Adirondack Architectural Heritage
NEWSLETTER
FALL 2023 VOLUME 32 NUMBER 3

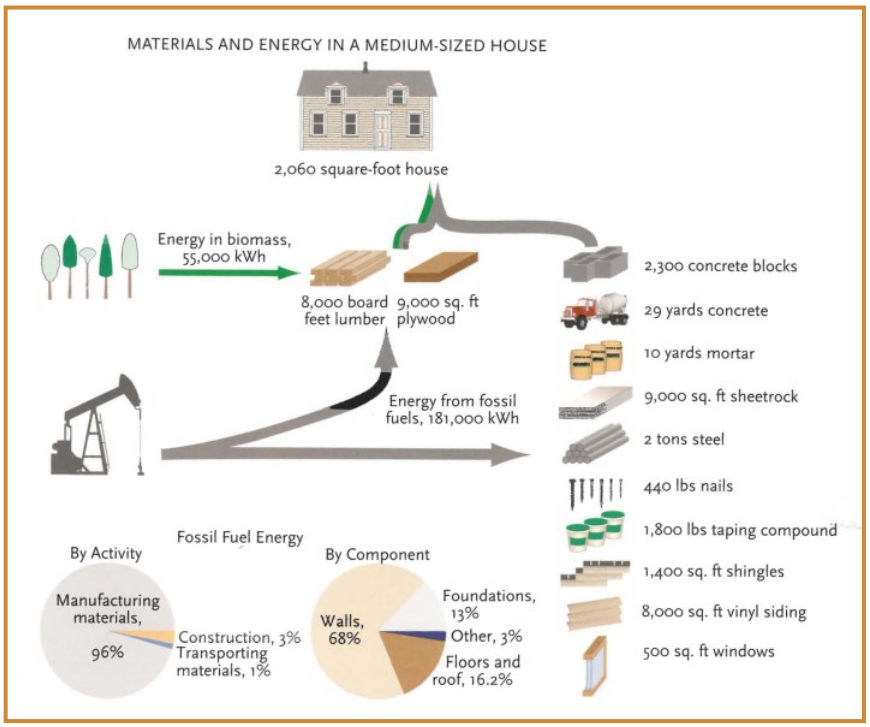
Inherently Sustainable Features

Platt Rogers Halstead House, Westport

Stewarding the Adirondack Promise

STEWARDING THE ADIRONDACK PROMISE

The Adirondack region is often celebrated for its distinctive topography, but that topography cannot tell the whole story on its own. Since 1990, AARCH has advocated for historic structures in our region, highlighting how they are just as valuable as our region's vibrant natural resources. Humans have occupied the Adirondacks for thousands of years and our relationship with the natural environment has shaped the landscape itself through activities like farming and forest management as well as embroidering it with the structures that we rely on in everyday life, schools, businesses, and transportation infrastructure.



Courtesy of Jerry Jenkins (from Climate Change in the Adirondacks, *2010, p. 139)* .

When we study the land and the built environment together, our region's stories shine strongest. These stories reveal that it is not just a strong environmental ethic that makes the Adirondacks special, it is the people here and the communities that they have created. There is no reason we cannot celebrate and preserve both the stunning environment and historic structures of the Adirondack region – in fact, the two aims are more aligned than you may think.

The primary goals of environmental conservation are conserving resources and protecting the natural environment. Fortunately, preserving historic structures does just that. One of the biggest historic preservation myths is that old buildings are not sustainable or energy efficient. In fact, many **historic buildings *are* inherently efficient,** as they were designed to take advantage of their surroundings, from passive heating and natural shading to wind protection. In addition, **they were constructed with the inevitability of change and future repairs in mind** – just consider the infinite repairability of wood windows and other historic construction methods.

It takes 35 to 50 years for a new, energy efficient home to recover through efficient operations all of the carbon that was expended during the initial construction process.

The Greenest Building: Quantifying the Environmental Value of Building Reuse *(National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2011)*

These traditional techniques have stood the test of time and sheltered humans for millennia. Their adaptability means that historic buildings can be improved to meet today's energy efficiency standards by marrying old and new technologies together. Even historic buildings that have been poorly altered over the years can typically be rehabilitated.

