Frederic Edwin Church’s magnificent Persian-inspired dwelling (p. 8), the subdivision and development of the handsome landscape the artist meticulously created on approximately 250 acres, and the dispersal of the contents of the house.² Huntington was a forty-two-year old art historian then teaching at Smith College who was a scholar of Church, then largely forgotten but today generally considered the greatest of the Hudson River School landscape painters. Alarmed, Huntington contacted Charles T. Lark, Jr., Mrs. Church’s nephew and a New York City attorney who was one of the heirs to the estate, as Sally Church and her late husband Louis were childless. Lark had decided to sell the property, he told Huntington, because he had four children and “needed money to send them through college.”³ In speaking with Lark, Huntington made two requests: that he be able to document Olana prior to its sale, and that he have time to organize an effort to purchase and preserve Olana.⁴

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1. Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., oral history interview with David C. Huntington, 1988, typescript copy, p. 15, David C. Huntington Papers, Series 6, Olana Archives, Olana State Historic Site, Greenport, N.Y. All page numbers in the citations below refer to this copy. The original is in the Oral History Series of the Papers of Charles Bridgham Hosmer, National Trust for Historic Preservation Library Collection, University of Maryland Libraries, College Park, MD. A letterpress edition of the interview, edited and printed without Hosmer’s questions, was published by Dorothy Heyl as *The Campaign to Save Olana: An Oral History by David Huntington* (n.p., 2009). Mrs. Church’s maiden name was misspelled Goode in the typescript, and I have silently corrected it. Huntington’s statement in the oral history continued, “and that the contents of Olana are to be auctioned off?” Stuart Feld recalls that at the time he contacted Huntington he did not know that the estate would be sold and its contents auctioned off. Feld, telephone conversation with David Schuyler, June 22, 2015.
 2. Stuart Feld, email to David Schuyler, June 17, 2015.
 3. Huntington, oral history, p. 16.
 4. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.
-

Huntington had been doing research at Olana for his Yale dissertation since 1953, and during his first visit was stunned at how intact the house was in the half-century since Church's death. He later recalled:

I was absolutely staggered in the attic, 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 forth and so on.⁵

Huntington was “absolutely bewildered” by what he saw, “not at all expecting such a relic of the 19th century, almost virtually untouched, unchanged since the 19th century”⁶ (p. 10 top and bottom). Huntington immediately recognized what a remarkable resource Olana was, and as his admiration for Church and the place he created increased he became more deeply invested in the artist's career.

Olana was, from 1860 until 1964, a sprawling enterprise. Church had acquired much of the property in 1860, months before his marriage to Isabel Carnes, and then began construction of a dwelling, *Cosy Cottage*, designed by architect Richard Morris Hunt. Seven years later, Church acquired an additional eighteen acres that included Sienghenbergh (or Long) Hill, which he had undoubtedly visited during his two-year apprenticeship with Thomas Cole, the first important Hudson River School painter, and where, beginning in 1870, he would erect a spectacular house of his own design, with architect Calvert Vaux as a consultant, that he described as Persian in inspiration.⁷ As the house was nearing completion, Jervis McEntee, who had studied painting with Church, visited the house and recorded his impressions in his diary: “It is certainly a beautiful house and commands one of the finest views of river & mountain in the country. Church devotes nearly his whole time to building his house, and with his peculiar talent has produced a satisfactory result. The color of the house on the outside by the judicious use of colored bricks with the stone is very harmonious and agreeable. It looks like an artist's work.”⁸ The estate Church and his wife named Olana was a house and ancillary buildings, a working farm, a carefully designed landscape, and woodlands—a

5. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

7. The authorship of the design of the hilltop house at Olana is complicated, as the surviving documentary evidence is inconclusive. Church told a writer for the *Boston Sunday Herald* that he had designed the house: “I made it out of my own head.” Vaux prepared a preliminary design for the exterior, as well as a floor plan, but the house as built is significantly different from Vaux's study. Vaux's biographer, Frank Kowsky, convincingly argues that the cross-axial floor plan, centered on the Court Hall, is surely the architect's contribution to the design. Less convincingly, he speculates that the “most enduring contribution of Vaux to Olana” was his role in “orchestrating architectural space and outdoor vistas.” Church is quoted in Frank J. Bonnelle, “In Summer Time on Olana,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, Sept. 7, 1890. See also Francis R. Kowsky, *Country, Park, & City: The Architecture and Life of Calvert Vaux* (New York, 1998), pp. 206-14.

8. Jervis McEntee diary, July 22, 1872, Jervis McEntee Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

total environment on which the artist lavished enormous time and money (pp. 12-13). As Church scholar Franklin Kelly has explained, Olana is the “last great work” of Church’s life and “a thing of astounding complexity in its details, but remarkable harmony in its whole.”⁹ Church’s productivity as a landscape painter declined in the 1870s, as the taste of the art-buying public shifted away from Hudson River School paintings to ones by European or European-trained American artists,¹⁰ and when he was increasingly restricted by rheumatoid arthritis. In his late years Church poured his energies into Olana. “I have made about 1¾ miles of road this season, opening entirely new and beautiful views,” he wrote his friend, sculptor Erastus Dow Palmer, in 1884. “I can make more and better landscapes in this way than by tampering with canvas and paint in the studio.”¹¹ Ridge Road, one of the carriage drives constructed in 1884, was built on the additional fifty acres Church had acquired in 1878. The end result of all his efforts, the totality that is Olana, is surely the greatest artistic creation of Church’s life.

