

The Cornish Estate

**- Hudson River
National Estuarine
Research Reserve**

by Ralph J Ferrusi

My first memories of Boating on the Hudson are when I was about five years old, and Pop took us out in an old, leaky, borrowed, wooden rowboat, powered by his dinky 1 ½ horsepower outboard, from Jimmy's Cove in Buchanan, all the way out into the middle of the river, in what is now a busy commercial channel, to fish!!! Along the same line, I also can remember walking out in the winter to about the same spot in the middle of the frozen river—way, way out—on the ice: incredible!!!



Many years later—in the 60's—I recall going on my very first ever “official” hike, up Breakneck Ridge, in the Eastern Hudson Highlands, and being stunned by the spectacular views up and down the Hudson, and, unbeknownst to me at the time, a view of the ruins of what I eventually came to know as “The Cornish Estate”, hundreds of feet below the sheer southern face of Breakneck. In time, I climbed all of the “major” peaks of the Eastern and Western Hudson Highlands: Breakneck, Taurus (Bull Hill), Mount Beacon, Storm King, Sugarloaf, Anthony's Nose (these hikes eventually led me to getting within 12 miles of Mount Everest, Lhotse, Nuptse, and Ama Dablam in Nepal, but that's a whole other story...).

In the '60's

Back to The Cornish Estate: while hiking and climbing all over the Highlands, I eventually discovered the old cement road on the east side of Route 9D just north of Cold Spring that led up to the ruins of the estate. I was astonished by the ruins, and recall thinking at the time that if I could ever go back in time, this would be the place I would want to go, to see this estate in its heyday. I wandered around, and came back often, awed by the the still-standing stone arches and chimneys, and the broad patio facing Storm King to the west across the river. It must have been a heckuva view before the trees grew to their current



often the case, Life Got in the Way, and it never happened. Recently I heard “through the grapevine”—from good old hiking buddy all-around-good-guy Tim Messerich—that some good folks had been working hard and had cleared away most of the vines and foliage that were smothering the ruins (Tim later informed me that Thom Johnson and Rob Yasinsac started the clearing several years ago “and deserve most of the credit” and Chris Wilson from Fahnestock State Park had organized more recent clean ups). I hadn’t been to the estate in a long, long time, and so off I went, on New Year’s Day, 2019, as Mom would say, “Like a herd of turtles”, to see what had been done.

Cornish Estate History

There’s a HUDSON HIGHLANDS STATE PARK sign at the ruins now that says:

NORTHGATE POPULARLY KNOWN AS THE “CORNISH ESTATE”, THE RUINS SEEN HERE WERE BUILT BY NYC DIAMOND MERCHANT SIGMUND STERN IN THE EARLY 1910’S. THE BUILDINGS AND SURROUNDING 650 ACRES WERE INHABITED BY EDWARD AND SELINA CORNISH FROM 1916-1938, WHEN BOTH DIED WITHIN TWO WEEKS OF EACH OTHER A FIRE IN 1958 DESTROYED MOST OF THE MANSION.

THE PROPERTY BECAME PART OF THE HUDSON HIGHLANDS STATE PARK IN THE LATE 1960’S AFTER A FAILED ATTEMPT BY CENTRAL HUDSON GAS AND ELECTRIC TO TURN THE PROPERTY INTO A POWER PLANT.

I Googled “Cornish Estate Ruins” and “Northgate” and very quickly found several eye-opening recent photos of the totally overgrown ruins, and, amazingly, several mind-boggling historical (1920’s-vintage???) photos of the mansion, and, the following additional information:

In 1917 newlyweds Edward Joel Cornish—the president of the National Lead Company—and Selina Bliss Carter Cornish moved out of New York City to the very grand estate—including a mansion, swimming pool, gardens and other outbuildings—they had bought. It soon became known as The Cornish Estate. “The couple lived, loved, and entertained visitors frequently, throwing lavish parties and filling the rooms of the mansion with friends and laughter.” Until, in May 1938 the “life-long lovers” died within two weeks of each other.

The year before Edward Cornish tried to donate the estate to New York State upon his death, to protect it in perpetuity. Stunningly, his offer was rejected. Good old New York State...



Cornish heirs sold the estate in 1963 to Central Hudson Gas and Electric. When the ruins became part of the Hudson Highlands State Park, Central Hudson dropped the plans to build a power plant: Good For Them.

And, “surprisingly” to me, Lake Surprise and the Camp were “closely tied” to the early history of Northgate.

New Year’s Day, 2019 was a temperate, bright, blue-sky day, and I enjoyed the walk up to Edward and Selina’s once-(very)-grand estate, savoring views of the Hudson, really kicking up its heels from a strong blustery north wind straight down the reach, and the mighty Storm King, looming over it. Years ago, I very rarely shared the ruins with anyone. Now, with a marked “trail” leading up to it, and as part of the Hudson Highlands State Park, and just north of the (now huge: and very often FULL) Little Stony Point/Mount Taurus parking lot, there was a steady stream of people going up and down the (still,

to this day, in remarkable condition) cement road, and people swarming and gawking all over the now-cleared ruins and immediate surroundings.

In spite of the hordes, it was wonderful to actually be able to walk around and be able to clearly see—and to take photographs that I could never have taken in the past—the ruins and the “front yard”. I wandered around, doing my best to avoid bumping into people (most of whom, quite honestly, made no effort to avoid bumping into me...), and thoroughly enjoyed this fine First Day of 2019. I’d highly recommend this place to anyone interested in Hudson Valley (or any) ruins. But...Good Luck finding a parking place, either in the “official” parking area, or, along 9D: sadly, just about impossible on weekends.

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