

Saving Santanoni

Balancing Historic Preservation and Environmental Conservation in Adirondack Park

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View Of Newcomb Lake From The Great Camp Santanoni Boathouse

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: SAVING SANTANONI: BALANCING HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN ADIRONDACK PARK

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Great Camp Santanoni is an approximately thirty two acre historic site located in New York State's Adirondack Park. A National Historic Landmark, it is one of only three publicly-owned historic sites within Adirondack Park, the other two being John Brown's Farm and Crown Point. Despite Santanoni's unique local, regional, and national significance as an architectural masterpiece and a cultural symbol of late nineteenth-century attitudes, its future remains startlingly uncertain. When New York State purchased the 12,900-acre Santanoni Preserve in 1972, the fate of the great camp was in jeopardy due to the "forever wild" provision in Article XIV of the New York State Constitution. This provision requires that state-owned lands within Adirondack Park are to be kept "forever wild". It is a mandate that has been interpreted by some to mean the eradication of all human-made structures situated on public lands.

Ultimately, Great Camp Santanoni was saved from demolition and starting in the early 1990s, after nearly twenty years of abandonment and neglect, efforts to preserve and restore the great camp were launched and continue today. The full story surrounding the preservation and restoration of Santanoni is told in this paper. It is a story that demonstrates a significantly larger problem, the need for finding equilibrium between historic preservation and environmental conservation in Adirondack Park. Culture and

nature need not be mutually exclusive and any attempt to make them totally separate from one another is artificial. If Adirondack Park is truly to be a model for how humans can live and interact with nature, then a better balance between historic preservation and environmental conservation must be achieved in regard to publicly-owned historic resources located there.

**SAVING SANTANONI: BALANCING HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL
CONSERVATION IN ADIRONDACK PARK.**

By

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Final Seminar Project submitted to the Faculty of the Historic Preservation Program,
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Introduction: Saving Santanoni

This project explores the management of historic resources, specifically, historic resources located in New York State's Adirondack Park and located on public property. The chapters that follow tell the story about the laws and policies that have failed a unique, state-owned historic resource within Adirondack Park named Great Camp Santanoni. By focusing on the unique story surrounding the construction, ownership, neglect, and preservation of this particular Adirondack great camp one will gain a better understanding of some of the larger issues surrounding the preservation of state-owned historic resources within Adirondack Park. In many ways New York State's stewardship of Santanoni, a National Historic Landmark, serves as a guide of what not to do when trying to effectively manage state-owned historic resources.



Gateway To Great Camp Santanoni (Figure #1)

Santanoni's story highlights the need for a better, more compromise-oriented, dialogue between historic preservationists and environmental conservationists in Adirondack Park. Much of the mismanagement surrounding Santanoni was done in the name of environmental stewardship and, in particular, out of reverence for the "forever wild" provision found in Article XIV of the New York State Constitution. This project promotes the idea that in instances involving state-owned historic resources in Adirondack, culture and nature do not need to be at odds with one another. It is the peculiarities of the decision-making process, or perhaps more appropriately the lack of a decision-making process, surrounding the stewardship of Santanoni that offer such a compelling case for the need to better protect state-owned historic resources in Adirondack Park. Put simply, state-owned historic resources within Adirondack Park must be better protected to ensure that future generations of Americans will have the opportunity to learn from the story that they collectively tell.

The first chapter, *The Current Situation*, provides a general overview of Adirondack Park and an idea of how this paper utilizes and expands on the wealth of research already conducted regarding the region. The second chapter, *A Perfect Setting*, examines how the Adirondacks were transformed into an internationally recognized wilderness destination during the late nineteenth-century and how the region became the place of choice for many of the wealthy to build large sprawling summer estates. The third chapter, *Santanoni's Story*, tells the story of Great Camp Santanoni, a story filled with many dramatic twists and turns, all of which add to the legacy of this incredible National Historic Landmark. The fourth chapter, *The Wilderness Problem*, briefly looks at the longstanding culture versus nature debate in the Adirondacks and how this debate impacted the way in which New York State managed Santanoni once it came under state control.

The paper concludes with a chapter, *Achieving Balance*, dedicated to presenting solutions to the problems caused by New York State's mismanagement of Santanoni, with the hope that such an analysis will help prevent some of the same problems from happening again in the future (involving different historic resources). These are problems that illustrate a much larger issue, sooner rather than later New York State is going to have come to grips with the fact that part of what makes Adirondack Park such a wonderful place are the people who live, work, and visit there. To not protect the places that together tell their story is to deny a simple truth, that Adirondack Park is and was a place of both beautiful natural creations and beautiful cultural creations, both of which deserve to be cherished and protected "forever."



Great Camp Santanoni Main Camp Veranda (Figure #2)

Chapter 1: The Current Situation

Within New York State's Adirondack Park one will find some of the most dramatic areas of natural beauty located in the continental United States. For well over one hundred years visitors have been drawn to the Adirondacks to escape the ills of the city, to vacation in a beautiful setting, and to experience what life was like in the wild. This perception of the Adirondacks as an unspoiled wilderness destination, containing both elements of realism and romanticism, was one of the contributing factors that led to the creation of Adirondack Park in 1892. Today, Adirondack Park is comprised of over six million acres of both privately and state-owned land. Approximately 2.8 million acres of the land is state-owned, while around 3.1 million acres of the land in Adirondack Park is in private hands.¹

Together the public and the private lands form a park that is actually larger than Yosemite National Park, Yellowstone National Park, Glacier National Park, Grand Canyon National Park, and Great Smoky Mountains National Park combined. Adirondack Park is approximately the same size as the neighboring State of Vermont. State-owned lands within Adirondack Park are part of the larger New York State Forest Preserve (which also includes public lands located in Catskills Park), lands that are specifically protected by the New York State Constitution. The New York State Constitution mandates that all lands in the Forest Preserve are to be kept "forever wild," a popular and poetic shortened expression used to describe the content Article XIV. Interestingly, the words "forever" and "wild" never appear side by side in Article XIV of the New York State Constitution. It actually reads "the lands of the State, now owned or hereafter acquired, constituting the Forest Preserve as now fixed by law, shall forever be kept as wild forest lands."

¹ Jenkins, Jerry and Andy Keal, *The Adirondack Atlas: A Geographic Portrait of the Adirondack Park* (Syracuse University Press & The Adirondack Museum: New York, New York, 2004), 3.