Olana at the time of Sally Church’s death in 1964 was remarkably intact from the years of Frederic and Isabel Church’s residence. To be sure, the house had been electrified and other systems upgraded. Louis Church, the artist’s youngest son, had donated a cache of 2,028 drawings (almost 800 with additional drawings on the reverse) to the museum of the Cooper Union (today the Cooper-Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum) in 1917 and gave away several paintings to family and close friends. But Olana was otherwise much as the artist has designed it: the house, the Church-designed landscape, the working farm and orchards, the carriage drives, and the lake remained. So did all of the furnishings in the main house, including thirty-two of Church’s studio oils, twenty-three framed oil studies, and twenty-seven unframed oil studies, as well as paintings by fellow Hudson River School artists, including Thomas Cole, Thomas Doughty, Worthington Whittredge, Jervis McEntee, and a stunning orchid and hummingbird painting by Martin Johnson Heade, as well as approximately forty “Old Masters” the artist had collected. There were also approximately 300 wash drawings, pen and pencil drawings, and gouache created as Church refined his vision for the house (p. 7), fifteen notebooks and approximately 500 drawings, the library of almost 2,000 volumes, decora-

9. Franklin Kelly, “Frederic Church’s Olana: An Introduction,” in James Anthony Ryan, *Frederic Church’s Olana: Architecture and Landscape As Art* (Hensonville, N.Y., 2001), p. 11. Ryan’s handsomely illustrated book is largely a new printing of his essay in the National Gallery of Art’s 1989 exhibition catalog, *Frederic Edwin Church*. See also the chapter on Olana in David C. Huntington, *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church: Vision of an American Era* (New York, 1966), pp. 114-25.

10. On the declining interest of the picture-buying public in Hudson River School paintings, see my chapter on Jervis McEntee in *Sanctified Landscape: Writers, Artists, and the Hudson River Valley, 1820-1909* (Ithaca, 2012), pp. 110-32, and Eleanor Jones Harvey, “Tastes in Transition: Gifford’s Patrons,” in *Hudson River School Visions: The Landscapes of Sanford R. Gifford*, ed. Kevin J. Avery and Franklin Kelly (New York, 2003), pp. 75-89. See also Doreen Bolger Burke and Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, “The Hudson River School in Eclipse,” in John K. Howat, et al., *American Paradise: The World of the Hudson River School* (New York, 1987), pp. 71-90.

11. Church to Erastus Dow Palmer, Oct. 18, 1884, McKinney Library, Albany Institute of History and Art.

tive objects from around the world, and almost 6,000 photographs.¹² As Huntington compared the interior with photographs taken in the 1890s he was astonished at how little had changed in the years since Frederic Church's death.

Huntington realized that he had to move quickly to organize an effort to preserve Olana because, as he put it, "One of the most spectacular and most miraculously preserved monuments of nineteenth century American culture is at this moment in danger of vanishing before our eyes."¹³ He knew that earlier in 1964 the paintings, artifacts, and furnishings of Cole's Cedar Grove, directly across the river from Olana in Catskill, had been auctioned off from the porch of the house.¹⁴ But Huntington may not have been aware of how immediate the threat to Olana was. The executors of the estate were determined to end the ongoing expense of maintaining Olana "by turning the property into cash at the earliest possible moment," art historian E. P. Richardson wrote to critic Russell Lynes. "They plan to bring the works of art to New York to be sold at auction, auction the contents of the house on the site, and put the property up for sale." In early November 1964, Richardson urged Lynes to visit Olana within the week, as it might be gone soon thereafter.¹⁵

Huntington made phone calls and sent telegrams to academics and museum professionals throughout the United States, met with members of prominent families in the mid-Hudson Valley, and worked mightily to educate the public about Olana's significance. Together with Frederick Henry Osborn; Carl J. Weinhardt, director of the Gallery of Modern Art in New York City; and Robert Wheeler, of Sleepy Hollow Restorations, on November 11, 1964, Huntington met with Lark and Russell Sigler of Banker's Trust, which was responsible for liquidating the Church estate. They proposed what amounted to a stay of execution—a three-month reprieve during which time they would organize a group and raise money to purchase the estate. By that day many of the paintings had been moved to New York City for cleaning prior to sale, and items in the house were tagged for sale by a local auctioneer.¹⁶ Several major cultural figures, including architectural historian Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., champion of modern architecture Philip Johnson, and ballet impresario Lincoln Kirstein, had pledged their support, each promising to pay a month's rent for the property as fundraising continued.¹⁷ When

continued on page 14

12. David Seamon and Karen Zukowski, "Afterword: Olana After Frederic Church," in Ryan, *Frederic Church's Olana*, p. 74.

13. Huntington, "Threatened Monument of Millennialist America," *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* (Winter 1966): 81.

14. Betsy Jacks, email to David Schuyler, July 16, 2015; Seamon and Zukowski, "Afterword: Olana After Frederic Church," p. 70.

15. E. P. Richardson to Russell Lynes, Nov. 5, 1964, in Russell Lynes Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. I am grateful to Dorothy Heyl for bringing this letter to my attention.

16. Huntington, oral history, pp. 22-23.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-25. When Russell Lynes visited Olana in late autumn (probably early November) 1964,

Color Plates



Frederic E. Church, wash drawing of east façade, Olana, c. 1870
(courtesy of Olana State Historic Site)

Next page: Olana, south façade (courtesy of Olana State Historic Site)







Robert and Emily de Forest, Court Hall, Main House at Olana, October 11, 1884 (courtesy of Olana State Historic Site)



Peter Aaron, Court Hall, Main House at Olana, photograph, 2010
(©Peter Aaron/OTTO)



Entrance to the exhibition of Frederic E. Church's paintings,
National Collection of Fine Arts, February 1966.
Note the two cranes from the Court Hall
(courtesy of Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.)





