

## **The Unification Theological Seminary Property at Barrytown -- its Historical Significance**

This splendidly situated property of 250 acres overlooking the Hudson and including unimpeded River access at Heron Point and shoreline on Tivoli South Bay was first established as a country seat in 1797 by Major John R. Livingston, a brother of Chancellor Robert R. Livingston of Clermont and of Janet Montgomery, who eight years later was to create Montgomery Place immediately next door. Major Livingston had become a rich New York City real estate owner and is believed to have recruited Marc Brunel, then a refugee from the French Revolution and later England's greatest civil engineer, to help design his house at the property he named Massena in honor of one of Napoleon's young Marshals. Major Livingston remained at Barrytown until his death in 1851 at the age of 96, the last surviving officer veteran of the Revolution. In 1820 he gave the southern portion of his property to a daughter for whom he built Edgewater on the acreage.

In August 1812 Washington Irving visited Major Livingston at Massena. The views he enjoyed at that time found their way into one of the most famous and evocative passages in American literature, the scene-setting for Rip Van Winkle:

Whoever has made a voyage up the Hudson must remember the Kaatskill mountains. They ... are seen away to the west of the river, swelling up to a noble height, and lording it over the surrounding country. Every change of season, every change of weather, indeed every hour of the day, produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains ... When the weather is fair and settled, they are clothed in blue and purple, and print their bold outlines on the clear evening sky; but sometimes, when the rest of the landscape is cloudless, they will gather a hood of grey vapors about their summits, which, in the last rays of the setting sun, will glow and light up like a crown of glory.

This is truly the Catskills as seen from Barrytown.

Following Major Livingston's death Massena was purchased by Henry Dwight, who commissioned the English-born architect Gervase Wheeler to modernize and enlarge the house (a process he described in detail in one of his architectural books, Homes For the People.) In 1860 the property was sold to John Lloyd Aspinwall, a partner in the prosperous New York City international shipping firm of Howland & Aspinwall. With the establishment of what is now Bard College that same year by his friend and neighbor John Bard, Aspinwall became a strong supporter of the institution. The main house at Massena was further enlarged and the grounds upgraded, making it one of the nation's showplaces, as depicted in Martha J. Lamb's 1879 "coffee table" book The Homes of America.

In the summer of 1868 Massena was loaned to Theodore Roosevelt and it was here, in the meadows, woods and brooks and along the South Bay, that nine year-old Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., became a lifelong naturalist and writer. Beginning his first journal that August, his entries include these:

August 18<sup>th</sup> Tuesday

I took a ride of six miles, on pony grant, before breakfast, up to Crugers Island this morning.

August 22<sup>nd</sup> Saturday

To day we went down to the brook. But wonders were in store for us. It seemed as if all the inhabitants of the brook had got down to one point. In a small pond that has an island in the middle of it. At that place we saw crayfish, eels, minnows, salamanders, water spiders, water bugs, etc., etc.

Sunday, Munday and Tuesday

Nothing happened except that we found a swallows, catbirds, and robins nests.

September 5<sup>th</sup>

We discovered a weasel's hole and a foxes burrow.

Such were the modest beginnings in the natural environment of our country's greatest conservationist governor and president. It happened here at Barrytown.

In 1885 the main house at Massena was destroyed by fire and a new house of brick, designed by William A. Potter, was erected in its place. This house survives, as does the nearby Episcopal Church of St. John the Evangelist, also designed by Potter and built in memory of Aspinwall by his widow. In 1911 the property was purchased by Garret and Carola dePeyster Kip, who in 1928 sold it to the Christian Brothers, a Roman Catholic order that relocated at Barrytown its St. Joseph's Novitiate, a boys' pre-seminary boarding school. (The school's former home at North Tarrytown had been purchased by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and incorporated into his family's lands at Pocantico.) Beginning in 1928 the Christian Brothers erected institutional structures such as the large masonry residential building and the steel water tower. Due to diminishing enrollment and faculty the Christian Brothers closed the novitiate and in 1974 sold the property to the Unification Church, which conducted indoctrination and training of recruits there for several years and then established the Unification Theological Seminary on the premises.

The property is a contributing element in the Hudson River National Historic Landmark District, the "Sixteen Mile" National Register Historic District, the State's Mid-Hudson Historic Shorelands Scenic Area, and a Scenic Area of Statewide Significance as provided for under the Federal Coastal Management Act. It adjoins the Tivoli Bays National Estuarine Reserve (indeed, the property includes a water grant encompassing the southern acreage of Tivoli South Bay), and shares a lengthy boundary with Montgomery Place (the landmark museum estate/farm owned and operated by Historic Hudson Valley, Inc.) along a tributary brook and historic mature woodlands.