

Managing Change at Olana

Preliminary Recommendations
for a National Historic Landmark Cultural Landscape



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Cover image: View from the Second Floor – *Is the harmonious alignment of the carriage road in relationship to the borrowed view a happy accident?*

A Foundation for the Work that Follows

This white paper summarizes the findings that grew out of a site visit by Charles Birnbaum to Olana, in Hudson New York on December 2, 2010. The intense day began with a quick stop at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site in Catskill, New York, and was followed by an on-foot and driving tour of the Olana Historic Site, including its network of historic carriage roads, the main house, barns, and Cosy Cottage. Associated meetings were held at Cosy Cottage, with Sarah Griffen, Sara Price, Mark Prezorski, and Rick Sharp in attendance. This group was also joined by Wint Aldrich and, by telecom, Robin Key, Bob Toole, and Margaret Davidson. This was my fifth trip to Olana over a 20-year period with the most recent prior visit in December 2009.

In advance of the visit, all available material provided by the Olana Partnership was reviewed including the Historic Landscape Report by Robert M. Toole (1996), the Landscape Restoration Plan by the Office of R. M. Toole (March 2002), the Olana State Historic Site Final Comprehensive Plan and Final EIS (May 2002), and the recent publication, *Glories of the Hudson: Frederic Edwin Church's Views From Olana*, by Evelyn D. Trebilcock and Valerie A. Balint. In addition, National Register, National Historic Landmark and World Heritage applications, annual appeal letters, and cases for support provided by the site were invaluable in addition to a great number of related books, monographs and articles by and about Church, Olmsted, Vaux, and the Hudson River Valley.

Before selected strategies for Olana's cultural landscape are put forth in this White Paper, a critical observation should be noted – Over the past decade it has become common knowledge that historic house museums are struggling to survive and organizations such as the National Trust have raised the valid question: *Are there too many historic house museums?* Based on Olana's significant achievements over the past five plus years as chronicled in their annual reports and confirmed by my own site visits, the current leadership is to be commended for both their vision and the truly monumental success with preserving and protecting the site's historic fabric while promoting Church's vision and values. Looking ahead, this White Paper aims to place a focus on those next efforts through the lens of Olana's nationally-significant, historic designed landscape.

Olana's Significance

Since its initial designation in 1965, Olana's statement of significance has evolved, in part a result of the changing format of the National Park Service's (NPS) nomination forms, as knowledge of the site's past has grown substantially and available scholarly context on Frederic Edwin Church, Calvert Vaux, Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., and Hudson River School painting and landscapes, has matured. To illustrate similar situations, note that when Prospect Park was designated in 1975 it was solely as a "Scenic Landmark" and not a historic designed landscape, while the Biltmore Estate and Biltmore Forestry Site were originally designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1963 solely under the theme of Conservation. Looking deeper, the anemic, three-page Biltmore nomination was largely the result of a December 1962 site visit by a NPS historian which led to the designation of 12,000 acres less than six months later. A careful review of this early nomination reveals both the absence of landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and his patron, George W. Vanderbilt.ⁱ The results: the evolution of Olana's statement of significance is both reasonable and not unusual.

Today, with Olana pursuing World Heritage Status and so much of the historic viewshed now protected through contiguous land holdings, there is sufficient rationale to revisit the foundational statement of significance. This updated statement of significance would not only frame future World Heritage applications, it would provide a powerful tool for how Olana presents itself (including its mission and vision statements) and manages its own change (e.g. develop an overarching historic preservation philosophy for the landscape).

Background: Shifting Attitudes Regarding Significance

"Frederic E. Church House (Olana)" was designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL) solely as a "building" on June 22, 1965. The statement of significance focused largely on the structure, universally well-known architects (Richard Morris Hunt and Calvert Vaux), and the extant studio. The statement of significance read as follows:

Olana is a 250-acre estate within a 327-acre park. The picturesque estate was designed by the artist Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900). The Church residences on the estate include a cottage designed by Richard Morris Hunt and the mansion designed by Calvert Vaux. The estate dominates a hilltop on the east bank of the Hudson River with views west to the Catskill Mountains and east to the Berkshires. The main house was constructed 1870-74; a wing 1888-90 was designed and constructed by the artist. Frederic E. Church was one of the leading American Landscape artists of the Hudson

River School. Few estates with existing artist's studios of such authenticity remain in existence.

As was the case with many of the early NHL designations, a National Register form was submitted in 1975 to supplement the earlier findings for the Frederic E. Church House . Prepared by Richard Greenwood, a historian on the Landmark Review Task Force, the site was ultimately listed on the National Register on April 14, 1978 **solely with significance in Art.** Looking deeper at the nomination, those boxes left blank where significance would have been attributed (with a simple check mark) included the themes of Architecture, Conservation, and Landscape Architecture. In addition, the key year of 1872 (the year that the Churchs moved into their new home) is stated as the significant date of “completion of Olana” thus ignoring the critical period between 1873-1899 when the landscape is built out.



Figure 1: The Lake at Olana (2007)

This oversight places the completion of the lake, the acquisition of land for the north meadow, and the construction of the carriage road network (not to mention the addition of the studio wing of the house from 1888-90) outside of the period of significance.

Curiously, the statement of significance is very different than the one generated 13 years earlier for the NHL nomination, noting:

Olana’ Frederic Church’s castle-like residence atop Churchs Hill on the east bank of the Hudson River, near Hudson, New York, evinces that painter’s love of the dramatic and grand. Overlooking 60 miles of the Hudson River Valley, the towered stone mansion, with its Oriental flavor symbolizes the spirit and vitality of one of America’s ablest nineteenth century artists, a leader among American artists in a period that has been described as the most prosperous time in the history of American art (1840-1876).