The carbon costs of constructing new green buildings is not discussed often enough. You may have heard Carl Elefante's wise statement that, "the greenest building… is the one that is already built." The materials and energy required to build new structures and the landfill space needed to dispose of demolished ones is so great that it is markedly more sustainable to reuse the buildings that we already have.

Lastly, and of particular importance for the Adirondacks, historic buildings reside on already developed land. Making full use of these structures keeps our communities centralized, which protects the surrounding environment from sprawling new development and reduces transportation emissions. Thus, AARCH's work to preserve the built environment of the Adirondacks is an important piece of protecting our region's natural resources.

AARCH directly supports the conservation of our region's environment. Our **advocacy** efforts aim to save buildings that would otherwise be demolished, which would

negatively impact the environment. Our **technical assistance** work guides property owners through the process of preserving historically significant buildings, from identifying structural issues to connecting owners with skilled architects and tradespeople. Our **educational programs** not only share the region's architectural history, they also explore all manner of preservation case studies. These explorations demonstrate the varied ways in which we can adapt historic buildings for continued use. We have also expanded our hands-on programming with a workshop series that includes lime plaster repair and restoring wood windows, as well as providing space for empowering women to confidently use power tools. The trades are a crucial part of the preservation puzzle, because we cannot save and properly maintain our buildings without skilled craftspeople to do the work.

Another fact that holds true for both historic preservation and environmental conservation is that they are community efforts. Communities that preserve historic structures not only celebrate their unique heritage, they invest in a sustainable future. By adapting existing buildings to fit our current needs, we can divert (literal) tons of waste from the landfill, prevent the accompanying methane off-gassing, and save the resources that go into manufacturing new buildings and their furnishings. The collaboration, creativity, and patience required to work with historic buildings is much more desirable than the environmental costs of new construction.

AARCH's work would not be possible without the support of our members, partners, colleagues, and friends. Your passion for historic preservation in the Adirondacks reminds us that we are not alone in our endeavors and inspires us to continue advocating for historic structures throughout the region. We can accomplish so much more and have a far broader impact when we work together to find common solutions. We hope you will read on to dive deeper into the ways in which AARCH's goals align with those of environmental conservation and to learn more about what we're doing to reach these common aims.

The Inherent Efficiency of Traditional Design

Buildings are designed as systems. Each of the components, from the foundation to the roof and the structure in between, work together to manage heat, cooling, air flow, and light for optimal maintenance and comfort. When buildings are designed with local climate and materials in mind, the resulting structure is tailor-made for its environment and will stand the test of time. After all, the financial and material cost of heating and cooling buildings is no new concern – in fact, it has shaped architectural design for millennia.

A building's design begins with the basic principles of siting and materials. Historic structures were typically sited to take advantage of solar gain, maximizing the sun's natural heating potential. They were also oriented to capture cooling breezes or avoid chilling winds, depending on the climate. In addition to siting, landscaping can further regulate the environment's interaction with the building. For example, evergreen trees can block wind, while deciduous trees provide shade in the summer while allowing more sunlight in the winter.

The Charles Henry Noble House in Elizabethtown was constructed in 1825 using local materials. Its design incorporated many inherently sustainable features, including exterior storm windows, deep eaves, entry porch, end chimneys, attic ventilation, and deciduous trees for shading. Although the entry porch was added later, a shadow outlines the original porch it replaced. There is also evidence that the building once had shutters, which could always be added again. Photo courtesy of Richard Longstreth.

Materials greatly impact the carbon costs of a structure, both during its initial construction and over its lifetime. Historic buildings in the Adirondacks were typically constructed of local natural materials like wood, stone, bricks, and iron, most of which could be obtained within 100 miles. Not only did these materials come without the carbon costs of transportation from other states or countries, most can also be repaired and outlast modern synthetic materials that must be discarded and replaced when they fail. Moreover, many traditional materials, like old-growth lumber and lime plaster, are more durable and energy efficient than their modern counterparts.