F. J. Church, Plan of Olana, September 1886 (courtesy of Olana State Historic Site)



Frederic Edwin Church, *Twilight in the Wilderness*, 1860, oil on canvas, 40 x 64 in.
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund, 1965.233
(image copyright The Cleveland Museum of Art)



Olana, photograph by Henry Dauman published as the title page of the article
“Must this mansion be destroyed?,” *Life*, May 13, 1966
(copyright Henri Dauman/Dauman Pictures.com/Life Magazine All rights reserved)

continued from page 7

Lark and Sigler agreed, *The New York Times* announced that a “movement to preserve as a national monument the 92-year-old Italian-Moorish home of Frederic Edwin Church... began formally yesterday.”¹⁸ A small group of supporters—a self-described “ad hoc committee for the preservation of Olana”—met at the Gallery of Modern Art on November 18, 1964. Present were James Biddle, then head of The American Wing of The Metropolitan Museum of Art and later president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation; Louis C. Jones of the New York State Historical Association; William Gerdtz, a historian of American painting; Frederick Osborn; Henry Hope Reed; and Huntington, among others. The group took on the challenge of promoting public awareness of Olana’s significance, with the goal of raising the money necessary to purchase the estate and its contents and determining its future.¹⁹

Historic preservation in New York was more than a century old at the time: the Hasbrouck house, George Washington’s headquarters in Newburgh during the waning months of the American Revolution, had been acquired by the state in 1850 and was the first building in the United States preserved for its historic significance through public funds.²⁰ To be sure, the demolition of McKim, Mead, and White’s iconic Pennsylvania Station beginning in October 1963, which was extensively covered in and denounced by *The New York Times*, gave a major impetus to preservation,²¹ as did the wanton destruction of the historic fabric of cities nationwide as a result of urban redevelopment in the 1950s and 1960s and the impact of construction of the interstate highway system in urban areas. These events contributed to the creation of New York City’s Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1965. But the challenge of preserving Olana was different and especially daunting. It had been privately owned and was largely unknown even to historians of American art and architecture. Church, whose reputation as the greatest of American landscape painters had declined during the final thirty years of his life, was largely forgotten. And Olana’s location, 120 miles north of Manhattan, in rural Columbia County, surely contributed to the difficulty of raising its profile and the money needed to acquire the site. Thus the first steps Huntington and supporters of Olana took were to spread awareness of its significance. Huntington invited academics, including Yale architectural historian Vincent Scully and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, an architectural historian then teaching at Smith College; cultural figures such as Russell Lynes, managing editor of *Harper’s Magazine*; and individuals

he noted that “Everything in the house had a white tag on it—pictures, pieces of furniture, bits of bric-a-brac, cases of butterflies, caftans, rugs, mirrors, a collection of sombreros.” Lynes, “Persia on the Hudson,” *Harper’s Magazine* 230 (Feb. 1965): 32.

18. “Fund Drive Is Begun to Save Estate on Hudson: Olana, Italian-Moorish Home of U.S. Artist of Mid-1800’s, Sought as Monument,” *New York Times*, Nov. 12, 1964.

19. Minutes, Ad Hoc Committee for the Preservation of Olana, Nov. 18, 1964, Olana Archives.

20. David Schuyler, “The American Revolution Remembered in the Hudson River Valley,” *Hudson River Valley Review* 30 (Autumn 2013): 3-17.

21. Hilary Ballon, *New York’s Pennsylvania Stations* (New York, 2002), pp. 103-5.

who might be interested in supporting Olana, to tour the site.²²

Another challenge was that the large house at Olana was a unique and exotic high Victorian building. Preserving colonial or early national buildings was widely accepted, but Victorian was still largely dismissed as a regrettable episode in American taste. To be sure, Lewis Mumford's *The Brown Decades* (1931) had argued that "we have already destroyed much that was precious" in the architecture and art of the post-Civil War years. He added, "unless we rapidly recover a little common sense we shall doubtless destroy much more." While he conceded that there was "something pitifully inadequate, indeed grotesque, in the post-bellum scene,"²³ Mumford nevertheless found in those years the beginnings of modern American civilization. More recent books by Scully, Hitchcock, and John Maass also presented a more sympathetic understanding of the era, but to the public in general Victorian was simply ugly. A fit subject for Charles Addams' *New Yorker* cartoons, perhaps, but Victorian was hardly a beloved style. One notable preservation success was the Jefferson Market Courthouse, which had been designed by Frederick C. Withers and Calvert Vaux and erected 1875-77: New York City decided that instead of demolition the building be converted into a public library, which opened in 1967.²⁴ Such successes were rare, as Lynes observed in an article advocating Olana's preservation: "The buildings built between 1860 and 1885, and especially houses of that vintage, have long been considered to be catastrophic in their vulgarity, their nonsensical ornamentation, and artistical pretentiousness. They were assumed to be products of the dark ages of taste..."²⁵ Sadly, many important buildings erected in the second half of the nineteenth century were being demolished, sometimes to be replaced by colonial revival structures. For example, the Jayne Building in Philadelphia, a mid-nineteenth-century antecedent of the skyscraper, was demolished in the 1950s to make way for Independence National Historical Park.

Thus publicity was key. Volunteers organized tours and teas to acquaint the public with Olana, and the ad hoc group, which took the name Olana Preservation Committee in December 1964, began organizing a major event to be held at the New-York Historical Society on January 19, 1965. Huntington spoke on that occasion, as did Lynes and Scully. Lynes, who had first written about Olana in *The Tastemakers* (1954), produced the first important national article about Olana in the February 1965 issue of *Harper's*. At a time when the house was largely unknown, he wrote affectionately of Olana: "Delight in detail, an enchantment with bright colors and the exotic, and a determined pursuit of the romantic are all built stone by stone and tile by tile into Olana." In the article, accompanied by a modern photograph of the south façade and a line drawing

22. Huntington, oral history, pp. 22, 34.

23. Mumford, *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America 1865-1895* (1931; New York, 1955), pp. 50, 20.