When viewed together, these two foundational statements of significance created the management framework for Olana during its earliest days of State oversight and, not surprisingly, they emphasized the structure, the extant studio (1965), and the art (1975). Looking ahead, it is worth exploring the continuum of the statements of significance that Olana has put forth since that time through multiple reports and other communication tools (e.g. website, annual reports). This is beneficial not just for historic context, but because there are many foundational ideas that could be gleaned from these efforts that may be considered when revisiting the historical themes that contribute to Olana’s significance as well as how the Olana Partnership presents itself to the public.

For the purposes of this discussion, in the early 1980s there was a shift toward viewing the overall property and not just the Mansion. In 1983, the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) made a noble attempt to assign significance to the overall property, including its landscape stating:

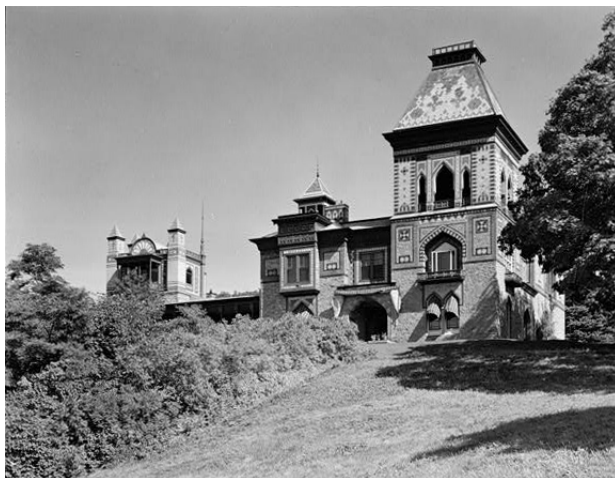


Figure 2: General View from the Southwest; HABS photograph, 1971

“Church incorporated architectural versions of the two different parts of the world in his design for a new home. The styling of his house is largely- Moorish. The design includes several Persian themes which Church called “personal Persian.” Architect Calvert Vaux had a supervisory role in the design; and he also drew plans for the mansion. The vastly sculptured landscaping design was done by Frederick Law Olmsted.”

Fortunately such generic misattributions seem to end at this time and the research and analysis that followed, initiated by Olana’s stewards, goes deeper and is holistic for both the buildings and grounds. Beginning with Ellen McClelland Lesser’s *Landscape Research Report*

(1986), and continuing with R. M. Toole's myriad reports (1996-2002), the depth of knowledge of Olana's landscape and its period of significance begins to crystallize. The turning point appears to be McClelland Lesser's report where it is noted that:

*Mr. Church was at the height of his painting career in 1860, when he undertook the creation of his most ambitious work of art, the design of Olana. Here on two hundred and fifty acres of rough, hilly Hudson Valley farm – and woodland, he found the material to create one of the most enjoyable landscape gardens of the second half of the 19th century.*ⁱⁱ

A decade later in the *Historic Landscape Report* (1996), former site manager James Ryan and landscape architect Robert Toole, respectively, echo McClelland Lesser's statement by thematically grouping landscape design and painting:



Figure 3: An Earthscape of Significance

*We can now be certain that Church's achievements as a landscape designer match the achievements he realized as an architect for his house and interiors. At Olana, Church created an earthscape of significance.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Despite the long-recognized affinity of landscape painting and landscape gardening, there are few documented properties where the art of landscape gardening is attributed to an artist – let alone a landscape artist.^{iv}

In more recent years, the landscape of Olana has been viewed through the lens of the school of Picturesque landscape gardening, most widely associated with, and promoted by tastemaker Andrew Jackson Downing. For example, the *Landscape Restoration Plan* and *Final Comprehensive Plan* (both from 2002) contain the following statements:



Figure 4: Picturesque Landscape Gardening at A. J. Downing's Springside. (Painting by Henry Gritten, 1852)

Figure 5: Chesterwood, Stockbridge, MA, the Studio of Daniel Chester French is a rare surviving example of an intact property with associations to an artist. (Photo by Richard Doody)

Today, the Olana landscape is preserved as one of the finest Picturesque-style designed landscapes extant in the United States and is considered a masterpiece of American landscape design.^v

Olana is one of the few remaining historic sites in this country with the original artist-designed studio, house, landscape and collection intact, and with few intrusions on the historic property or viewshed.^{vi}

Church designed the landscape in the Picturesque style primarily between 1860 and 1890. . . The result is one of the few remaining, and finest, Picturesque residential landscape garden designs.^{vii}

This framing of the landscape *predominantly* through the lens of Hudson River Picturesque continues today, as noted in the 2009 Annual Appeal for Support which states that Olana is “One of the few remaining Picturesque landscapes in the country.”

With this chronology of Olana’s evolving recognition of its own significance as a basis for moving forward, the recommendations that follow begin with putting forth new research themes, places them in the context of present day stewardship opportunities and constraints, and concludes with an integrated look at applying treatment (including a sample of the what this would look like in action). Collectively, these are organized under the following themes:

- ❖ Expanding Vision and Values: Broadening Olana’s Areas of Significance
- ❖ Adopting a Holistic Stewardship Ethic for Collections: Living and Non Living
- ❖ Treatment Next Steps and a Sample Exploration Looking at Olana’s Circulation Systems

Expanding Vision and Values: Broadening our Areas of Significance

As previously noted, earlier National Register and NHL nominations have emphasized Olana's **art** and **architecture**. In terms of Olana's historic designed landscape, as recently as the *Case for Support* prepared by the Partnership (October 2009), the site's critical historical context has been limited to the Picturesque. To illustrate this narrow lens, in response to the question, "Why we think it's important to preserve Olana's landscape," the first of five bullet points, and the only one that addresses landscape significance notes: "Olana is one of the few remaining Picturesque landscapes in the country."^{viii} Later in this summary, this historic context is expanded noting:



Figure 6: A. J. Downing and the Picturesque
(from *Landscape Gardening*, 1844)

Picturesque landscape gardening at Olana had its foundation in English design but the style emphasized 'genius of place,' and so Olana is removed from European models. This was an indigenous landscape design expression achieved in a period when appreciation for natural and pastoral beauty reached near-religious intensity. As such, picturesque landscape gardening was a basis for the urban park movement and was absorbed in the National Park and conservation movements throughout the 19th century.