The implications of this constitutional promise are broad and have an impact on activities ranging from basic trail maintenance to one of the focuses of this paper, the preservation of historic sites located on public lands. The struggle to balance nature and culture in Adirondack Park is nothing new. From the beginning maintaining a balance between these two compelling forces was destined to be a struggle. When Adirondack Park was created it was “a park like no other park the world had ever seen - a park that was a complicated mix of public and private property.”² Since that time, finding equilibrium between culture and nature has been an issue of paramount importance for generations of permanent residents, summer residents, and visitors. Much has been written about this struggle, but few real permanent solutions have been found.



Early Morning View From Marcy Dam (Figure #3)

² Terrie, Philip, *Contested Terrain: A New History of Nature and People in the Adirondacks*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse University Press & The Adirondack Museum: Syracuse, New York, 2008), 106.

In *Contested Terrain: A New History of Nature and People in the Adirondacks* Philip Terrie hoped that people would begin to think of the Adirondacks “as a cultural landscape, a place of people, their artifacts, and nature.” He argued that “Adirondack Park has both a natural and a human history,”³ and Terrie could not have been more right. The Adirondacks do indeed have both, as Terrie noted, a natural and a human history. To deny this simple fact is to ignore the truth. Long before Europeans colonized North America, delineated the boundaries of New York State, and created Adirondack Park as a wilderness area, there were people living in the Adirondacks, people with a history that deserves to be preserved and told long into the future. If we are honest with ourselves we realize that the Adirondacks were never quite as wild as they were made out to be.

Outside of works dedicated to the preservation or documentation of specific historic resources, such as Harvey Kaiser’s *Great Camps of the Adirondacks* and Sally E. Svenson’s *Adirondack Churches: A History of Design and Building*, not much has been written with regard to how the struggle to balance culture and nature in the Adirondacks relates to the preservation and restoration of historic resources located in Adirondack Park on a broader scale. This is surprising given the breadth of scholarship on Adirondack Park since its creation over one hundred and ten years ago. Recent work by Richard Longstreth in *Cultural Landscapes: Balancing Nature and Heritage in Preservation Practice* (2008) and his soon to be published work involving Great Camp Santanoni are relative oddities in what is otherwise a crowded field of research.

Considering the wealth of historic resources in Adirondacks this lack of attention comes as a considerable disappointment. Some historic resources have been lost forever,

³ *Ibid.*, xxii - xxiii.

but there are still many more, including Great Camp Santanoni, worth researching and saving. A more deliberate and conscious effort must be made by researchers both within and outside the field of historic preservation to illuminate the threats facing historic resources in Adirondack Park. As part of this effort it should be made clear that not all of the at-risk historic resources within Adirondack Park are of the same high-style as the numerous great camps like Santanoni. The situation at Santanoni merely highlights a much larger issue. If a high-style, state-owned historic resource like Santanoni is having trouble being properly managed by New York State, then the question of what is being protected and preserved becomes a much more relevant and tangible issue.



Adirondack Roadside Architecture (Figure #4)

There are hundreds of everyday buildings and numerous undocumented archaeological sites located in Adirondack Park. Lake Placid, New York, with a population of approximately 2,600, is the largest city in Adirondacks and it is the only city in the United

States, and one of only three places in the world, to have ever hosted the Winter Olympics on two different occasions. Lake Placid has numerous historic resources including the site of what is arguably the greatest victory in American sports history, the United States men's hockey team's victory over the Soviet Union in the 1980 Winter Olympics.



Goodnow Mountain Fire Tower (Figure #5)

Nearly three dozen Adirondack fire towers, often one of the favorite destinations for hikers, are located on the tops of various mountains in the Adirondacks. Without intervention at the state level many of these fire towers are in jeopardy of being lost, in fact the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation plans to take down any fire tower “not restored to a safe condition.”⁴ Simply driving through many of the hamlets and villages located in the Adirondacks one cannot help but notice the numerous historic

⁴ Adirondack Architectural Heritage, *Fire Towers of the Adirondacks – History* (<http://www.aarch.org/fire/fire.html>).

storefronts, churches, and homes located in the region. The next chapter looks at how the Adirondacks were transformed into a renowned tourist destination during the late nineteenth-century and how the region became the place of choice for many of America's most wealthy citizens to build expansive summer estates.

Chapter 2: A Perfect Setting

During the late nineteenth- century the Adirondacks became synonymous with the idea of wilderness and it was this notion, of the Adirondacks as wilderness that transformed the region into a major tourist destination. This transformation occurred for good reason. Adirondack summers are wonderful; the days are comfortably warm with virtually no humidity and nights are crisp, but not cold. Mountains appear seemingly endlessly stretching outward and upward in every direction. Water carves its way through the landscape in the form of numerous streams, rivers, and lakes. It truly is a perfect setting. A clergyman from Boston named William H. H. Murray, after visiting the Adirondacks over the course of several summers, wrote of its beauty in *Adventures in the Wilderness*, first published in 1869.



View From Goodnow Mountain Fire Tower (Figure #6)

In *Adventures in the Wilderness*, Murray declared that the beauty of the Adirondacks during the summer months was comparable to the beauty of Switzerland.⁵ Murray's book brought thousands of new visitors to the Adirondacks and although many of "Murray's Fools"⁶ came away frustrated from their first visit to the Adirondacks, due to the especially wet and bug filled summer following the book's publication, his writing contributed to making the region a major tourist destination. Murray's decision to compare the natural beauty of the Adirondacks to the natural beauty of Switzerland is notable. Starting during the late 1800s and continuing through the early 1900s affluent families from the eastern United States identified the Adirondacks as the perfect setting to build large estates. The late nineteenth-century "saw more and more of the nation's wealthiest citizens seeking out wilderness for themselves. The elite passion for the wild took on many forms: enormous estates in the Adirondacks and elsewhere (disingenuously called "camps" despite their many servants and amenities)."⁷ These principally summer homes (the families that built these estates would for most part choose to avoid the harsh winter climate of the Adirondacks) were often arranged in a compound-like layout, set on large parcels of lands, and largely self sufficient.

The owners of these getaways often referred to them as "camps," and are today sometimes identified as "great camps,"⁸ which is perhaps a more fitting descriptor given the

⁵ Murray, William, Warner Cadbury, and William Verner, ed., *Adventures in the Wilderness* (Syracuse University Press & The Adirondack Museum: Syracuse, New York, 1989), 9.