24. See Francis R. Kowsky, *The Architecture of Frederick Clarke Withers and the Progress of the Gothic Revival in America after 1850* (Middletown, Conn., 1980), pp. 109-15.

25. Lynes, "Persia on the Hudson," p. 30.

of the Court Hall, Lynes was attentive to Olana's uniqueness. There were, he noted, "few nineteenth-century interiors of such unabashed authenticity still in existence." He also praised the way in which "Church carefully rearranged the landscape and greatly enhanced the magic of its vistas."²⁶ The article was a powerful statement of Olana's significance and a clarion call for its preservation. Scully published an article, "Palace of the Past," in the May 1965 issue of *Progressive Architecture*. At Olana, he wrote, Church "tried to see through the flux of the seasons, the permanence of the world. His soul has entered into the place, which he brought into focus for our eyes. It was his last and most enduring work, the ultimate justification for his art."²⁷ Art Institute of Chicago curator and critic Katharine Kuh subsequently published "Castle Under Siege" in the *Saturday Review* and Huntington contributed "Olana—the Center of the World" in *Antiques*. As Kuh explained in her article, with specific reference to Lady Bird Johnson's highway beautification efforts, "Our real enemies are not billboards but bulldozers, not urban realities but the heedless demolition of our man-made heritage." Huntington described Olana as Church's "perfect microcosm" and argued that it "is richly deserving of posterity's care and regard."²⁸

Olana Preservation was incorporated at a meeting on March 23, 1965. Elected trustees were Alexander (Sam) Aldrich, a cousin of Governor Nelson Rockefeller and a member of his staff; James Biddle; Albert S. Callan; Huntington; Donald H. Karshan; Raymond C. Kennedy; Frederick H. Osborn; Mrs. William H. Osborn; and Carl Weinhardt (Mr. and Mrs. Lammot DuPont Copeland, Henry Francis DuPont, and Frank W. McCabe were elected trustees at the meeting of May 4, 1965). The trustees placed the board's finances in the hands of treasurer Biddle and the account in First National City Bank.²⁹ Betty Cuninghame served as the office manager for Olana Preservation. She worked closely with Aldrich, Biddle, and Huntington and coordinated the efforts of all board members. She worked hard on publicizing Olana and organizing events there and elsewhere as well as on fund-raising.³⁰

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-34. See also Lynes, *The Tastemakers: The Shaping of American Popular Taste* (1954; New York, 1980), p. 99, and Lynes to The Honorable Nelson A. Rockefeller, May 18, 1966, which is included in the bill jacket of the Newcombe-Lane Act, New York State Archives, Albany, N.Y.

27. Scully, "Palace of the Past," *Progressive Architecture*, May 1965, pp.184-89.

28. Kuh, "Castle Under Siege," *Saturday Review* 48 (Nov. 27, 1965): 46-47; Huntington, "Olana—the Center of the World," *Antiques* 88 (Nov. 1965): 656-63. See also Hennig Cohen, "The Romantic of Olana," *Reporter* 34 (Apr. 7, 1966): 51-52, a review of the exhibition of Church's paintings at the National Collection of Fine Arts and Huntington's 1966 book, *The Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church*. "At Olana," Cohen concluded, "within this world of his own creation, Church remained—in the Emersonian phrase—of the party of hope" (p. 52).

29. Olana Preservation, Inc., Minutes, Mar. 23, 1965, Apr. 1, 1965, May 4, 1965, Olana Archives. This was an impressive group. Mrs. William Osborn's spouse and her brother-in-law Frederick were grandsons of Church's friend and patron, William H. Osborn; Lammot DuPont Copeland was son of the CEO of the DuPont Company; Henry Francis DuPont had established the Winterthur Museum on his estate north of Wilmington, Delaware; Donald Karshan was a talented former public relations executive; Frank McCabe was an Albany banker and chair of the Hudson River Valley Commission; Callan and Kennedy were newspaper publishers in Columbia County.

At the next meeting, held on April 1, 1965, the trustees elected the following officers: Aldrich, President and Chairman; Osborn, Honorary Chairman; Mrs. Osborn, Vice Chairman; Huntington, Vice President; Kennedy, Secretary; and Biddle, Treasurer. The board then initiated steps to gain tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service and to appoint an accountant or firm to audit its finances. Aldrich announced that Lark and Bankers Trust had halted plans to liquidate the estate and had instead agreed to sell Olana—house, outbuildings, land, and all of the contents of the house—to Olana Preservation for approximately \$500,000, the sale to be consummated by April 1, 1966. The trustees authorized Aldrich to negotiate the terms of the arrangement with Lark and Banker's Trust and to hire appraisers to determine the precise value of the holdings.³¹

The trustees finalized their arrangement with Lark and Banker's Trust at the next meeting. They agreed to a purchase price of approximately \$470,000 and to rent the property for \$2,000 per month as well as pay the cost of maintaining the property—taxes, utilities, salary for the caretakers, maintaining the buildings and grounds. The trustees further authorized Aldrich to sign a purchase option and pay the estate \$20,000, which would be deducted from the sale price if the option were exercised. They also organized a fundraising committee, headed by Aldrich and Mrs. William H. Osborn, and charged its members with approaching foundations for support, as well as a local hospitality and house committee to organize group and individual access to Olana.³²