When properly maintained, historic structures can easily last hundreds of years. This is true of the masonry

The Greek Revival-style Charles Fowler House in Chestertown (now the Chester Inn Bed & Breakfast) illustrates how an 1830s building stands the test of time with inherently sustainable features and proper maintenance. This building includes a sturdy slate roof, exterior storm windows, deep eaves, well-maintained clapboard, and some shutters, as well as porches that were likely added later. Photo courtesy of Richard Longstreth.

and wood buildings found throughout the Adirondacks. Not only is masonry durable, stone and brick evenly distribute heat, creating comfortable buildings to live in. Traditional lime mortar allows moisture to pass through, flexing and breathing with the seasons, in contrast to the stiff Portland cement mortars that gained popularity in the 1920s and remain in use today. This breathability in masonry buildings is crucial, because it prevents moisture from getting trapped and causing mold or rot in timber and other materials. Similarly to mortar, lime plaster is flexible and breathable – it is even hypoallergenic, filtering the air that passes through it and preventing mold growth. In addition to its durability and repairability, traditional lime plaster offers a further level of insulation, fire resistance, and soundproofing that drywall does not.

Wooden components, such as timbers, windows, clapboards, shingles, and trim, can be repaired or replaced in part without sacrificing the entire architectural feature. **Traditional wood windows are one of the most inherently sustainable systems in historic buildings, but they are often the victims of energy efficiency retrofits.** Unlike modern windows, which often need to be replaced after 20 years, each of the components of a historic wood window (sashes, panes of glass, sash rope, glazing putty, etc.) can be repaired as needed. When coupled with storm windows and/or shutters, they form a flexible system that reduces heating and cooling costs and protects windows from harsh weather. For example, exterior storm windows insulate as well as modern double-paned windows and extend the life of the interior window's paint and glazing putty. Shutters also shield windows from inclement weather and help moderate sunlight. The placement of windows in a building further regulates temperature by making use of solar gain and creating cross breezes.

In addition to wood window systems, traditional design incorporates many other inherently **sustainable architectural features** that work with the natural environment to improve building maintenance and energy efficiency:

- **Entry vestibules** create a buffer between weather and the rest of the building, reducing the amount of water and cold air brought in from outside.
- **Porches** shelter entrances and parts of the facade from the sun and weather. This both preserves portions of the exterior while also shading the interior from the heat and ultraviolet light of the sun. When combined with thoughtful siting, porches can take advantage of breezes (like at Great Camp Santanoni) and extend the living space in warmer months.
- Similarly to porches, **deep eaves** provide shade and protect the façade, shedding water away from the building. They help block the high summer sun, while allowing more light from the low winter sun.
- Though not a primary source of heat today, **fireplaces** were historically located at either the center of a building or at both ends in order to evenly disperse heat throughout the space.
- **Steam or hot-water radiators** remain in use in many historic Adirondack buildings. This system was perfected in the 1860s and is still great at gently and evenly heating rooms.
- **Transom windows**, which are often found above interior doors in late 19th and early 20th century schools and houses, help brighten hallways and interior rooms. Some are also operable, improving heating and cooling.

A healthy building uses all of these features to create an efficient system of heating, cooling, and air flow that both keeps its inhabitants comfortable and minimizes energy consumption. While we can benefit from today's innovations in building technology, we should not abandon the inherently sustainable tenets of traditional design. Moreover, we cannot abandon those principles if we want to keep our historic buildings standing.

Historic Trades Keep Our Buildings Standing

Even the most efficient and sustainable buildings require maintenance, whether old or new. While some historic architectural features are easier to repair than modern ones, the knowledge of how to do so is less widely known today. This makes those trained in the historic trades more important and in-demand than ever.

Anyone involved with restoration, renovation, or adaptive use projects knows that finding skilled tradespeople can be challenging. Our nation's shortage of tradespeople is a growing problem that preservation organizations across the country are working to address. Two recent studies – the Campaign for Historic Trades and Understanding's *The Status of Historic Trades in America* and the Northeast Regional Initiative for the Preservation Trades' *Advancing the Preservation Trades* – delved into the causes and effects of this shortage. Both reports confirmed that not only is the number of tradespeople with specialized knowledge in restoration techniques dwindling, but also that the loss of these skills and knowledge has a widespread impact on society. Such implications affect the availability and safety of housing stock, the sense of place and vibrancy of cities and towns, and the ability of communities to sustainably (re)use their existing resources.