⁶ Popular name given to those tourists who ventured to the Adirondacks for the first time following the publication of *Adventures in the Wilderness* in 1869 and returned home soured by the disparities between Murray's description of summers in the Adirondacks and the reality they encountered during their journey.

⁷ Cronon, William, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (W.W. Norton & Company: New York, New York, 1995), 78.

luxury these residence provided to their owners. At great camps such as Pine Knot, Uncas, Sagamore, and Santanoni residents were hardly roughing it. Santanoni was almost entirely self sufficient complete with Gate Lodge, Farm Complex, and Main Camp; the Farm Complex at Santanoni featured cows, pigs, ducks, chickens, sheep, and a full vegetable garden. Great camps were built in a unique architectural style utilizing large amounts of locally produced materials. The style, Adirondack Rustic, was clearly influenced by a number of sources of inspiration, but maybe none more so than the Swiss Chalet style.

Adirondack Rustic style “with its mixture of logs, native stone, and decorative rustic work of twigs and branches, has been adopted for hotels in the Pacific Cascades, the Rockies, and the Northern Great Lakes, in private vacation homes, and, most notably, in National Park Service buildings across the country.”⁹ It is a style, both elegant and beautiful, that has proven to be truly timeless, blending the elements of the built environment seamlessly with the surrounding landscape. Summering in the Adirondacks provided those families that could afford it with a welcomed reprieve from both the perceived and real ills that families living in the city experienced during the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century.

Cities were polluted with both animal and human waste and the air was filled with smoke and smog from factories operating long hours. Even under the best circumstances summers in many large eastern cities were guaranteed to be hot and muggy, two weather characteristics that the Adirondacks rarely experienced. The best known great camps were

⁸ A description that the authors of *Santanoni: From Japanese Temple to Life at an Adirondack Great Camp* noted was first popularized during the 1980s following the publication of Harvey Kaiser’s *Great Camps of the Adirondacks*. Herein “camp” and “great camp” are used interchangeably depending on the specific reference.

⁹ Kaiser, Harvey, *Great Camps of the Adirondacks* (David R. Godine: Boston, Massachusetts, 1982), xiii.

designed and built by real estate prospector William West Durant near or on the beautiful shores of Raquette Lake. Durant was “the man who elevated the Adirondack camp into an indigenous craft.”¹⁰ The first great camp to be built by Durant was Pine Knot, although it was actually Durant’s father, Thomas C. Durant, who started construction of Pine Knot in 1877. Prior to starting Pine Knot, Thomas C. Durant was involved in the construction of the Adirondack Railroad, which terminated its course approximately thirty miles south of Pine Knot in the little community of North Creek, New York. Both Thomas C. Durant and William West Durant recognized that they could benefit financially from the growth of tourism in the Adirondacks.

At Pine Knot Durant combined “the Adirondack features of the crude log cabin with the long low lines of the graceful Swiss chalet. From this pleasing blend there sprang distinctive school of Adirondack architecture.”¹¹ The central building at Pine Knot was appropriately named the Swiss Cottage. From 1877 to 1895, the year that Durant sold Pine Knot to Collis P. Huntington due to financial difficulties, buildings were added to the compound. If a new use was conceived then a new building was constructed. Each space was uniquely designed and used for a specific purpose. Pine Knot was elegantly detailed with fine rustic touches both inside and out. Durant’s eye for detail was extraordinary, or infamous, depending on your point of view. Durant noticed mistakes, “if a post was ever so faintly out of plumb, he could spot it immediately.” Durant was known for not allowing “deviations from the standards which his aesthetic sense demanded.”¹²

¹⁰ Frank Graham, *The Adirondack Park: A Political History* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, New York, 1978), 39.

¹¹ Hochschild, Harold, *Life and Leisure in the Adirondack Backwoods* (Syracuse University Press & The Adirondack Museum: Syracuse, New York, 1990), 4.

The year that Durant sold Pine Knot he moved into the already completed Camp Uncas, a great camp that he began working on in 1890. Uncas, named after one of the lead characters in James Fennimore Cooper's timeless *The Last of Mohicans*, was another carefully crafted Adirondack Rustic masterpiece. Uncas was situated on Mohegan Lake and was crafted with the same care and precision found at Pine Knot. However, Uncas was constructed over a two year period, a quick pace compared to the over ten years it took to construct Pine Knot, and perhaps as a result "the original rustic work at Uncas is less elaborate than at Pine Knot." While the rustic details were not up to the same standard as those at Pine Knot craftsmanship at Uncas was not lacking; "all of the buildings' iron hardware was made in a blacksmith's shop on site. Log work and use of local stone for exteriors and interiors were executed exceedingly well throughout."¹³ Unfortunately, Durant's demand for detail, perfection, and luxury cost him dearly from a financial perspective. For example, "Durant had the locomotives on his Adirondack Railroad between Saratoga and North Creek burn wood instead of coal, at considerable extra expense, so that the smoke would not offend the nostrils of visitors to the Adirondacks."¹⁴

In 1896 Durant sold Uncas to J. Pierpont Morgan and concentrated his efforts on the construction of what became his most famous Adirondack architectural wonder, Great Camp Sagamore. Sagamore was situated on a body of water named Shedd Lake. Durant never took a liking to the name "Shedd" and as a result "borrowed again from James Fennimore Cooper's lexicon of Indian words. Both lake and camp became Sagamore."¹⁵ One

¹² Ibid., 27.

¹³ *Great Camps of the Adirondacks*, 85.

¹⁴ *Life and Leisure in the Adirondack Backwoods*, 25.

of the first buildings completed at Sagamore was the Main Lodge, a magnificent Adirondack Rustic building that proudly exhibits various aspects of its Swiss Chalet style roots, which is no accident. As a young man Durant traveled extensively in Europe and it is certainly possible that Durant's work in the Adirondacks was influenced by something he saw or experienced during those travels.