While this context does apply to Olana, it also applies to dozens of other Picturesque parks, gardens, and pleasure grounds that survive today that also meet this criteria – consider for example that there are approximately 200 Olmsted-designed landscapes in the Picturesque style that are listed on the National Register, with a great number of these by Olmsted, Sr.

An Opportunity: The Prospect of World Heritage Status

At Olana, the time has come to view its significance more holistically. This idea is trumpeted in the recent World Heritage application (February 2008), where those "features or aspects

of the property” that are deemed worthy to qualify Olana for the World Heritage List are described as:

The landscape, house and collections that comprise Olana are the features that qualify Olana for the World Heritage list. Together, they are a masterpiece conceived and executed by the preeminent mid 19th-century American landscape painter.

Also worth noting, in this application, when queried about those elements and features related to the site’s significance, Olana placed itself within a larger context – one that includes both the physical context (setting) and larger historical context (thematic). Here it noted:

Olana’s significance lies not only in the structures and surrounding landscape that constitute the designated boundary but in the panoramic views from the property,



Figure 7: *Olana in the Clouds*, Frederic Edwin Church, 1872

which stretch many miles in each direction. Church developed his property with the views in mind, composing various three dimensional landscape “paintings” with a vegetated foreground of great variety framing a middle ground containing open pastures and water elements such as a pond and winding creeks, and a deep background encompassing majestic rivers and distant mountains.

This statement is more ambitious and comprehensive than any previous written statement and serves as a launching off point for the exploration of a larger thematic structure for Olana’s landscape. Additionally, while placing equal value on the landscape, house and collections, the nomination also situates the property in a larger historical context, stating that Olana “represents a masterpiece of human creative genius” and that the:

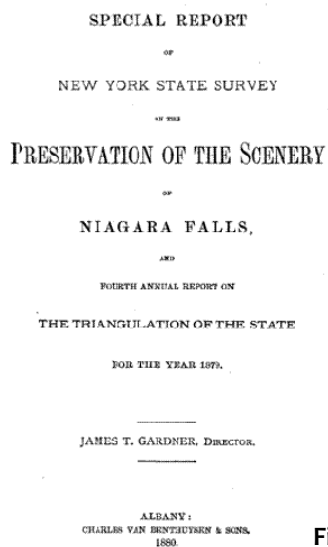
Hudson River School of landscape painters was based in New York in the mid-19th century and has proven to be one of the most important cultural developments in the

history of the United States. The paintings produced by The Hudson River School are America's first truly American art form, and paved the way for international recognition of American art.

With this quest to situate Olana within a larger framework now put forth in the World Heritage application, let's continue to integrate and build on these ideas.

Broadening Significance: Themes and Ideas to Explore

At Olana, it is possible to broaden its significance and to consider Church's masterwork as **both a historic designed landscape and as an early progenitor of conservation principles.** Here again, we can look to Biltmore for leadership. As previously noted, when Biltmore was first designated in 1962 it was solely under the theme of conservation. When the NHL was revised in 2002, its areas of significance included conservation, social history, architecture, and landscape architecture.”^{ix} This broadening of Biltmore's thematic significance is an excellent example for Olana to follow – and, consistent with Biltmore's management approach, this expanded stewardship perspective can also serve as an interpretive framework for presenting its landscape to visitors today.



To illustrate the logical fit with Olana, consider the *Special Report of the New York State Survey of Niagara Falls and Fourth Annual*



Report on The Triangulation of the State for the Year 1879 written by director of the state survey, James C. Garner with Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., who was responsible for framing the various proposals. As

summarized by the Library of Congress' American Memory Project, "This Report documents the early stages of one of the first state-level conservation efforts in America, New York's

movement to restore and preserve the scenic beauty of Niagara Falls.” The Report analyzes the Falls' scenery, describes and illustrates its deteriorated condition, and puts forth the recommendation that the State purchase the critical parcels of land in the immediate vicinity and restoring them to their former beauty, thereby fulfilling a "sacred obligation to mankind".^x The Report also includes a list of Memorial supporters, addressed to the governor, and signed by more than a hundred prominent individuals, including several associated with conservationism and such artists as Church, Bierstadt, Durand, and Hicks.



Figure 10: *Niagara Falls*, Frederic Edwin Church, 1857

According to Olmsted biographer Laura Wood Roper, the idea of preserving the Falls through public ownership had first been proposed publicly by Lord Dufferin, Governor-General of Canada, in 1878; however, Church had broached the idea privately some years earlier and, by 1869, several Americans, including Church, Olmsted, and architect H. H. Richardson, were working privately to build public support. In 1879, the Legislature responded to a request from Governor, Lucius Robinson, by instructing the Commissioners of the State Survey to investigate the matter and issue this Special Report. The public campaign that followed the submission of the Special Report led to the establishment of the State Reservation at Niagara in 1885.^{xi}

Within the report, a window into the Church's thinking and conservation ideologies, the conclusion notes:

I can think of no better statement that not only nestles Church's motivations behind Olana's creation at the origins of the American scenic conservation movement, while also embracing his sensitivities towards providing and designing democratic grounds that by this time was being promoted and realized by Olmsted, Vaux and their successor firms.

Hence, at Olana, there is an opportunity to not only reframe its overarching areas of significance to include Conservation, but to also broaden the notion of the Picturesque, in both painting and landscape-making. In sum, this expansion of significance to include landscape painting, landscape design, and landscape conservation provides an enriched and energized interpretive framework to see and to value landscape as Church and his circle of collaborators and friends did during this time.