The Status of Historic Trades in America, *published by the Campaign for Historic Trades in 2022.*

While there is a shortage of skilled tradespeople, the good news is that there is demand. According to *The Status of Historic Trades in America* study, **the portion of the construction industry focused on historic rehabilitation is growing.** Historic trades make up an estimated 12.6% of all building rehabilitation jobs. The number of historic buildings and the amount of money invested in their rehabilitation are on an upward trajectory. "Historic preservation is not niche," said Nicholas Redding, president and CEO of Preservation Maryland. "It's a major component of the nation's construction industry, and this study underscores the need for communities all across America to invest in the workforce that will sustain this growing, diverse, and significant component of the trades landscape."

There is not only a lack of tradespeople specialized in preservation, but a lack of tradespeople in general that is impacting the region in the aftermath of devastating flooding this past summer. AARCH is working to address this issue through our hands-on workshops and educational resources. The first step is creating awareness and interest, both in those who may become tradespeople and those managing historic buildings who may employ them. While there are certain preservation jobs that require the specialized skill of an expert, our workshops show people that they are more capable than they might think – with practice and patience, anyone can learn basic wood window maintenance and plaster repair. Our workshops on historic plaster repair, wood window restoration, and "Power Tools for Women" are many participants' first introduction to the trades.

As the construction industry moves toward integrating new modes of technology into all building phases, we need to be mindful that we don't lose knowledge from generations of tradespeople. **Integrating old construction with new technologies requires a thorough understanding of historic construction and craftsmanship.** Furthermore, traditional building technologies foster a closer relationship between the built environment and local natural resources than is typical in contemporary buildings. For instance, a traditional timber framer searching for materials to restore a historic structure might also seek an understanding of historic regional forest management, tree harvesting, local milling options, and building design. AARCH had the opportunity to highlight timber framer Jack Van Wie on our recent

New Russia tour and experience first-hand how his deep understanding of local materials and methods masterfully blends the new and the old in his work restoring 19th-century barns.

Global Heritage Group founder Richard Barrow shares his expertise at our Repairing Historic Plaster Workshop in June 2023.

Historic rehabilitation work is estimated to create 165,000 jobs each year and 60% of jobs demand preservation skills. Skilled tradespeople are vital to maintaining, preserving, restoring, rehabilitating, reconstructing, and deconstructing historic structures. With more than 40% of all buildings in the U.S. built over 50 years ago (an even higher percentage in the Adirondacks) and our steadily aging housing stock, the ability to rehabilitate, adapt, and maintain these structures for continued use is critical. Historic preservation not only contributes to a vibrant sense of place and connects us to our heritage, it is also an important environmental sustainability strategy. Through their familiarity with various historic construction methods and techniques, historic tradespeople bring invaluable knowledge, insight, and skill to restoration projects. The preservation of the built environment is fundamentally dependent on the work of skilled people in all the traditional building trades.

The Harmony Between Architecture and the Environment at Great Camp Santanoni

For over 30 years, our efforts at Great Camp Santanoni have shone a light on many historic preservation issues, in particular telling a key part of our region's story, highlighting the importance of the historic trades in preserving Adirondack history, and illustrating the inherent harmony of Adirondack Great Camps and the natural environment. The restoration work at Camp Santanoni demonstrates the importance of skilled tradespeople and provides an educational opportunity for our summer staff. Hands-on trades training is a key component of our internship program at Santanoni, in which the summer staff learn basic maintenance and window repair, along with any current building projects.

The preservation of Camp Santanoni as a publicly accessible site allows people to better understand an important piece of Adirondack history. Adirondack Great Camps were lavish wilderness estates, developed by wealthy Americans who sought tranquility in northern New York's mountains. These destinations served as retreats for their owners, away from the restlessness of newly industrialized American cities. These urbanites viewed the Adirondack region as a quiet, romantic, and restorative place to retreat and relax.

Adirondack Great Camps are identifiable by their rustic architectural style, which uses local materials like logs, bark siding, and stones, which blend in harmoniously with the environment around them. Built across the Adirondacks for different families, these estates came to define the Adirondack Rustic Style that still influences architecture throughout the region today.

Summer staff at Great Camp Santanoni working on the Main Lodge's historic wood windows.

Great Camp Santanoni was constructed using materials sourced from the immediate area. Robert and Anna Pruyn, for whom Santanoni was constructed, wanted to create a wilderness escape for their family where they could reflect on the natural beauty of the Adirondacks. They hired local builders and sourced materials for the lodge and outbuildings from the property, harvesting local spruce logs for the structure and bark for accents, as well as sourcing local stone for the chimneys and fireplaces.