Great Camp Sagamore Main Lodge (Figure #7)

At Sagamore, Durant's quest for total perfection in his work was once again a tremendous financial strain. In one instance a recently completed stone fireplace was totally removed and redone because one stone was placed incorrectly. Durant lived at Sagamore for a number of years, but ultimately his financial troubles caught up with him and, "faced again with imminent bankruptcy, Durant liquidated the Sagamore property in 1901 and sold

¹⁵ Schneider, Paul, *The Adirondacks: A History of America's First Wilderness* (Owl Books: New York, New York, 1997), 252.

the camp to Alfred G. Vanderbilt.” It cost Durant approximately \$250,000 (in late nineteenth-century dollars) to build Sagamore. He himself valued the property at \$200,000 and Alfred G. Vanderbilt bought the buildings and property for the relatively bargain price of \$162,500.¹⁶

As his personal finances collapsed Durant found himself slowly being pushed out of the Adirondacks, but the legacy that he left cannot be diminished. In the National Park Service’s *Adirondack Camps National Historic Landmarks Theme Study* Durant was identified as being “widely regarded as the most important innovator in the evolution of the Adirondack camp property type.”¹⁷ Even as his workers sometimes struggled to meet his expectations of perfection, Durant was recognized for being compassionate. On more than one occasion Durant “paid the salaries, for long periods, of employees who had fallen ill from causes not connected with their work,” and if there was an instance in which “a family in the neighborhood was in distress he sent them money and food, whether or not they were in his employ.”¹⁸

The life lived by the Vanderbilts at Sagamore was one of total luxury. After purchasing Sagamore, the Vanderbilts had a remarkable covered outdoor bowling alley constructed. In order to ensure that the bowling lanes would endure the freeze thaw cycle and remain level through the course of multiple Adirondack winters, the Vanderbilts had the bowling alley built on top of a poured concrete foundation. Tragically, Alfred G. Vanderbilt died when the *Lusitania* was sunk in 1915, but his widow, Margaret Emerson, continued to actively utilize Sagamore. Sagamore hosted numerous parties and was visited by guests,

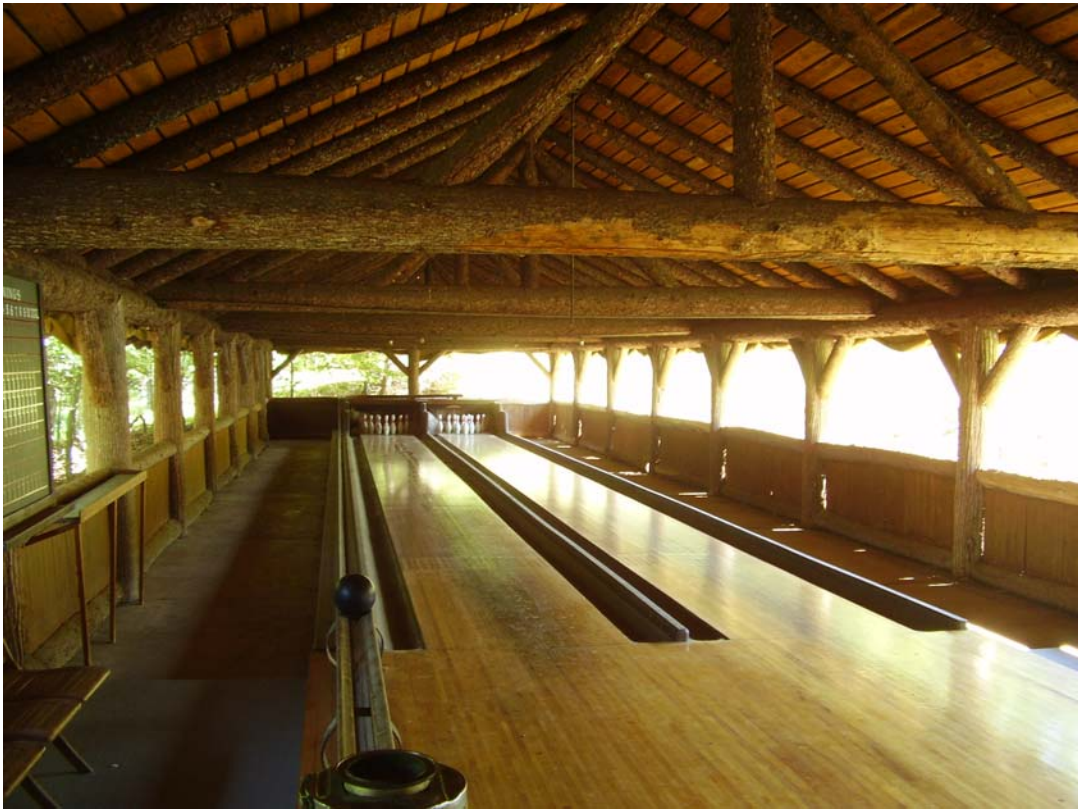
¹⁶ *Great Camps of the Adirondacks*, 91.

¹⁷ *Adirondack Camps National Historic Landmarks Theme Study* (National Park Service, 2007).

¹⁸ *Life and Leisure in the Adirondack Backwoods*, 28.

including Gary Cooper and Jean Arthur, from quite literally all over the United States.

Sagamore was even visited by Madame Chiang Kai-Chek.



Great Camp Sagamore Bowling Alley (Figure #8)

During the early 1950s Margaret Emerson gifted Sagamore to Syracuse University. Syracuse University utilized Sagamore “for the next twenty years and then decided to divest itself of the by then, dilapidated white elephant in serious disrepair.”¹⁹ Syracuse University planned on selling Sagamore to New York State. Both “Sagamore and fifteen hundred acres were set to be sold to the state for inclusion in the Forest Preserve when architectural preservationists around New York, and to a lesser extent the rest of the country, became alarmed.”²⁰ Once Great Camp Sagamore came under the control of the New York State

¹⁹ Sagamore Institute of the Adirondacks, *The Rest of the History of Great Camp Sagamore* (<http://www.greatcampsagamore.org/history/the-rest-of-the-history>).

²⁰ *The Adirondacks: A History of America's First Wilderness*, 278.

Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) there was a real risk that it would be destroyed and that the “forever wild” provision in Article XIV of the New York State Constitution would provide the justification for doing so.

Fortunately, Sagamore was ultimately saved from demolition. A last minute compromise was hammered out that allowed for an organization headed by Howard Kirschenbaum to purchase Sagamore at the astonishingly low price of \$100,000 (in late twentieth-century dollars).²¹ Shortly after purchasing Sagamore, it became clear that a group of service buildings located a quarter mile from the main camp were not included in the purchase. Fortunately, Kirschenbaum led a successful effort to save the buildings, this time through an amendment to the New York State Constitution, in what was truly a remarkable achievement.²²

Today, the Sagamore Institute of the Adirondacks continues to preserve and restore the buildings at Sagamore. Visitors are provided with the opportunity to experience the story of Sagamore for themselves during the summer months, something that would not have been possible had the NYSDEC been allowed to destroy the magnificent great camp. Sagamore was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2000. The next chapter tells the unique story of Great Camp Santanoni, from its construction in 1892 to when, like Sagamore, it was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2000.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, 278-279.