One such example that relates to both Olana's unrivaled viewsheds while also serving as a window into Calvert Vaux's own thinking, is the essay, "Sky and Skyline" published in 1881 in *Concerning Lawn Planting*.^{xii} Here Vaux notes:



Figure 11: *Summer Sunset from Olana*, Frederic Edwin Church, ca. 1870-74

The landscape painter is trained to see the color relations of each to the other, and pays habitual attention to such combinations. To him the sky is constantly visible, asserting itself as a fact more positive even than the subjects in front of it. The typical landscape painter may be said, indeed, to observe the aspects, rather than the forms of nature. He is fascinated by some effect of light and shade and color, that depends on the

particular season of the year, or the sunlight and atmosphere of some special hour of a day. To this he is attracted in connection with a group of harmonious lines; and he sees

and paints his beautiful picture, which is, in fact, devoted to the illustration of a passing moment of time.

In every sensitive observer this co-ordinating faculty of the landscape painter is somewhat active, although it does not seek expression through the hand. The lover of pictures is properly complementary to the painter of pictures; and the art of lawn planting appeals directly to this delicate capacity in the human eye to blend foreground and middle distance, sky line and sky, into one harmonious optical impression. . .

It is evident therefore, that in laying out a country place, large or small, with reference to its landscape attractions, the present and prospective sky line is one element of design that needs very skillful attention.

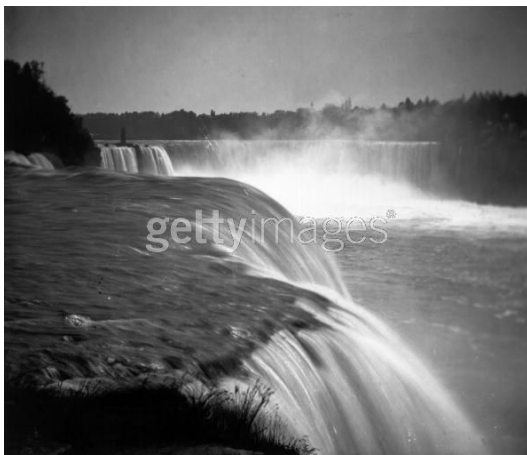


Figure 12: The two cataracts of Niagara Falls, as seen from Prospect Point. The nearer waterfall is the American or Rainbow Falls, separated by Goat Island (left) from the Canadian or Horseshoe Falls. Just to the right of Goat Island is Terrapin Tower, an observation point built in 1833. (Photo by William England, 1859 London Stereoscopic Company/Getty Images)

Bookending Concerning Lawn Planting, which opens with “Sky and Skyline,” is its closing essay, “A Natural Park at Niagara,” which not only captures the spirit of the collaborative Vaux/Church friendship, but also how Church’s vision inspired Vaux, and how the Niagara experience was foundational to making Olana. Here Vaux notes:

Some years since, while Mr. F. E. Church was one of our Park Commissioners, he showed me in his studio an original sketch of Niagara, and the conversation naturally turned on its present disadvantageous surroundings, both on the American and the Canadian side, and on the desirability of securing to the public all that was really essential to a full enjoyment of its beauties. I remember Mr. Church’s

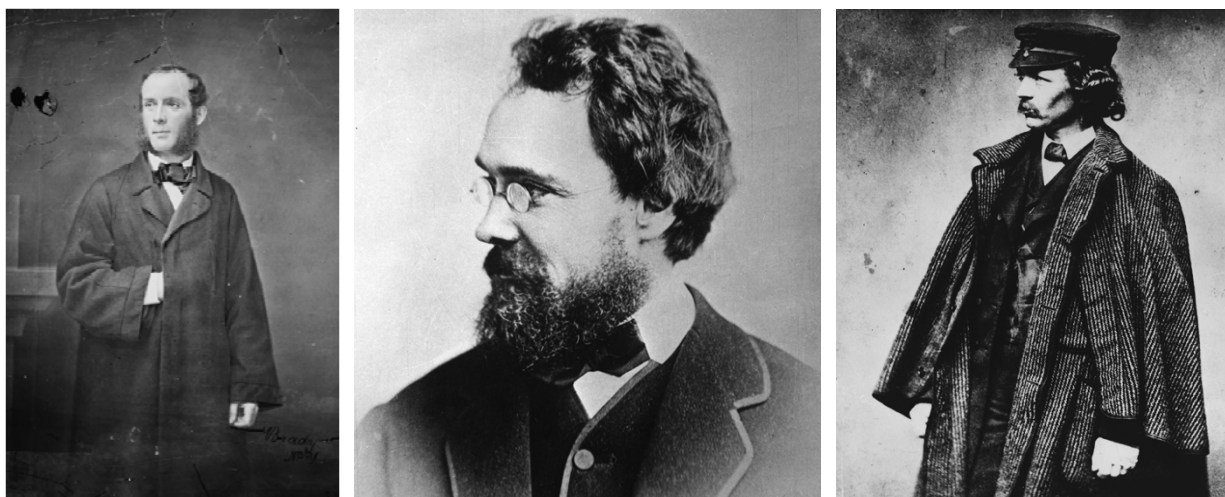
then mentioning incidentally, that he was under the impression that a close study of the subject in the future would show that it would be quite feasible, and perhaps desirable, to

improve the artistic effect on the American side by opening up a few channels that would allow water to flow here and there over the high rock wall of Goat Island, between the Horseshoe and the American Falls, and thus give a sparkle and life to this subsidiary portion of the scene, which would help the general effect to their artistic eye, by linking together in an easy way the two great falls, which at present seem to be somewhat disconnected, in consequence of what really looks like an untoward accident in the play of natural forces. I was reminded of this conversation when, a few winters afterward, I was at the Falls, when the flow of water had been much reduced by the storm of wind that continued for several days. . .