The Main Lodge at Great Camp Santanoni during construction circa 1892.

A visit to Santanoni was meant to immerse guests in the stunning landscape of the Adirondacks through the buildings' harmonious relationship with their surroundings. Along with its natural allure, Santanoni's unique design employs a variety of efficient construction techniques that enhanced the quality of life for the Pruyn family and their guests: the Main Lodge's open breezeways capture wind from the lake, preventing biting flies from swarming the decks, and its open Japanese-styled *irimoya* gables allow western sunlight to illuminate the guest rooms and main living space.

Great Camp Santanoni became an increasingly self-sufficient property over time, as the Pruyns used the land and its bounty to sustain themselves during their visits. They hunted and fished and developed a farm that provided vegetables, fruits, meat, and dairy products for everyone on the property.

Today, AARCH partners with the Town of Newcomb and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to preserve the integrity and interpret the historical significance of the Santanoni Preserve. Great Camp Santanoni exemplifies the way in which Adirondack camps were built to celebrate and work in harmony with their surrounding environment. Their unique architecture emphasizes our ability to enjoy the beauty of the mountains and forests, while simultaneously enhancing recreational opportunities in the Forest Preserve.

Advocating for Our Built and Natural Environment

When AARCH advocates for the preservation of historic buildings, we are also advocating to protect our environment. Our recent and ongoing advocacy work continues the effort not just to preserve buildings that contribute to our streetscapes, sense of place, and community history, but also to protect our environment through continued or adaptive building use.

When Dollar General developers demolished the Crandall House in the Warrensburg National Register historic district in Warren County, they added the equivalent of **1 million aluminum cans** into the landfill. The New York State legislature is currently investigating ways to make bottle recycling more effective, **yet the Crandall House's demolition created landfill waste equivalent to a 4,000-person community's water bottle usage for two years**. In addition, the concrete, steel, and plastics produced to construct the new Dollar General created approximately the same amount of carbon dioxide as the average emissions from 39 cars in a given year. So recycling our cans and bottles and limiting our greenhouse gas emissions through reduced car travel or the purchase of hybrid or electric vehicles might also consider the carbon impact of demolition and new construction.

The Crandall House in Warrensburg (above) was demolished in 2022 to make way for a new Dollar General store (below). Photos courtesy of Teresa Whalen.

Along those lines, Essex County's proposal to construct a new agricultural and youth services building at the National Register-listed Essex County Fairgrounds, will

leave the adjacent historic Cornell Cooperative Extension building vacant. In addition to leaving a significant historic agricultural building on the fairgrounds vacant, this new building will create significant greenhouse gas emissions through its construction, emissions that could be avoided by reusing the existing building.

The Cornell Cooperative Extension building on the Essex County Fairgrounds.

Advocating for the rehabilitation of historic buildings is a vital part of the environmental movement. Not only are well-designed historic buildings inherently efficient and adaptable, the very act of using an existing building, rather than building a new one, is the greenest choice we can make.

Funding Preservation, Benefiting the Environment

We have already established that preserving buildings directly benefits the environment. However, any building owner knows that it is difficult to maintain a structure without funds for materials and labor. While AARCH's advocacy, programs, and technical assistance have helped preserve historic Adirondack structures for decades, we are finally able to offer direct financial assistance through our **Adirondack Rural Revitalization Program (ARRP), which will fund capital projects in historic buildings across the region**.

We created this program to encourage economic development in the Adirondack region through the preservation and adaptive or continued use of historic buildings. The importance of fostering strong communities with walkable neighborhoods and vibrant main streets is recognized by nearly all regional stakeholders – municipalities, residents, business owners, environmental groups, and economic development entities. The historic hamlets and villages throughout the Adirondack region, established before the rise of the automobile and urban sprawl, reflect conservation design standards meant to minimize the impact of cars and promote walkable communities.

Through the ARRP, we support capital rehabilitation projects that invest in these existing historic population centers and surrounding farmsteads. The program will bring renewed use to buildings in pedestrian-oriented communities and support the local farms that are so important to our agricultural heritage. These rehabilitation projects will rely on traditional trades to improve the buildings' functionality, accessibility, and energy efficiency.