Chapter 3: Santanoni's Story

In 1892, the same year that Adirondack Park was created by New York State, Robert and Anna Pruyn began construction of their dream summer escape, Great Camp Santanoni. Situated on the shores of the beautiful and remote Newcomb Lake, Santanoni was located northeast of the great camps built by Durant near Raquette Lake, right in the heart of the central Adirondacks. Santanoni was designed by the Pruyn's family friend, Robert H. Robertson and it took only nine months to clear the land and build the great camp (although additional buildings were added over time). Over 1,500 spruce logs were utilized for Santanoni's construction. Santanoni is truly beautiful. Words cannot describe it and photographs do not do it justice. In order really experience Santanoni's elegant beauty one must experience it firsthand. Perhaps it is the way it blends so seamlessly with nature or the way in which the workmanship of the original craftsmen who built it can be still be seen as one walks through it today, over one hundred years later.

As a young man Robert C. Pruyn lived with his father in Japan (his father was the American Minister Plenipotentiary to Japan).²³ Pruyn was undoubtedly influenced by his experiences in Japan and his admiration for Japanese architecture can be seen throughout the Adirondack Rustic style architecture on display at Santanoni. The impact of the Japanese style of architecture on display at the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 in Philadelphia on both Robert and Anna Pruyn, and Santanoni architect Robert H. Robertson should not be underestimated in terms of the ways in which it steered each of their individual tastes in

²³ Engel, Robert, Howard Kirshenbaum, and Paul Malo, *Santanoni: From Japanese Temple to Life at an Adirondack Great Camp* (Adirondack Architectural Heritage: Keeseville, New York, 2000), 8-9.

architecture. It was certainly possible that both Robert C. Pruyn and Robert H. Robertson saw the exhibition in Philadelphia firsthand.²⁴ Pruyn had made his fortune in the field of banking, but both he and Anna longed to escape the confines of the city during the summer months. Unfortunately, there was a bit of a dilemma.



Hudson River In Newcomb, New York (Figure #9)

Robert wanted a farm, while Anna wanted a summer home in the mountains and in the end they ended up with both. Robert and Anna were first drawn to the Town of Newcomb by their friend Robert Robertson; Robert Pruyn and Robert Robertson went to school together at Rutgers University. It was Robertson who convinced the Pruyns to build their great camp on the shores of Newcomb Lake. The Pruyns chose to name their great camp Santanoni due its close proximity to the Santanoni Range. The word “Santanoni” was

²⁴ Ibid., 64-65.

supposedly originally derived from the local pronunciation of the words “Saint Anthony.” The Pruyns owned over 12,900 acres of land within the Santanoni Preserve and they took advantage of the many opportunities their property offered them (camping, hiking, and fishing). They were especially avid fishers; notches were added to the exterior of the Main Lodge to allow them a stylish way to store their fishing rods whenever they were done fishing for the day.



Great Camp Santanoni Main Lodge (Figure #10)

Santanoni was built with three primary sections (connected to one another by a main road) and was comprised of nearly four dozen separate buildings. Located on a small crest and facing Newcomb Lake, the Main Camp was the first section of be constructed. The influence of Japanese style architecture was on full display at the Main Camp. Connecting the central Main Lodge to the flanking sleeping quarters and adjoining Kitchen Wing was an extensive covered porch system that allowed the Pruyns to enjoy the outdoors even if the

weather was not cooperating. The covered porch system added another 5,000 square feet to the 5,000 square feet of interior space found under the Main Camp's large roof. A 16,000 square foot roof covering the Main Camp remains a striking sight to behold.²⁵ Unique irimoya gables are found in several sections of the Main Camp's gabled roofline. The irimoya gables allowed for natural light to break through both the forest and the extensive roofline, and into each of the rooms at the Main Camp (all of which faced westward).



Main Camp Irimoya Roof Gable (Figure #11)

The quality of the log construction employed at Santanoni was incredible. Despite the hilly terrain, the entire connected structure was built on a single plane, and “all end-trimming, limbing and saddle notching was done with hand tools, and done with such skill that after more than a century there is hardly a gap between log and notch wide enough in which to probe a pine needle.” The spruce logs utilized for the Main Camp's construction

²⁵ Ibid., 70-71.

were harvested on the Santanoni Preserve, but not close enough to the Main Camp as to disturb its setting.²⁶ The interior spaces at the Main Camp were equally amazing. Peeled birch bark served as the wallpaper for the upper portions of the great room in the Main Lodge. Split log paneling was utilized to clad the exterior faces of several doorways throughout the Main Camp and panel portions of the great room in the Main Lodge. The stairway railing leading from the first floor to the second floor of the Main Lodge was made out of individually selected tree trunks.



Main Lodge Stairway (Figure #12)

In the center of the Main Lodge, separating the great room from the dining room, was a gigantic two-sided stone fireplace. The fireplace was the first part of the Main Lodge built and it served as the structural anchor for the rest of the building. Interestingly, a similarly sized fireplace was constructed in the Kitchen Wing and its strength as an anchor is

²⁶ Ibid., 68.

believed to be one the primary reasons that the massive three story building has survived. Within the Main Lodge the Pruyns enjoyed the warmth of the fire and the sound of the piano. The sleeping quarters located to each side of the Main Lodge utilized a shared fireplace and a shared bathroom with neighboring rooms. All of the bathrooms at the Main Camp featured full indoor plumbing. The initial plumbing arrangement was extraordinary. Water was gravity feed from a small spring located (at a slightly higher elevation than the Main Camp) all the way across Newcomb Lake through underwater pipes. After this system failed (the underwater pipes corroded) a small Pump House was built just down the hill from the Main Lodge on the edge of Newcomb Lake.