Figure 13: *Olana from the Southwest*, Frederic Edwin Church, ca. 1872, illustrates the panoramic view in all directions

The idea of visually connecting iconic landscape features was also foundational to Olana – consider how the unrivaled 360 degree viewshed of carefully composed foregrounds, mid-grounds, and sweeping panoramic backgrounds melded together a harmonious sequence of powerful views and vistas that include the Hudson River Valley, Catskill Mountains, and Berkshire and Taconic ranges.



Figures 14-16: left to right - Frederic Edwin Church, Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.

These sample findings reveal that there are multiple opportunities to broaden and recast Olana's historic narrative that not only place it within the conservation and scenic preservation movement, but also explore the professional relationship, friendship, and shared vision and values of Frederick Law Olmsted, Calvert Vaux, and Church himself. To this end, the professional overlaps at Niagara and Central Park should be further explored. As should the diversity of family connections between Olmsted, Vaux, and Church that include Henry and Mary Elizabeth Mack, who hired Vaux to design their 1870s villa at the urging of Mrs. Mack's cousin Frederic Church, and, more significantly, painter Jervis McEntee, who Church once described as "a brisk, energetic young fellow." McEntee studied with Church from 1850-51 and, in 1853, McEntee hired Vaux to design his board-and-batten studio and cottage.



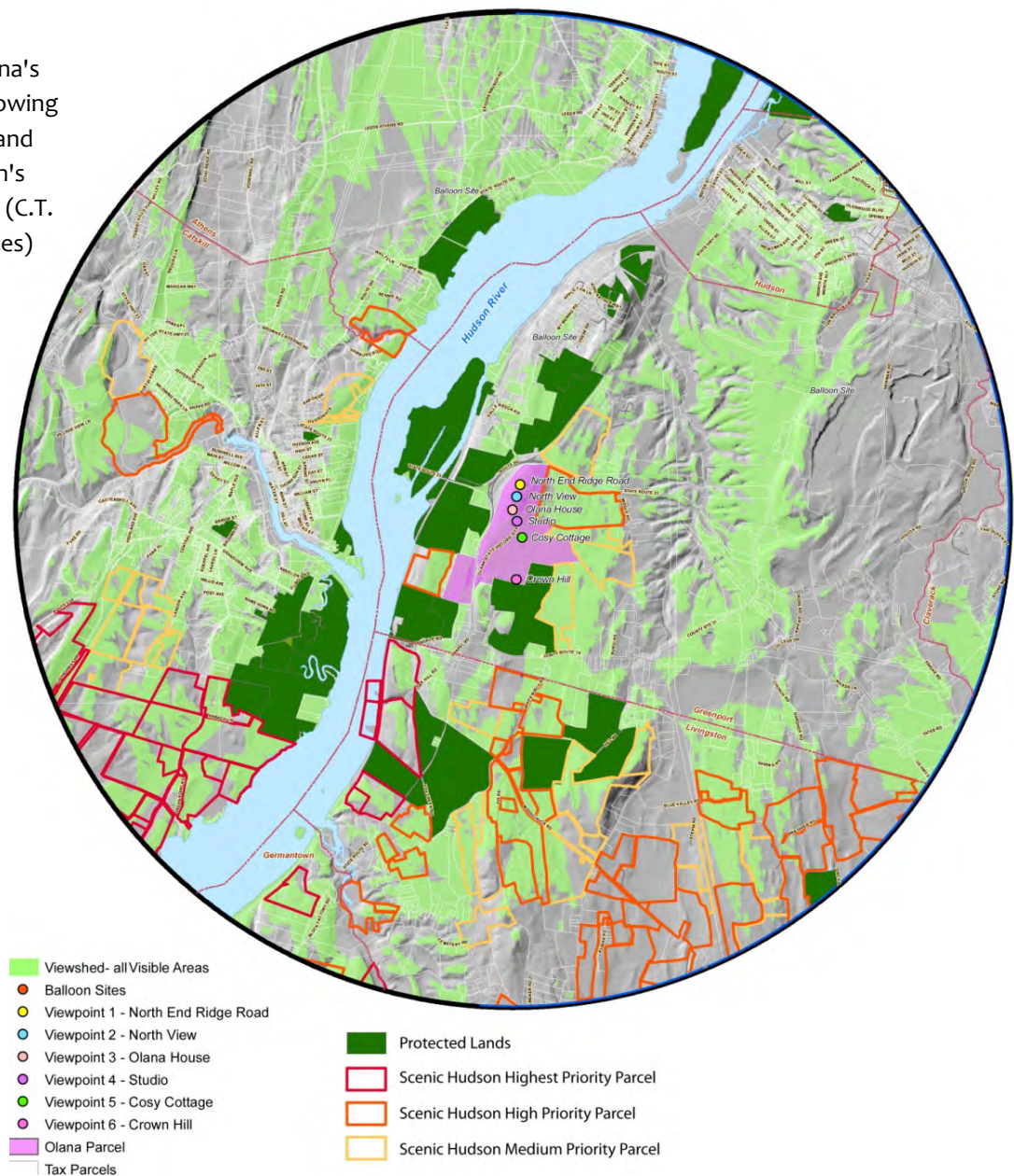
Figure 17: Jervis McEntee Studio, Rondout, N.Y., ca. 1853-43

In 1854, Vaux married McEntee's younger sister which further connected the men for the next four decades.^{xiii} Research of these personal and professional connections would likely place Olana at the birth of both the conservation movement and the Picturesque espoused by Olmsted and Vaux.

Additionally, research should be committed to Olana's ongoing conservation story, including the period of time in the early 1960s when it faced an uncertain future. Here, further

research should look at the origins of Olana Preservation, Inc., when it formed a board in 1964, and should spotlight such seminal figures in the birth of the modern historic preservation movement as James Biddle, Henry Francis du Pont, David Huntington, and Alexander Aldrich. In sum, this expanded narrative that spans the 19th and 20th centuries is appropriate as Olana nears the 50-year mark of public stewardship, but it also provides a framework to view this unrivaled, visionary legacy of land conservation, easement acquisition and protection that is both a hallmark of Olana and a very small number of other American historic properties.