Beyond our grant program, AARCH has long offered technical advice on funding sources for preservation projects. Preservation incentives like **New York State's Environmental Protection Fund (NYS EPF)** and **state and federal tax credits** support investment in historic buildings, the traditional trades, and pedestrian-oriented communities. The NYS EPF includes funding for historic preservation projects, recognizing the environmental importance of preserving our historic buildings. The New York State and Federal Historic Tax Credit programs spur economic development in our Main Street communities, repair of our historic homes, and encourage the adaptive use of vacant historic buildings. **These preservation incentives not only support economic development, they keep buildings out of the landfill and save greenhouse gas emissions related to demolition and new construction.** You can find more information about these incentives on AARCH's website and YouTube channel.

The Adirondack Rural Revitalization Program is funded by a Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grant from the Historic Preservation Fund administered by the National Park Service.

Adirondack Rural Revitalization Program

Showcasing Stewardship, Highlighting Heroes

The best preservation successes not only celebrate a historic building's cultural heritage, they contribute to environmental stewardship in numerous ways. These structures keep landfills clear of debris, avoid the associated carbon costs of demolition and new construction, and conserve the surrounding landscapes that make the Adirondacks so special. Each year, our educational programs highlight buildings, structures, and infrastructure that contribute to our region's broader story.

In 2023, we visited places in various stages of preservation that emphasize the ways in which historic buildings keep us grounded, inspired, and supportive of our treasured

natural surroundings. In Tupper Lake, we showcased the **Oval Wood Dish complex** as an example of how enormous industrial structures can be adapted to meet housing needs for the Tri-Lakes community while avoiding the heavy toll of demolition, creation of 23,000 tons of building waste, and the loss of an iconic structure. This project would not be possible without preservation incentives like the state and federal historic tax credits, along with other grants and tax incentives.

Saint Drogos Coffee and Bake House in Lowville exemplifies the connections between historic preservation and environmental stewardship.

Similarly in Lowville, we perused the new **Saint Drogos Coffee and Bake House**. This downtown revitalization project transformed a vacant 19th-century sheriff's house and county jail into a charming bakery, artisan coffee roastery, and community gathering place. Additionally, its owners devised a creative lodging component, hosting visitors in its reimagined historic jail cells. Saint Drogos also divested of fossil fuels through new heat pumps that don't detract from the building's character.

Built to capture the cool breezes off Friends Lake, the Cappabiancas' family cabin illustrates building design that thoughtfully considers its surroundings.

Our inaugural sojourn to **Friends Lake**, a scenic body of water near Chestertown, showcased a warm and inviting 1930s family cabin belonging to two dedicated AARCH members that serves as a great example of what folks here call "Adirondack air conditioning." Instead of incurring the energy costs associated with air conditioning or central air, the cabin's window configuration and orientation on the lake's shore allow it to capture cool breezes from the north and west, which goes a long way on hot and humid days (like the day we visited).

Raquette Lake's Camp Pine Knot is a place where students directly engage with both historic buildings and the Adirondack woods.

While exploring the former company town of **Wanakena** with long-time colleagues and passionate preservationists, we learned about the reforestation and re-habitation of this once clear-cut landscape. There, we visited SUNY-ESF's Ranger School where students learn to become frontline conservation workers as foresters and surveyors, many of whom stay in the Adirondacks after graduating. Even our final stop, a historic 1923 family camp called Knollwood, retains its impressive suspension bridge as the sole access to the site. Its dedicated stewards repaint and repair the bridge each year rather than trading it for easier access, thus keeping intact the embodied energy, materials, and deeply meaningful historical connection that the bridge has with the site. Wanakena's buildings and history exhibit a strong connection to the safeguarding of Adirondack land, lakes, rivers, trees, and wildlife management areas.

Similarly, a classic AARCH tour to SUNY Cortland's satellite campus at **Camp Pine Knot** on Raquette Lake, the earliest example of the Adirondack Rustic Style, highlights the college's efforts to not only save and preserve the site, but its role in bringing students closer to nature in an educational setting that directly engages the intersection between environmental conservation and historic preservation.

Lastly, our popular **Small Farm Rising tours** in the Champlain Valley's rich agricultural communities like Keeseville, illustrate how a group of energetic and passionate farmer-preservationists have revitalized old farms and turned them back into productive landscapes – buildings, barns, fields, and all. These places, like others featured in our programs, help to nourish our communities, bringing together nearby residents and visitors alike and embodying the symbiosis of human and natural landscapes in our region.