Other meetings followed, and the trustees demonstrated commendable zeal in promoting the preservation of Olana. During the summer of 1965, Huntington recalled, there were numerous receptions, “and thousands of people by then were visiting Olana, going through, and for the fund-raising campaign.”³³ The trustees' meetings were held in the prominent law firm Milbank Tweed's satellite offices in Rockefeller Center. Several partners prepared the incorporation documents for Olana Preservation and advised the trustees on important matters. James Hamilton, an associate at Milbank, regularly attended the trustees' meetings and often recorded the minutes. Hamilton and several Milbank partners strongly supported Olana Preservation, and Hamilton dealt with Charles Lark when there were misunderstandings or disagreements with the trustees. He eventually drafted the Newcombe-Lane bill that ensured New York's involvement and brought Olana into the state system of historic sites.³⁴

Columbia County leaders were also strongly supportive of the preservation campaign. Two trustees of Olana Preservation were locals: Raymond Kennedy, the owner of the *Hudson Register-Star*, and Albert S. Callan, owner and publisher of the *Chatham*

30. Betty Cuninghame, email to David Schuyler, July 12, 2015.

31. Olana Preservation, minutes, Apr. 1, 1965, May 4, 1965.

32. *Ibid.*, May 4, 1965.

33. Huntington, oral history, p. 34.

34. J. Winthrop Aldrich, “Olana Talk,” Feb. 3, 2015, copy in the author's possession; information on Milbank, Tweed provided by Dorothy Heyl in an email to David Schuyler, June 4, 2015 and by Richard T. Sharp, July 13, 2015.

Courier, used their newspapers and their contacts in the community to support Olana's preservation. Huntington met with the Columbia County Board of Supervisors at Olana, and they too supported the cause, (despite concern that as a historic house museum it would be taken off the tax rolls), as did the local chamber of commerce. Most influential was Lloyd Boice, a realtor and insurance agent who had overseen the management of Olana during the years of Sally Church's decline (and would continue to do so until Olana Preservation acquired the property). Huntington describes a chance meeting with Boice, whom he overheard while Boice was giving a tour of the house to the director of the Taconic Park Commission, probably Howard Davis, who was then chairman of the commission. He was impressed by how much Boice appreciated Olana's history and significance. When the park commissioner left, Huntington and Boice "sat down in the kitchen and began planning a strategy."³⁵ Boice may also have persuaded Lark and Sigler to delay the sale of the estate and its contents.³⁶ At their meeting of January 19, 1966, the trustees of Olana Preservation adopted a resolution praising Boice and expressing "their sincere appreciation of the generous spirit, interest, time and talents which he had faithfully devoted to the careful preservation of Olana." Also important was Mary Mazzacano, who organized the women's committee that guided the thousands of visitors who toured Olana during 1965 and 1966. Olana Preservation minutes indicate that the Columbia County committee was "swamped with volunteers" and that there was "tremendous local enthusiasm."³⁷

In February 1965 Mahoud Foroughi, the Iranian ambassador to the United States, visited Olana and described it as "an invaluable collection" of early Persian art. Church, he stated, had "truly created the feeling of a Persian home of a century ago right here in the Hudson Valley."³⁸ Olana was designated a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior in June 1965. According to Alexander Aldrich, the survey team that visited the site pronounced Olana as being "of exceptional value."³⁹ One especially prominent visitor, August Heckscher, who had been a special consultant on the arts for President John F. Kennedy and later served as New York City's parks commissioner, gave an address at Olana on January 22, 1966. "In its completeness, its perfection of detail and its capacity to evoke an era," Heckscher stated, "Olana is an important element of our cultural heritage. If this collection should be dispersed or this architecture destroyed, the blow would be severe—an impoverishment of the present and a betrayal of the past."⁴⁰ Another important visitor was Edith Saville, a close

35. Huntington, oral history, pp. 18-19, 26.

36. Seamon and Zukowski, "Afterword: Olana After Frederick Church," p. 71.

37. Olana Preservation, minutes, Jan. 19, 1966, Dec. 16, 1964.

38. *Hudson Register-Star*, Feb. 4, 1965. Several other articles describing the ambassador's visit are preserved in the Olana Archives, but they are undated and only one, from the *Poughkeepsie Journal*, is identified by source.

39. Aldrich is quoted in "Olana's Historic Site Designation To Help Campaign, Aldrich Says," *Albany Times Union*, June 24, 1965.

40. The Heckscher quotation is in Olana Archives, as is a videotape of his remarks.

associate of the Rockefellers. According to Huntington, “she fell in love” with Olana but cautioned that Governor Rockefeller would not: his preference was for modern, not Victorian, but she believed that the governor would be interested in helping to preserve the site.⁴¹

Impressive as were the accomplishments of Olana Preservation in its first ten months, the biggest problem was that money was only trickling in. In September 1965 treasurer Biddle reported that three individuals had given \$1,000 or more, and the Edgar J. Kaufmann Charitable Foundation had made a donation of \$12,000. He also stated that two corporations and four individuals had pledged a total of \$17,000. With less than seven months remaining on the option, Olana Preservation had raised less than ten percent of the purchase price. The following January Aldrich reported that Olana Preservation had raised approximately \$100,000 and had been granted an extension to June 30, 1966, to exercise the option and acquire the property.⁴² Finally, in March 1966 a young couple, Stephen and Audrey Bruce Currier (Mrs. Currier was a granddaughter of Andrew Mellon and the daughter of Ailsa Mellon Bruce, each of whom was a major benefactor of The National Gallery of Art), pledged \$100,000 to Olana Preservation. Huntington recalled: “And that, really, then released—I mean, a lot of other people just—they were just waiting for some one big critical donation, I think. And then a lot of other people began pitching in, and money built up pretty fast.”⁴³ Even so, as the deadline neared Olana Preservation had raised, after expenses, \$307,703.58, a significant sum in a short period of time but far from the \$470,000 needed to acquire the property. Even if the trustees took out a mortgage of \$120,000 (presumably all they could obtain from three different banks), they would still be well short of their goal.⁴⁴