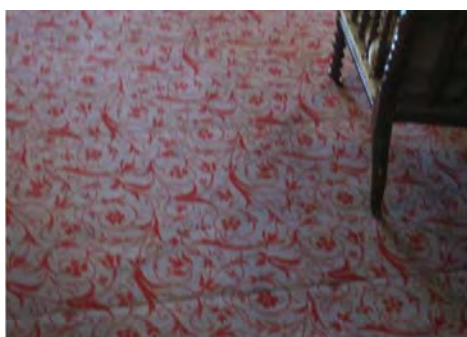
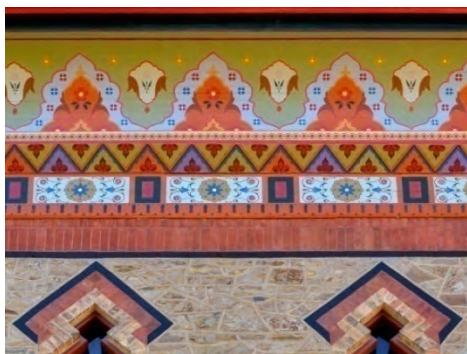
Figure 18: Olana's viewshed, Showing both Olana's and Scenic Hudson's priority areas. (C.T. Male Associates)



Adopting a Holistic Stewardship Ethic for Collections: Living and Non-Living

It seems fitting that Olana's unique and trailblazing story of viewshed protection should be a prelude to a management discussion. After all, the way in which the Olana viewshed is interpreted can teach visitors how to see like Church, both as an artist and as a conservationist.

Foundational to this idea, it is worth noting that before my most recent visit to Olana I had never previously ventured up to the second floor -- and it is from this greater elevation that Church's vision, and the role that the Olana Preservation (and now the Olana Partnership) has played in insuring the protection of its unrivaled vista becomes even clearer.



Also during this visit, I toured the second floor's newly restored rooms with their magnificent pain-staking restoration of rugs and wallpaper and was taken by the thought that **preserving** and **restoring** historic interiors is much easier when it comes to putting back exactly what was severely deteriorated or even lost. At Olana, for example, these tasks may include repainting authentic stenciling for a historic cornice or securing qualified weavers/manufacturers for restoring or repairing a deteriorated tapestry or rug. But what happens when it comes to those outdoor spaces that need to evolve to accommodate a growing number and diversity of visitors to Olana in the future? Most often, these projects can be addressed under the umbrella of **The Standards for Rehabilitation** (as defined by the Secretary of the Interior). The ten treatment Standards for Rehabilitation should be used to guide a holistic stewardship approach for Olana's landscape and should be considered in all

Figures 19-21: Restored Cornice, Tapestry + Wallpaper at Olana. (Birnbaum 2010)

work from vista and carriage road restoration to the introduction of new site furnishings and signage. As stated in the definition for Rehabilitation, the treatment:

assumes that at least some repair or alteration of the historic building or landscape will be needed in order to provide for an efficient contemporary use; however, these repairs and alterations must not damage or destroy materials, features or finishes that are important in defining the building's historic character.^{xiv}

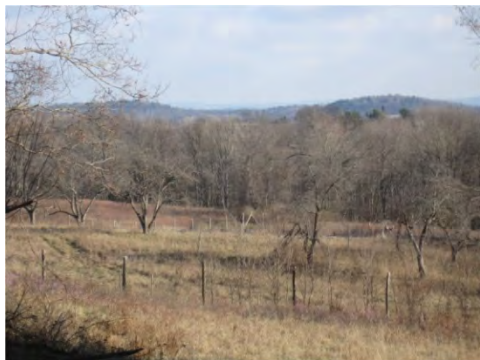
For example, here's how the Standards for Rehabilitation may relate to Olana's character-defining landscape features:



- What should be done to the expansive ground plane surface area at the rear of the Mansion which is now ornamental brick and asphalt, but historically was crushed shale? What material and detailing is appropriate for such a highly trafficked area? (Fig. 22, left)



- How should new parking areas be designed and what criteria and values shall determine where they should go and how they are developed? (Fig. 23, left)



- Regarding vegetation management, what types of fruit trees are planted in the former orchard? (Fig. 24, bottom left) Is the layout/spatial configuration more important than plant material selection? Although “not contemplated,”^{xv} what crops can/should be grown in the former working landscape? Should this be reversible, based on what was there, or is this an opportunity for new programming today? What is planted on steep slopes, cleared of second-generation woodland growth, and what are the criteria for plant selection (e.g. appearance, performance, water requirements)?

- Do we know what the Summer House atop Crown Hill looked like historically and, if not, if it is replaced at a later date, what style should it be?



- Should new site furnishings be old-fashioned and rustic (Fig. 25, left), or should they be modern and minimal in their design? What are the associated design guidelines? (e.g. Should signs be tilted and low to the ground when they appear in a significant viewshed? Should benches in key viewsheds be backless?) Should an overall philosophy be universally

applied based on such criteria as overall significance, authenticity of the feature and current maintenance concerns?



- If a Museum/Visitor's Center is constructed in the future (most likely outside of the historic core of the estate), how does material selections used for its associated landscape (e.g. paving, benches, signage) inform or affect similar introductions within the

historic estate landscape? Is this an opportunity to let visitors *distinguish* areas of new construction and how they differ from the historic designed landscape's character-defining materials and features? (Fig. 25. Above left)

To answer these challenging questions regarding Olana's landscape, the Standards for Rehabilitation are an excellent reference when developing a historic preservation philosophy to balance both **change and continuity** and to guide the Olana landscape into the future. Referring back to the Standards, the following four are worth considering in addressing these challenges:

A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment. (Standard 1)

The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided. (Standard 2)

Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken. (Standard 3)

New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment. (Standard 9)

With these overarching Standards illustrating stewardship benchmarks for Olana today, it is critical that no individual treatment or management intervention (e.g. new structure or road surface) be addressed in a vacuum, as many are interrelated. Moving forward, to provide a framework for cohesive decision making, all treatment decisions should be viewed through a series of philosophical lenses that result in a *holistic stewardship approach* that are described herein as the **4 C's**. This includes:

Collections - This includes both living (e.g. seminal trees) and non-living (e.g. rustic bench) character defining features;

Community - Everyone involved in Olana including those that live, work and play; from local students to International researchers;

Context – Both the physical context (e.g. the setting, viewshed) and historic (thematic histories that serve as overarching interpretive lenses such as conservation, landscape architecture);

Containers – Placing structures within the landscape of Olana and framing the significance from the perspective of the cultural landscape.

Fortunately, serving as a critical foundation for these questions, much research and analysis has been generated about Olana’s historic designed landscape over the past 25 years,

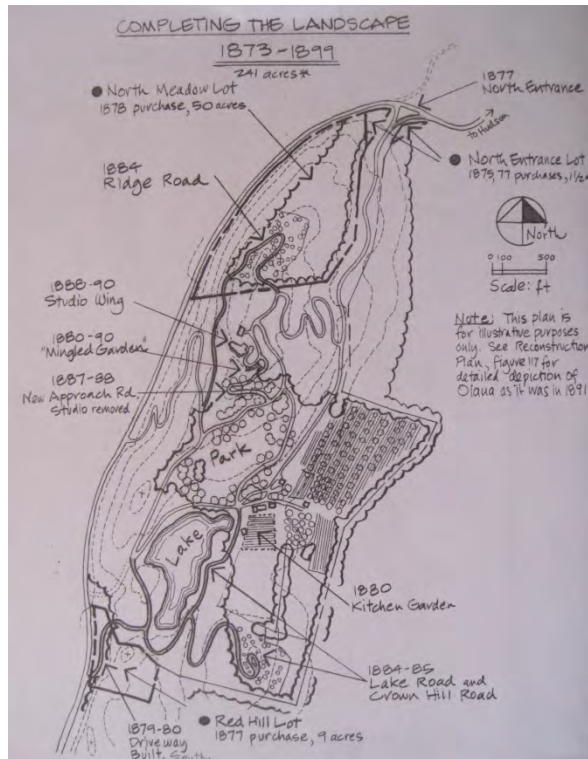


Figure 27: Period Plan, 1873-1899. “Completing the Landscape” represents Olana at the end of its period of significance (R.M. Toole, Historic Landscape Report, 1996)

beginning with Lesser’s *Landscape Research Report* and the multiple studies generated by Toole. For example, with Toole’s 1996 *Historic Landscape Report* we have an in-depth chronology, complete with period plans (pre-1860; 1860-1867; 1866-72; 1873-1899; 1900-1943; 1944-1966 and 1966-1996) which provide an essential starting point for understanding the evolution of Olana’s visual and spatial relationships over time. However, because of the large scale of these plans, and their freehand drawn qualities, additional research at a larger scale, will be necessary to both answer questions like the ones previously outlined and to assist in prioritizing the work.

Treatment Next Steps and a Sample Exploration Looking at Olana’s Circulation Systems

While a full-fledged new Cultural Landscape Report may not be required, in an effort to inform treatment decisions, additional research and analysis above and beyond what has been generated to date will be required for specific projects. In addition, as outlined in the preceding research and holistic stewardship discussions, individual treatment recommendations (e.g. signage or pavement selections) should not be made in a vacuum,

rather they should be prescribed in the context of each other and the overall site. (For example, there may be different guidelines for what is acceptable within the historic core versus what is appropriate for later land acquisitions that may, one day, house a museum/visitor's center).

Independent of the intervention, from the addition of new benches to a new parking area, the primary goal for Olana's landscape management should be to first articulate a comprehensive framework for all treatment work. To this end, a concise Historic Preservation Framework or Philosophical Statement that grows out of the ideas outlined in the 4 C's described on pages 19 and 20 should be developed. This short paper, which then acts as a series of lenses to evaluate all new work would ideally be no more than five pages in length, and would be organized in a manner consistent with the ***Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes***. As with that publication, the recommendations should be organized from macro to micro in scale, first addressing *visual and spatial relationships* (both on site and outward views) followed by each of those character-defining features that comprise the Olana landscape including: *topography, vegetation, circulation, water features, structures, site furnishings and objects*. **Such a framework should be adopted before individual projects such as vista clearing or a new orchard are advanced.**

Treatment in Action



Figure 28: *Road to Olana*, Walter Launt Palmer, 1888

In an effort to illustrate why such a framework is essential, let's consider the idea of the arrival experience and the often stated goal to restore Olana's historic carriage roads. As noted in the 2002 *Final Comprehensive Plan*, "modern paved roads have been added that are inconsistent with Church's design intentions. Given the drive's purpose as important design elements, reuse of the primary north road and authentic restoration of the south road are important goals of the restoration."^{xvi}

This recommendation is a reasonable one, but it only addresses the historic road alignment and new road insertions. What, for example, happens with the installation of a new museum/visitor's center – is the goal to remove the parking around the Mansion and “restore” a dignified arrival experience?



Figure 29: Modern signage mounted on rustic posts; (Birnbaum, 2010)

Prescribing treatment recommendations as they relate to circulation is critical, but it is important to note that there are many interrelated variables that should be considered such as the material for the roads (e.g. loose shale aggregate, rolled and chip sealed aggregate, no aggregate at all); surface pavement or road surface for new parking areas or larger pavement expanses (e.g. the area behind the Mansion, parking near the

barn); the visual relationship from the road (e.g. new signage guidelines, drainage inlets); and, the view to the road, not to mention the historic role that carriage roads played in animating the landscape.