On September 1, we said goodbye to Mary Hotaling, a co-founder of both AARCH and Historic Saranac Lake, our first staff person, and our dear friend. Mary was involved with AARCH for 33 years as a board member, program leader, member, and supporter, contributing so much to historic preservation in the Adirondacks and documenting the region's history.

To honor Mary's legacy and contributions, we are republishing one of her earliest AARCH newsletter articles covering her foundational scholarship on the life and career of prolific Saranac Lake architect, William Coulter.

Moss Ledge (1898), Upper Saranac Lake, one of Coulter's earliest rustic camp designs.

Volume 4, Number 2
December 1995

W. L. Coulter, Architect

WILLIAM L. COULTER was the first successful, resident, professional architect to practice in the central Adirondack region of New York State. He established his home and office in Saranac Lake which had begun to develop as a health resort for tuberculosis in 1884, when Dr. E. L. Trudeau founded the Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium. In the spring of 1896, the thirty-one-year-old Coulter came to Saranac Lake to supervise the construction of a new Administration Building for Dr. Trudeau, but also for the benefit of his own health. He was one of the very few tuberculosis patients who arrived at the sanatorium with a job; his was with the firm of Renwick, Aspinwall and Renwick, for whom he had been working as an architect in New York City. During this period, with the help of a variety of draftsmen, he designed many fine houses in Highland Park and on Helen Hill in Saranac Lake (including his own family house at 34 Shepard Avenue), as well as on Signal Hill in Lake Placid. He built a business block on Main Street in 1899, as both an investment and office space for his firm, and more than doubled its size in 1901.

Coulter designed four small churches: with J. Lawrence Aspinwall, he built Baker Chapel at the sanatorium for Dr. Trudeau; the original St. Eustace and St. Hubert's (Pilgrim Holiness) in Lake Placid, both rebuilt now; and the St. Regis Presbyterian Church in Paul Smiths. Also at the sanatorium, he designed Anderson, Ladd, Robins and Phoenix Cottages (all extant), as well as Hoffman Cottage and Childs Infirmary (demolished).

A number of camp buildings on the St. Regis chain were Coulter's work, including some at the Penfold camp (today's Camp Regis and Applejack), as well as the first Ice Palace in Saranac Lake. He also built distinctive rustic camps on Lake Placid, including Woodland and Joyland (Victor Herbert); Beach Cove, Meadowhill & Irondequoit in Private Park; and Camp Gordon, Brushwood and Sunset Lodge in the Ruisseaumont area.

Upper Saranac Lake was the site of many of his camp designs: Moss Ledge and the original Pinebrook; spectacular Bull Point for Otto Kahn (demolished); the Moritz Walter camp next door ([formerly] the Wawbeek, with its remarkable dining room

fireplace-staircase); main house alterations and a new billiard room for J. S. Bache at Wenonah; a cottage for Schuyler Merritt at Bartlett Carry; and some work at both Deer Island camps.

On Lower Saranac Lake, Knollwood and the Mark Twain Camp were Coulter' s creations. He was the architect of the Lake Placid Club, and of the Rockefeller retreat at Bay Pond. Farther afield, he built the Amusement Hall at Camp Sagamore in Raquette Lake for Alfred G. Vanderbilt.

W. L. Coulter, courtesy of the Coulter Family.

In 1902, perhaps the height of Coulter's career, the firm designed two of the largest camps on Upper Saranac Lake, Prospect Point for Adolph Lewisohn and Eagle Island for former U.S. Vice-President Levi P. Morton. In 1904 Max H. Westhoff, who had been Coulter's employee for two years, was named as associate in the firm. That year Coulter built a winter home in Camden, South Carolina, but the firm did design the D. Henry Smith camp on Lower Saranac Lake and Sunset Hill in Keene Valley. In 1905 Westhoff rose to partnership, and the firm became Coulter & Westhoff. In their two years in partnership, Adolph Lewisohn hired them to design an enormous estate for him in Ardsley, New York, and they planned the mining town of Keokee, Virginia. Locally, Coulter & Westhoff laid out a subdivision for Julia Miller, and designed camps Red Fox and Gull Rock on Lake Placid, the Floyd-Jones camp on Lower Saranac Lake, a cottage for the Upper Saranac Lake Association, several large houses in Saranac Lake, a particularly fine Ice Palace, and a Town Hall (later demolished) for Santa Clara.