Three events in early 1966 proved crucial to the preservation of Olana. First was the opening of a major exhibition of Church’s paintings, oil sketches, drawings, and personal memorabilia (p. 11) at the National Collection of Fine Arts (today the Smithsonian American Art Museum), which subsequently traveled to the Albany Institute of History and Art and M. Knoedler & Company in New York City. This was the first significant showing of Church’s work since a memorial exhibition organized at The Metropolitan Museum of Art shortly after the artist’s death in 1900. Richard Wunder, the curator of American paintings at the Smithsonian museum, had long been familiar with Church’s work from his former position at the Cooper Union, which held the collection of Church sketches Louis Church had donated in 1917. The exhibition included forty-three paintings, fifty-seven oil studies, eighty-one drawings and sketches,

41. Huntington, oral history, p. 19.

42. Olana Preservation, minutes, Sept. 9, 1965; “\$100,000 Is Raised to Prevent Destruction of Olana Mansion,” *New York Times*, Jan. 31, 1966.

43. Huntington, oral history, p. 38.

44. Confidential Financial Report: Olana Preservation, Inc., June 9, 1966; Agenda, June 22, 1966, both in Olana Archives.

and personal memorabilia (surely from Olana, though the latter are not listed in the published catalog). The exhibition presented many of Church's most famous paintings, including *Hooker and Company Journeying Through the Wilderness from Plymouth to Hartford in 1636* (1846), *New England Scenery* (1851), *Mount Ktaddn* (1853), *Niagara* (1857), an oil study for *Heart of the Andes* (1858), *Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860) (p. 14), and *Cotopaxi* (1862). In the preface to the catalog, Wunder noted that Olana's fate was very much at risk and expressed hope that the exhibition would further the preservation effort: "The urgent need at this time is to bring Frederic Edwin Church to the attention of the public," he wrote. "The interest stimulated by the present show could be a major factor in the preservation of this unique segment of our national cultural heritage."⁴⁵ In his introductory essay Huntington described Olana as "a domestic cathedral of the Transcendentalist mystique of American destiny: the New World as the meeting of East and West, civilization and nature."⁴⁶ When the exhibition opened in New York, Knoedler charged a \$1.00 admission fee, with all receipts going to Olana Preservation.⁴⁷ At the request of the Biddles, Jacqueline Kennedy agreed to serve as honorary chair of the opening benefit at Knoedler.⁴⁸

Second was the publication of Huntington's *Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church: Vision of an American Era* in February 1966. Huntington had completed his Ph.D. dissertation, "Frederic Edwin Church, 1826-1900: Painter of the Adamic New World Myth," in 1960. In recalling his dissertation work, Huntington confessed that he had struggled to come up with a thesis that would explain Church's significance until colleagues and mentors recommended that he read several now-classic works in American Studies, including Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950) and R. W. B. Lewis's *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955), as well as D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923). These and other books enabled Huntington to relate Church to the Transcendentalists, especially Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and to present an interpretation of the artist's paintings as an expression of what he termed a millennialist vision of Manifest Destiny. Church's popularity during the 1850s and '60s, he argued, resulted from the degree to which the public identified with this ideological vision.⁴⁹ Huntington's publisher, George Braziller, rushed the book to press both to take advantage of the publicity generated by the effort to preserve Olana and

45. Wunder, "Preface," *Frederic Edwin Church* (Washington, D.C., 1966), pp. 12-13.

46. Huntington, "Introduction," *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

47. "A Dollar for the Garden of Eden," *The New York Times*, June 19, 1966. It is not clear why the New York City venue for the Church exhibition was in a private gallery, though Knoedler had previously hosted benefit exhibitions. It seems likely that the exhibition came together so quickly that the city's major museums had already fixed their exhibition schedules.

48. "Benefits Planned To Make Shrine Of Upstate Home: Cruise and Preview to Aid Olana, Estate of the Artist Church," *New York Times*, May 17, 1966.

49. Huntington, oral history, p. 11; Huntington, *Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church*, pp. ix-xii, 34-39, *passim*.

to support the cause.⁵⁰

Huntington concluded the introduction to *Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church* by highlighting the effort to preserve Olana as a museum and park, and described it as “a living island of the spirit of our not-so-awful-after-all Victorian past.” As Lynes and other writers had done, perhaps as a result of Huntington’s prompting, Huntington expressed admiration for the ways Church had designed the house with the landscape as a singular expression of its creator’s understanding of the human relationship with the natural world: “This great house, exposed to cosmic nature by plate glass windows, porches, loggias, and decks, and surrounded by three hundred landscaped acres, guaranteed Church a way to live in an eternal Genesis.” Perhaps most important was his grasp of Olana’s relationship to Church’s art: “at Olana one is suddenly surprised to discover himself living in Church’s paintings. Olana is a never-ending Church.”⁵¹

Third was the publication of a nine-page handsomely illustrated article, “A century-old refuge of art and splendor: Must this Mansion be destroyed?” in the May 13, 1966, issue of *Life* (p. 14, bottom). Huntington recalled that Aldrich’s father was a friend of Henry Luce, the publisher of *Life*, and had pressed Luce to publish something in support of the campaign to save Olana, though Sam Aldrich denies this.⁵² The article began with a banner headline, “Only quick action by Americans can save the exotic home of the celebrated 19th Century landscapist F. E. Church.” It described Olana’s interior as “still aglow with Oriental treasures, tropical butterflies and sunlight warmed by amber windows.” As had others who wrote about Olana, the *Life* reporter noted how Church, who as an artist achieved “spectacular effects of light,” had “put light to dramatic use in his home. He contrasted cool light falling through clear glass with the golden hues diffused by amber glass.” The article unabashedly stressed the importance of Olana’s preservation and observed, “Only the interest and contributions of many Americans can save this unique and splendid domain of an artist’s fancy.”⁵³