Figure 30: The scenographic landscape of Springside, ca. 1850s

In an attempt to address these myriad challenges, when developing treatment guidelines for circulation, they should also consider the historic function of the carriage roads as pleasure drives. Olana, like Olmsted and Vaux's Central and Prospect Parks and Andrew Jackson Downing's Springside, in Poughkeepsie, was conceived as scenographic

landscape by design and, as such, the act of arrival and the planned sequence of viewing experiences that reveal themselves should be carefully choreographed -- not just in the road

alignment, but in relationship to the vista clearing work that is being considered as well as the 21st century landscape that exists today, for better or worse, outside of its boundaries.



Figure 31: View from Carriage Drive, ca. 1890; Stimson, Jeffrey. *The Hudson River, 1850-1918*

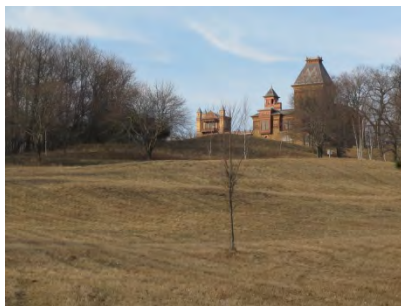


Figure 32: View from Carriage Drive; (Birnbaum, 2010)

Olmsted often referred to “passages of scenery” when moving visitors through a park or pleasure ground. For Olmsted, Vaux, and Church an integral, critical component in the larger landscape are its foreground, mid-ground, and background relationships. So for example, as the second-generation vegetation that has overtaken sixty acres of former parkland or meadows is reclaimed, there must be a critical understanding of the role that specific plant masses played from the unique perspective of the carriage roads.

Finally, as important as the act of moving through the landscape is, the act of looking out over the landscape and seeing it animated with movement is also a critical perspective. Here, one can imagine that unlike sheep populating an Olmsted/Vaux-designed meadow in Chicago’s Washington Park or Brooklyn’s Prospect Park, visitors to

Olana during a parallel time were afforded views from the upper terrace or balcony and witnessed visitors moving through the landscape’s network of carriage roads by way of rustic donkey carts.



Figure 33: Boats animate the landscape of the World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893

To illustrate the integral idea of animating the landscape, it is worth noting that by the end of 1891, in the design for the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the question of what kind of boats to allow on the fair’s waterways had come to obsess Olmsted, “as if boats alone would determine the success of his quest for ‘poetic mystery.’” In response to a proposal by a tugboat manufacturer, Olmsted

complained that it “framed the boat question solely in terms of moving the greatest number of passengers between different points in the expedition as cheaply and quickly as possible.” Olmsted’s intent was that “mere transportation was never the goal” and “the whole point was to have boats enhance the landscape.”^{xvii}



Figure 34: Donkey Cart on an Olana Carriage Drive, ca. 1890s

Figure 35: A lone fisherman animates Rowboat on the Hudson, River in Fog Moss-Covered Boulder, Catskill, Frederic Edwin Church, May 1845

This same question should resonate today for Olana, while also illustrating the opportunities and constraints of moving people through the landscape. For example, there may be one type of transport which moves larger groups from the museum/visitor’s center to the Mansion while smaller golf carts, inspired by the former donkey carts, allow visitors a more personal way to explore the carriage roads that lead to distant viewing summits while providing a spiritual contact with nature.

Closing

This White Paper aims to put forth a broadened and integrated series of lenses to view the Olana landscape – one might call this approach a way to help visitors to **see like Frederic Church – the landscape painter, the landscape maker, and the pioneering conservationist**. It also provides a framework to wed Church’s own stewardship philosophies with both those that helped to save Olana nearly a half century ago, along with the present day professionals

who are shepherding this World Heritage class landscape and its associated viewshed into the future.

The Cultural Landscape Foundation is honored to be part of this important undertaking for this exceptional property and would be pleased to play a role in framing and advancing these next critical steps.

Endnotes

ⁱ . Sheely, Jr., Horace J. National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings Supplementary Sheet. "Biltmore Estate and Biltmore Forestry School Site," p. 3.

ⁱⁱ Lesser, Ellen McClelland. "Landscape Research Report," 1986. p. 1

ⁱⁱⁱ Toole, R.M. "Historic Landscape Report," 1996. foreword

^{iv} Toole, R.M. "Historic Landscape Report," 1996. p. 30

^v Toole, R.M. "Landscape Restoration Plan," 2002. p. 2

^{vi} Toole, R.M. "Final Comprehensive Plan," 2002. p. 15

^{vii} Toole, R.M. "Final Comprehensive Plan," 2002. p. 49

^{viii} The Olana Partnership. "Olana's Designed landscape – An Artistic Masterpiece, A Case for Support," October 2009. (3 pages)

^{ix} The revised nomination titled, Biltmore Estate (additional Documentation and Boundary Reduction) was designated in 2002-. See pages 81-82 for a detailed discussion of the boundary analysis.

^x Garner, James C. with Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. *Special Report of the New York State Survey of Niagara Falls and Fourth Annual Report on The Triangulation of the State for the Year 1879*. p. 16.

^{xi} Roper, Laura Wood. *FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973. pp. 378-81

^{xii} Co-authored with Calvert Vaux, this 36-page monograph published by Orange Judd notes that many of the essays were previously published by the *Christian Union* and the *New York Tribune*. "Sky and Skyline" and "A Natural Park at Niagara" are the opening and closing essays respectively.

^{xiii} See pages 64-65 of Francis Kowsky's, *Country Park and City: The Architecture and Life of Calvert Vaux* (Oxford University Press, 1998) for a detailed discussion of McEntee.

^{xiv} See The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. On-line at <http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/tax/rhb/stand.htm>

^{xv} See page 49 of "Final Comprehensive Plan."

^{xvi} Toole, R.M. "Historic Landscape Report," 1996. p. 49

^{xvii} Larson, Eric. *Devil in the White City*. pp. 143-44