Main Lodge Great Room (Figure #13)

Other notable buildings located at the Main Camp included the Boathouse, which had enough space to house a good portion of the Pruyn's watercraft (in total the Pruyns had eleven Adirondack guide boats, seven canoes, and two sailing canoes). The Artist's Studio,

which was probably designed by the New York City architectural firm of Delano & Aldrich, was constructed for Robert C. Pruyn's son, Edward.²⁷ The Kitchen Wing, located directly behind the Main Lodge, was both the primary workspace and the primary place of residence for many members of the Pruyn's staff at Santanoni. It was "a virtually independent, three-story building, itself larger than most Adirondack camps. It housed the kitchen (where one of three enormous stoves still remains), a staff dining room, and ancillary rooms on the main level: wine storage, wood cellar, tackle room, two pantries and linen room."²⁸



Great Camp Santanoni Creamery (Figure #14)

Located four miles from the Main Camp was the Farm Complex. The farm at Santanoni was truly one of Robert Pruyn's passions. Santanoni's farm was designed by

²⁷ Ibid., 80-81.

²⁸ Ibid., 78.

Edward Burnett, the same man who designed the farm at the Vanderbilt's Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina. Composed of numerous individual buildings, the fully functional farm featured a creamery, a barn, a smokehouse, a vegetable garden and three buildings (Farm Manger's Cottage, Gardner's Cottage, and Herdsman's Cottage) that served as places of residence for staff. Santanoni's farm was built from 1902-1908 and outside of the Farm Manager's Cottage, a Sears Catalog Home (and one of the last buildings added to the great camp as a whole), all of the buildings at the farm were built in the Adirondack Rustic style. The farm at Santanoni was for its time state of the art.



Great Camp Santanoni Gardener's Cottage (Figure #15)

Under Burnett's design Santanoni's farm "conducted hygienic dairying two decades before such practices were required by state regulation."²⁹ An underground piping system

²⁹ Ibid., 100.

provided fresh spring water to several of the buildings at the farm. At the barn, a thirsty cow “could push its nose into a ceramic bowl to activate a valve that filled the bowl with spring water.”³⁰ The barn at Santanoni also featured a vertically oriented silo and although the Adirondack summers were too short to allow corn to properly ferment and thus the silo never functioned as intended, the silo’s vertical orientation was still a relatively ground-breaking design at the time of its construction. Once the Farm Complex was completed, it featured a wide range of farm animals including cows, pigs, sheep, chickens, and ducks. Santanoni’s farm produced enough milk, ham, and eggs that some of it was sold.



Great Camp Santanoni Herdsman’s Cottage (Figure #16)

Almost all of the Pruyns loved the outdoors and the adventures they experienced while staying at Santanoni, but Robert’s connection to Santanoni’s farm was special. He took great pride in ensuring that the farm was run to the highest standards. Robert would make

³⁰ Ibid., 98.

the four mile trip from the Main Camp to the Farm Complex on almost a daily basis just so he could check on his livestock and fresh vegetables. Santanoni's farm was never profitable. It cost the Pruyns nearly \$20,000 a year to operate it (in early nineteenth- century dollars), but the cost of running the farm never deterred the Pruyns, and especially Robert, from enjoying it. The Pruyns "could have ordered provisions delivered from Albany far less expensively than continuing to operate the Santanoni farm." The point of the farm however was not affordability, but rather knowing that joy the Pruyns experienced while "eating their own home-grown meat, dairy products, vegetables and fruit, both at camp and in town."³¹



Great Camp Santanoni Gate Lodge (Figure #17)

One mile from the Farm Complex, and five miles from the Main Camp, was the Gate Lodge. The Gate Lodge was built during the early 1900s by the architectural firm Delano &

³¹ Ibid., 105.

Aldrich. While overall the building was designed in the Adirondack Rustic style, it was defined by the large Richardsonian Romanesque field stone archway that served as the “gate” to Great Camp Santanoni. Once construction was completed it served as the primary entry into Great Camp Santanoni, and what a grand entrance it was. Visitors would have entered the Santanoni Preserve via the road connecting the preserve to the Town of Newcomb. Almost immediately after entering the property visitors crossed a bridge that spanned the Harris Lake Inlet and would follow the road around as it passed under the imposing archway that was part of the Gate Lodge.



Great Camp Santanoni Gate Lodge Rear (Figure #18)

After passing through the archway visitors would be provided with an unobstructed view of Harris Lake, with the central Adirondack Mountains serving as the backdrop. Visitors would then continue along the road through the Farm Complex, through the forest, and ultimately, after a five mile journey (from the Gate Lodge to the Main Camp), arrive at the

Main Lodge. The Pruyns utilized Santanoni through the 1930s. Unfortunately, the stock market crash of 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression hurt the Pruyn's financially. Furthermore, his health was declining and in 1931 he retired from his banking position in Albany. Three years later Robert C. Pruyn died. When Robert wrote his will he "felt that not all his children shared his emotional commitment to Santanoni, while separately, few might be financially able to maintain the Preserve. Whether by his own devise or through the custodianship, Pruyn's entire estate was placed in charge of the National Commercial Bank and Trust Co."³²

Once the Robert C. Pruyn Trust took control of Santanoni, the Pruyns were required to get permission anytime they wanted to visit the property. The trust fired many of the workers who lived and worked at Santanoni on year around basis. Furthermore, they permanently shut down all operations at Santanoni's farm. The trust's heavy handedness in operating in Santanoni did not stop the Pruyns from enjoying it. Starting in the mid 1930s, Anna resumed visits Santanoni, which she continued until her death in 1939.³³ They loved Santanoni and they seemingly had great relationships with their permanent staff at Santanoni and the Town of Newcomb. Together Robert and Anna spent many summers fishing, hiking, farming, singing, laughing, and relaxing at Great Camp Santanoni. They entertained both James Fennimore Cooper, Jr. and Theodore Roosevelt. In the end, Robert had his farm and Anna had her place in the mountains.

³² Ibid., 148.

³³ Ibid., 148-149.