Even as the exhibition of Church’s paintings and the publication of Huntington’s book and the *Life* article raised the artist’s profile among the public, fundraising continued to lag behind expectations. The extension of the option to June 30, 1966 that Aldrich had negotiated was essential, both to allow paintings from Olana to be displayed in the New York City venue of the exhibition and to continue the fundraising campaign.⁵⁴ At the March 1, 1966 meeting of Olana Preservation, Aldrich “expressed the gravest doubt that he would be able to raise sufficient money to save Olana prior to the June 30, 1966 deadline.”⁵⁵ While the trustees preferred that Olana be operated as a private museum,

50. Huntington, oral history, p. 35.

51. Huntington, *Landscapes of Frederic Edwin Church* p. xii.

52. Huntington, oral history, p. 39; telephone interview with Phyllis Aldrich, June 10, 2015.

53. “A century-old refuge of art and splendor: Must this mansion be destroyed?” *Life* 60 (May 13, 1966): 64-80.

54. Olana Preservation, minutes, Jan. 19, 1966.

55. *Ibid.*, Mar. 1, 1966.

which would give them greater control of its destiny and enable them to hire a curator, Aldrich requested that, “as a last resort, he be authorized to take steps to obtain a bill in the New York State Legislature which would enable the state to acquire Olana and perhaps include a community college on a portion of the property.”⁵⁶ The executors of the Church estate were as dubious as Aldrich about the success of Olana Preservation’s efforts. Stuart Feld recalls that in early 1966 he was asked by his Metropolitan Museum of Art colleague James Biddle to view the Church paintings, which were already at the Day Meyer Murray and Young warehouse in New York City, where they were tagged with numbers in preparation for auction by Parke-Bernet.⁵⁷

On March 23, 1966, State Senators Robert Watson Pomeroy and Lloyd Newcombe and Assemblyman Clarence D. Lane introduced bills, written by James Hamilton, to allow the state to take ownership of Olana and operate it as a museum and park. According to Hamilton, Whitney North Seymour, Jr. was also important in gaining legislative approval of the bill, as was the staff of Senator Robert F. Kennedy’s office. If enacted, the State Education Department would become the steward of Olana. Church’s estate would be “preserved for the benefit of the people of the state of New York as a historic landmark for educational and recreational purposes.”⁵⁸ The bills also proposed the transfer of land acquired by Louis Church to the supervisors of Columbia and Greene counties as the site of a new community college. Huntington had initially expressed hope that a preserved Olana would be turned over to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, but that would have required Olana Preservation to raise about \$1,500,000 above the purchase price to provide an endowment.⁵⁹ By purchasing Olana and turning it over to the state as a historic site, the state would be responsible for covering its operating expenses. On June 10, 1966, as the state Legislature was considering the Newcombe-Lane bill, *The New York Times* strongly endorsed its adoption. Describing Olana as “this Xanadu on the Hudson with its exotic fantasies of space, light and view,” *The Times* called it “the authentic esthetic expression of a unique monument in art and time.” With its eye surely focused on Pennsylvania Station and other recent preservation losses, *The Times’* editorial writer (probably Ada Louise Huxtable) concluded: “It seems incredible that this opportunity for public enrichment should slip away, and yet experience has proved that we Americans are quite capable

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

57. Stuart Feld, email correspondence with Evelyn Trebilcock, June 9, 2015 and telephone conversation with David Schuyler, June 22, 2015.

58. New York (State), Assembly, “An Act to provide for the acquisition and preservation of the historic site known as Olana . . .,” Mar. 23, 1966, New York State Archives, Albany. There is a copy of the Senate bill in Olana Archives. I have also drawn upon a telephone conversation with James Hamilton, September 20, 2015.

59. Until Olana Preservation, Inc. received tax-exempt status from the IRS, it directed that contributions to Olana should be sent to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. See, for example, “Drive On To Save Artist’s Mansion,” *New York Times*, Jan. 20, 1965.

of destroying the most valuable repositories of our heritage. This country's vaunted cultural explosion is a very small bang indeed if it cannot secure the preservation of one of America's great cultural monuments."⁶⁰ When the state Legislature met on June 22, 1966, to consider the Newcombe-Lane bill, there was a copy of the issue of *Life*, published six weeks earlier, that described the significance of the house in text and stunning photographs, on the desk of every state legislator.⁶¹ According to James Hamilton, Laurance Rockefeller worked diligently behind the scenes to ensure that brother Nelson supported the bill in the legislature, and it passed unanimously. Governor Rockefeller signed the Newcombe-Lane Act at Olana on June 27, 1966 (frontispiece). In his brief remarks Rockefeller praised those who had worked so hard to save Olana: "Because of the efforts of those who are here present, that this unique spot, this truly beautiful spot will be available to citizens of the state and future generations to come and enjoy."⁶²

Important as it was, the Newcombe-Lane bill was not a final act. Most of the approximately \$300,000 Olana Preservation had raised was still in the form of pledges, and Aldrich worried that at least some donors, who promised to give to a private non-profit historic house museum, might not feel obligated to fulfill their pledges if Olana were to become a state-owned property.⁶³ And the Newcombe-Lane bill, while authorizing the state to acquire Olana, would not have enabled the state to release the money and complete the purchase by the end of the month. As a result, the trustees of Olana Preservation borrowed \$189,000 in anticipation of receipt of state dollars and purchased Olana on June 29, 1966. On December 13, 1966, when the state Legislature finally released the \$189,000, Olana Preservation transferred ownership to the New York State Historic Trust, a division of the State Conservation Department.⁶⁴ In a remarkably short period of time, twenty months from the initial meeting of the ad hoc committee in November 1964 until June 1966, and as a result of the dedication of

60. "Olana," *New York Times*, June 10, 1966.