Coulter was lucky in his timing: he both benefited from and helped to create a building boom. Not only was the semi-charitable Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium itself growing fast, its reputation was attracting wealthy private patients who were building their own fine homes in the village of Saranac Lake.

At the same, vast tracts of nearby lakeshore lands were being subdivided, and wealthy families were building private summer homes, known as "camps." Among these families were Jews, who had been excluded from a number of resorts and hotels in the region since New York banker Joseph Seligman was refused accommodations at the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga Springs in 1877. After that widely-publicized incident, anti-Semitism became overt in certain hotels and clubs. Coulter worked for a broad clientele, but a handful of wealthy and prominent Jewish camp owners provided his largest and most lucrative commissions.

Coulter was an eclectic architect who worked principally in the Tudor, Shingle, Rustic and Chalet styles. A well-organized businessman, he ran a busy office, producing 100 projects in eleven years conservatively counted. During about the same time, Frank Lloyd Wright's office produced 135 projects in 17 years. Throughout his life, Coulter associated himself with others: as a protégé of J. Lawrence Aspinwall; as a partner in investment with Judson Newman Smith, Frank L. Creesy and George V. W. Duryee; in professional practice with Max Westhoff; and as a mentor of William G. Distin. He was happily married to Violet M. Rohe, with whom he had four living children. Through his architectural practice and investments, and especially because he did not discriminate against Jews, he made a fortune and a name for himself. But in seizing the abundant opportunities that presented themselves, instead of strictly following the rest cure, he may have hastened his own death. Age forty-two, Coulter died of tuberculosis on October 28, 1907.

W. L. Coulter made two unique contributions to architecture, both intimately associated with his own time and place. First, he designed the earliest institutional and residential sleeping porches in Saranac Lake, a community in which these porches define the vernacular. Second, along with William West Durant and Robert H. Robertson, W. L. Coulter significantly developed the rustic camp style for which the Adirondack region is known. Both of these contributions exerted a broad influence on American domestic architecture of the early twentieth century.

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The author completed her M.S. in Historic Preservation at the University of Vermont. The above article is derived from her thesis.

NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. Council on the Arts

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Cover photo: Platt Rogers Halstead House, courtesy of Richard Longstreth.

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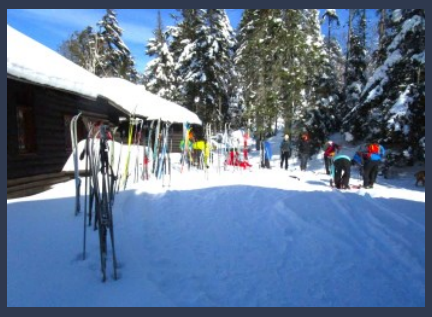
PRESERVING THE ARCHITECTURE AND COMMUNITIES OF THE ADIRONDACKS THROUGH EDUCATION, ACTION, AND ADVOCACY

2024 WINTER WEEKENDS AT GREAT CAMP SANTANONI!

Saturday-Monday, January 13-15, 2024
Saturday-Monday, February 17-19, 2024
Saturday-Sunday, March 16-17, 2024

Join us for a ski or snowshoe during Camp Santanoni's annual Winter Weekends! Explore the Gate Lodge and Main Lodge, view displays about the Great Camp, and take short interpretive tours with AARCH volunteers. These events provide a rare opportunity to go inside buildings (open 10-3) and meet guides during the winter months. The 10-mile round trip on gently rolling terrain will take you past the Santanoni Farm and through the Forest Preserve along the carriage road.



Enjoy free coffee, tea, or hot chocolate by the woodstove at the historic Artist's Studio. Visitors are encouraged to take the half-mile trail that connects the Santanoni Road to the Adirondack Interpretive Center's 3.6-mile trail system.

NOTE: Winter conditions can change quickly in the backcountry. Be prepared with extra warm clothing and adequate supplies for your trip.

SUPPORT OUR 2023 ANNUAL APPEAL

AARCH relies on the support of individuals, organizations, businesses, and communities throughout the Adirondacks to do its good work.

Even the smallest gift goes a long way! Scan this code to donate to AARCH securely online today: