

Olana was the home and estate of 19th century Hudson River School artist Frederic Edwin Church. Now a New York State Historic Site and National Historic Landmark, Olana is situated high on a hill south of Hudson, NY. The 250-acre historic estate offers spectacular views of the Hudson River and Catskill Mountains and is one of the most popular cultural tourism destinations in the Hudson Valley. The Olana Partnership, a private not-for-profit organization, works cooperatively with New York State to support its restoration, development and improvement.

Frederic Church first came to the Hudson Valley in 1844 to study with Thomas Cole, widely recognized as the founder of the Hudson River School. After two years under Cole's tutelage in Catskill, Church launched what was to become an internationally successful career. After establishing a studio in New York City, Church was soon elected full member of the National Academy of Design.

Shortly thereafter, Church made his first trip to South America, following German naturalist-explorer Alexander von Humbolt's 1802 route from Columbia to Ecuador.

Between 1857 and 1877, Church completed a few major paintings each year. Church's collection at Olana contains sketches and studies for many of these great works.

Amidst the success of *Heart of the Andes* in 1859, Church met Isabel Carnes, and in early 1860 the *Boston Evening Transcript* reported, "Church has been successfully occupied by another Heart than that of the Andes." He and Isabel married later that same year, just three months after he purchased a 126-acre working farm south of Hudson on which to build their home.

In 1861, the couple moved into Cosy Cottage, designed by architect Richard Morris Hunt. Although a working farm, expected to turn a profit, Church also wanted the property to be aesthetically pleasing.

The farm consisted of orchards, vegetable gardens, fields of corn, hay, and rye and livestock. To this Church added thousands of trees. A swampy stream at the bottom of the hill was turned into a lake whose shoreline echoes a broadening of the Hudson River below.

In 1867, Church was able to purchase an adjacent parcel of land atop the hill. The family, including one-year-old son Frederic Joseph, then left for an extended trip to Europe, Egypt, and parts of what is now Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine and Syria. During an extended period in Rome, where Church established a studio, the couple welcomed another son, Theodore Winthrop.

Upon their return in 1870, Church hired Calvert Vaux as architect of a new house, but it was Church's vision of a Persian design that guided the construction of the home. Church was also deeply involved in decorating the house at Olana, choosing furnishings and paintings, even mixing paint colors himself.

Over the next two years, two more children were born, Louis Palmer and Isabel Charlotte, nicknamed Downie. In 1872 the family moved into the second story of the incomplete new home, but it would be four years before the elaborately stenciled main floor rooms were completed.

The attention to detail apparent in Olana's intricate stencils extends to the development of the landscape, with a focus on building views both of it and from it. Church used the Hudson River and mountains in the distance as a background to a composition with carefully planned foreground and middle ground elements. In his final years, Church continued to travel regularly. Although he spent the bulk of his time at Olana, he wintered each year in Mexico, seeking relief from the New York cold that aggravated the symptoms of his arthritis. Isabel died in 1899, and in 1900 Church returned from Mexico for the last time and, too ill to make it back to his beloved Olana, died at the home of a friend in New York City.

Olana State Historic Site is now owned and operated by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Taconic Region and receives extensive support from The Olana Partnership.

The main house is open to the public for guided tours. A visitor center offers a film and panel exhibit as well as a Museum Shop, operated by The Olana Partnership, offering books and many items inspired by the exotic locales of Church's travels and paintings. The grounds are open year-round, 8am-sunset, for hiking, picnicking, snowshoeing or just enjoying the view.