61. The statement about there being a copy of the issue of *Life* on every legislators' desk comes from Phyllis Aldrich, wife of Sam Aldrich, in a telephone conversation of June 10, 2015. Neither Assembly nor Senate records of the discussion of the Newcombe-Lane bill have survived, so this account is from Huntington's oral history, p. 39, probably based on information provided him by his friend Whitney North Seymour, Jr., who was then a state senator.

62. Seamon and Zukowski, "Afterword: Olana After Frederic Church," p. 73. Rockefeller's remarks are available at www.cbs6.albany.com/contact_us/features/birth/stories/june-27-1966-preservation-olana-42. The bill jacket that went to Rockefeller prior to his signing the act includes an assessment by Paul Anderson of the Committee on Rules, which stated: "The home contains one of the few remaining 19th Century interiors which remain perfectly preserved. It is an unusual architectural design and it has been designated by the National Park Service as eligible for status as a National Historic Site." The bill jacket also contains numerous letters strongly urging the governor to support the Newcombe-Lane bill, including ones from important art historians such as Jules Prown of Yale University and Sherman Lee of the Cleveland Museum of Art, as well as from Russell Lynes and numerous private citizens (New York State Archives)

63. Olana Preservation, minutes, May 25, 1966.

64. Seamon and Zukowski, "Afterword: Olana After Frederic Church," p. 73.

many individuals, especially Huntington, Aldrich, and Biddle, whom Aldrich stated was “critically important in saving Olana because of his reputation in the art world and his influence within New York City society at that time,” Olana had been saved. Columbia County supporters, other preservationists, and numerous donors were also essential to the effort. Olana opened to the public on June 3, 1967, and has since become the crown jewel of New York State’s system of historic sites.⁶⁵

But in the early years the state was hardly the ideal steward supporters of Olana’s preservation hoped it would be. At the behest of James Biddle, James Hamilton visited the property in the spring of 1968 and found conditions there dismal. The state had widened and paved many of the carriage drives, but spent almost nothing on building repairs and restoration. Several of the stained glass windows were broken, and the main house was suffering from serious water damage, even in the principal rooms on the first floor. Olana, Hamilton concluded, was “on the brink of disaster.”⁶⁶

Olana Preservation had ceased to operate, but in 1971, when Richard Slavin, Olana’s first site administrator, organized the Friends of Olana, a number of its members, especially Sam and Elizabeth Aldrich, became strong supporters of the Friends. The Friends became a significant source of political and financial support in the restoration of Olana and the conservation of its contents, as has its successor organization, The Olana Partnership.⁶⁷

The preservation of Olana was an epic battle, fought against a deadline. If it failed, in all likelihood the house would have been razed, the landscape subdivided, and the house’s contents scattered as the auctioneer’s gavel fell. It was one of the first great preservation successes in the aftermath of the demolition of Pennsylvania Station, and an early (if not the first) instance of a private-public partnership working effectively to rescue a threatened historic site. The crusade to save Olana undoubtedly contributed to other successful preservation efforts as well. As Huntington stated in remarks he presented on the occasion of the signing of the Newcombe-Lane bill, “The preservation of Olana has been an achievement of the American community.”⁶⁸

65. *Public Opening of Olana as a New York State Historic Site*, Hudson, New York, June 2, 1967 (n.p., n.d.); Merrill Folsom, “Castle on the Hudson Is Opened to the Public,” *New York Times*, May 28, 1967; “Hudson Home to Be Opened As a Historic Site Today,” *ibid.*, June 3, 1967; “State Will Operate an Artist’s Mansion as a Museum,” *ibid.*, June 29, 1966. Sam Aldrich’s assessment of James Biddle’s role in the preservation of Olana was conveyed in an email from Phyllis Aldrich to David Schuyler, June 22, 2015.

66. James Hamilton to James Biddle, May 10, 1968, courtesy of James Hamilton.

67. Schuyler, telephone conversation with Richard Slavin, June 10, 2015; Friends of Olana was incorporated on May 28, 1971. Certificate of Incorporation, issued by the State Education Department, in the files of The Olana Partnership; James A. Ryan, “A Brief History of the Formation of Olana State Historic Site & The Friends of Olana,” Aug. 14, 1980, copy in the files of The Olana Partnership. Friends of Olana became The Olana Partnership in 2000.

68. Huntington, remarks on the occasion of the signing of the Newcombe-Lane bill, copy in Olana Archives.

In May 1967 Governor Rockefeller presented Olana Preservation with an award from the New York State Council on the Arts “for contributions to enhancing the state’s artistic condition.”⁶⁹ It was that, and more. Saving Olana helped bring nineteenth-century American landscape painting to its deserved place in the canon of American contributions to the arts. And it preserved a uniquely personal place that conveys a remarkable man’s vision of the human interaction with the natural environment. As Olana celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of its preservation in 2016, it shares that milestone with the fiftieth anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act, which became law on October 15, 1966, only four months after Olana Preservation acquired the Church property. The small but determined group of individuals who organized Olana Preservation did more than save Frederic Church’s house and estate: They contributed to the public’s appreciation of historic preservation and provided a model that other groups would follow. Olana belongs at center stage as we reflect on the preservation movement of the 1960s and beyond.

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This publication honors J. Winthrop Aldrich, whose life has been devoted to New York’s history and the preservation of its architectural heritage.

David Schuyler is the Arthur and Katherine Shadek Professor of the Humanities and American Studies at Franklin & Marshall College.

69. “Governor Makes 13 Arts Awards,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1967.

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