View Of Newcomb Lake From Road Leading Into Main Camp (Figure #19)

In 1953 two brothers named Crandall and Myron Melvin of Syracuse, New York purchased Great Camp Santanoni in an auction, and the accompanying 12,900 acre of land, for a little under \$80,000. The Melvins purchased Santanoni at an incredibly good price. Unfortunately, their time at Santanoni was marked with terrible tragedy. The Melvins were wealthy, but they did not have the same type of wealth that the Pruyns enjoyed. Rather than hiring full time staff to tend to the year around upkeep of Santanoni, the Melvins did much of the upkeep themselves (although the Melvins did retain the lone full time staff member, Arthur Tummins, who earlier survived the transfer of ownership from the Pruyns to the Robert C. Pruyn Trust during the early 1930s). The Melvin's time at Santanoni was quite a contrast to the Pruyn's time at Santanoni. While the Pruyn's time at Santanoni was

marked mostly by fun and relaxation, when the Melvins visited Santanoni they “seemed never to stop working.”³⁴

The Melvins had much work to do. During the roughly twenty year period that the Robert C. Pruyn Trust were responsible for the stewardship of Santanoni (who were most concerned with running the great camp at the cheapest operating cost possible), regular maintenance of the buildings was deferred. Throughout the Melvin’s ownership of Santanoni numerous buildings were repaired and updated and it is believed that not a single building was lost under the Melvin’s care. By the early 1970s, the Melvins were looking into the possibility of selling the Santanoni Preserve (the great camp and the surrounding 12,900 acres) to New York State. Unfortunately, tragedy struck.

During the summer of 1971, the Melvins endured unimaginable heartbreak at Santanoni. Douglas Legg, the eight year old grandson of Myron Melvin, was lost while vacationing with his family at Santanoni. Douglas was attempting to go on a hike with his uncle. When his uncle realized that Douglas was wearing shorts rather than pants he instructed Douglas to return to the Main Camp in order to put on pants. Douglas was never seen again. A massive search effort was launched in an effort to find Douglas, over one thousand volunteers from across New York State and from far away as California and Seattle, Washington came to the Town of Newcomb to help find the young boy. Some traces of Douglas were found (a shoe print) and provided the family with some hope, but after over twenty days of looking for Douglas, the search was officially called off. The Melvins were devastated and understandably they wanted to continue with their efforts to sell Santanoni. Ultimately, they were successful and in 1972 New York State acquired the Santanoni Preserve.

³⁴ Ibid., 160.

Chapter 4: The Wilderness Problem

Before Adirondack Park was created in 1892, New York State was already working towards protecting state-owned lands in the region. Article XIV was passed by the New York State legislature in 1885, marking a new era for environmental conservation both in New York State and in the United States as a whole. With the passage of Article XIV, New York State established the Forest Preserve. In an instant, all state-owned lands in the Adirondacks became constitutionally protected and guaranteed to be kept “forever wild.” Article XIV states that:

The lands of the state, now owned or hereafter acquired, constituting the Forest Preserve as now fixed by law, shall be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be leased, sold, or exchanged, or be taken by any corporation, public or private, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed or destroyed.³⁵

New York State felt compelled to protect state-owned lands in the Adirondacks for a number of very important reasons. First, state lawmakers recognized the unique nature of the Adirondacks as a place of local, state, and national importance. Second, the extractive industries of the nineteenth-century were not kind to the Adirondacks, and there was serious concern among legislators that if something was not done to protect the Adirondacks excessive logging would not only lead to a severely exhausted natural landscape, but more importantly to a depleted water supply in the lower portions of New York State (impacting major cities such as Albany and New York). These two forces were the primary reasons for establishing the Forest Preserve and later Adirondack Park.

Interestingly, “only later did people begin to see the great value of the preserve for wilderness recreation and as an ecological and scenic reserve. Defending the Forest

³⁵ *Camp Santanoni Historic Area: Unit Management Plan* (New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, 2000), 1.

Preserve became the goal of many citizens.”³⁶ The movement to protect the natural environment of the Adirondacks evolved from a collective effort in natural resource protection to a movement to protect the “wild” character of the region. Long before New York State lawmakers enacted Article XIV and “forever wild” entered the lexicon of the environmental movement, before the United States declared independence from Great Britain, before Europeans first arrived in what is today New York State, and there were people living in the Adirondacks. The Adirondacks never have been the place of “wilderness” that they were made out to be; “it seems entirely feasible that Indians were at least penetrating into the valleys and lowlands surrounding the Adirondacks within a few centuries after the last glaciations, 10,000 to 12,000 years ago.”³⁷

Evidence for the presence of Native Americans living in the Adirondacks has been found through the discovery of archaeological sites in the region: “Indian village sites have been uncovered at Chazy and Cranberry Lake. Additionally, axlike tools have found along the Saranac River and Saranac Lake, pottery shards have been recovered near the Saint Regis River, along with a bowl at Silver Lake.”³⁸ In contrast to the long standing presence of Native Americans in the Adirondacks, Europeans only arrived in the Adirondacks during the early 1600s. Interestingly, Europeans did not know a whole lot about the Adirondacks until the 1800s. It was their lack of knowledge of the region that first gave birth to the romanticized idea that the Adirondacks were a true “wilderness.”

³⁶ Randorf, Gary, *The Adirondacks: Wild Island of Hope* (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, Maryland, 2002) 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

Through the early 1800s, the Adirondacks remained a relatively unknown region to those who colonized North America; “in 1830, there was no map of the region, for no man had traversed the wild land thoroughly enough even to begin one. Americans had mapped Pike’s Peak in Colorado and the Columbia River in Oregon.”³⁹ During the late nineteenth-century the word “Adirondacks” came to be the very definition of “wilderness” in American society. The association between “Adirondacks” and “wilderness” was so strong that they continue to be paired together in American society. “Wilderness” is:

Not quite what it seems. Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation—indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history.”⁴⁰

In addition to this fundamental “wilderness problem,” in the case of the state-owned lands in the Adirondacks the “forever wild” provision has been interpreted to mean something that was never actually written into Article XIV.

Nowhere in Article XIV does it say that all human-made structures situated on state-owned lands in Adirondack Park are to be deliberately neglected or destroyed, but in some instances that is exactly how the “forever wild” provision has been interpreted. This interpretation, coupled with the fact that the “Forest Preserve itself grew as the state slowly acquired important private lands for the public domain,”⁴¹ resulted in a case where recently acquired lands with historic resources were wiped clean of all human-made structures, with the “forever wild” provision providing the justification for doing so.

³⁹ Keller, Jane Eblen, *Adirondack Wilderness: A Story of Man and Nature* (Syracuse University Press: Syracuse, New York, 1980), 8.

⁴⁰ Cronon, William, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (W.W. Norton & Company: New York, New York, 1995), 69.

⁴¹ *Contested Terrain: A New History of Nature and People in the Adirondacks*, 143.

In the case of Nehasane, there would be no last minute attempt by historic preservationists to save it as there with the Sagamore service buildings. Acquired by New York State in 1979, Nehasane “was part of the remaining 25,000-acre estate of the William Seward Webb family in the west-central Adirondacks.”⁴² The Main Lodge at Nehasane was a “long, low-building, gabled, and rimmed by verandas where guests might rock away the evening or dream in a hammock.”⁴³ It was burned to the ground by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), along with all the other buildings located at Nehasane. The situation was unique in that “not only was Nehasane regarded as less outstanding architecturally or historically than Sagamore, Topridge and Santanoni, but the Webb family had made demolition of the main lodge at Nehasane a condition of sale.”⁴⁴

One of the NYSDEC’s “most important functions has been to acquire land for the Forest Preserve”⁴⁵ and, like many budget-minded government agencies the preservation of historic resources located on the land they acquire is not one of their first priorities. As noted previously, this was especially evident with their handling of the Sagamore service buildings and Great Camp Santanoni. In contrast, “forever wild” and budget constraints never stopped the NYSDEC from putting up trail markers, clearing campsites, building lean-tos, constructing footbridges, or maintaining trails. By the end of the 1970s, New York State was in possession of three great camps; Santanoni, Topridge, and Nehasane, and part of a fourth, the service buildings at Sagamore. The NYSDEC took a decidedly different approach

⁴² *Santanoni: From Japanese Temple to Life at an Adirondack Great Camp*, 186.

⁴³ *The Adirondack Park: A Political History*, 136-137.

⁴⁴ *Santanoni: From Japanese Temple to Life at an Adirondack Great Camp*, 191.

⁴⁵ McMartin, Barbara, *Perspectives on the Adirondacks: A Thirty Year Struggle by People Protecting Their Treasure* (Syracuse University Press: Syracuse, New York, 2002), 60.

to the way in which they handled their stewardship of Great Camp Topridge. Topridge was given to New York State by the Marjorie Merriweather Post Foundation in 1974 and from the beginning the state made clear their intention to utilize the camp as a site for conferences and other meetings. In 1978, the state utilized Topridge for a meeting between the New York State Office of Parks and Recreation and the New York State Office of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC).



Human-Made Footbridge (Figure #20)

The conference, appropriately titled *Cultural Heritage in the Wilds*, was held for the explicit purpose of dealing with the issues surrounding historic preservation and environmental conservation in Adirondack Park. Santanoni was one of the principal topics covered at the conference at Topridge. The NYSDEC made clear that they did not intend to deliberately destroy any of the buildings at Santanoni, but their inaction was costing Santanoni dearly. Adirondack winters are harsh and for seven years Santanoni stood vacant

without proper maintenance, much less preservation or restoration. In some instances, NYSDEC staff working at the Santanoni Preserve (maintaining trails, clearing campsites, etc.) took it upon themselves to make the ten mile trip into the Main Camp to shovel snow off building roofs in the dead of winter.

Santanoni was slowly being demolished by neglect and the NYSDEC did not have any concrete idea of what to do. Topridge proved to be too much of a financial burden for New York State (as determined by then Governor Cuomo) to bear and in the early 1980s the buildings that made up Topridge were sold by the state to a private owner, while the state kept the surrounding acreage for the Forest Preserve. The sell of Topridge was a mistake. Historic resources located on private property in the Adirondacks are afforded even less protection than those located on state-owned lands, which is to say they are afforded none. Topridge is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but recent alterations to several of the buildings and the demolition of several others may put its National Register designation in jeopardy.⁴⁶ For New York State to sell Topridge to a private owner without any form of preservation-related easement was a terrible error in judgment.

Unfortunately, the *Cultural Heritage in the Wilds* conference did not produce any immediate results in terms of the situation at Santanoni, the only great camp left under the NYSDEC's control by the early 1980s. Part of the reason that the NYSDEC was having such a difficult time in developing a plan of action was the fact that no guidelines were in place regarding how to deal with such a situation. The Sagamore service buildings were saved through a constitutional amendment approved by voters in the early 1980s, but conservationists were wary of making anymore "exceptions" to "forever wild." During the

⁴⁶ Leigh Brown, Patricia, New York Times, *Out-Twiggling the Neighbors; In the Adirondacks Great Camps Are Sprouting Again* (October 23, 1997, F1).

early 1930s conservationist activists successfully lobbied to prevent the passage of an amendment that would have allowed for the state to utilize Forest Preserve lands for the construction of a new bobsled run in the lead up to the 1932 Winter Olympics.

Conservationists also unsuccessfully opposed the construction of both the Whiteface Mountain highway (as the name implies a highway leading to the top of Whiteface Mountain) and the Adirondack Northway (I-87). When Santanoni came under the control of New York State “strong pressure came from some environmental groups to have the camp destroyed, which their leadership believed was mandated by the state constitution.”⁴⁷ The NYSDEC was well aware that their decisions regarding Santanoni would be closely scrutinized by conservationists, but they also realized that public attitudes were shifting in regard to the preservation of historic resources in the Adirondacks as evidenced by the willingness of voters to save the service buildings at Sagamore through a constitutional amendment. At least part of the change in attitude was the 1982 publication of Harvey Kaiser’s *Great Camps of the Adirondacks* which brought a new level of public awareness to great camps and the threats facing them.

Through the 1980s the NYSDEC maintained a “hands off” approach to the Santanoni situation and the buildings at the great camp continued to deteriorate at an alarming rate. The NYSDEC wanted to preserve the buildings at Santanoni, but they also wanted to uphold the standards of the Forest Preserve and, in particular, the “forever wild” provision and with no legal mechanism in place they were hesitate to take any action. Many of Santanoni’s buildings:

Remained remarkably sound, a testimony to their outstanding construction, problems could not be forestalled indefinitely. Many leaks had begun to appear in

⁴⁷ Longstreth, Richard, ed., *Cultural Landscapes: Balancing Nature and Heritage in Preservation Practice* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2008), 11.

the main camp's vast roof structure. The boathouse showed gaping holes in its roof, and rafters were starting to give way. Moss was growing on cedar shingles of the Artist's Studio. Some of the outbuildings of the main camp were collapsing. Daylight showed through many cracks in the barn roof. The rear roof of the Old Farm House had caved in, and the building was open to the weather with serious damage resulting. One of the masonry arches of the Creamery was cracking and separating. The porch and porch roof of the West Cottage by the Gate Lodge was falling in.⁴⁸

Twenty years of negligence and mismanagement (in the form of delayed decision making) had left many of the buildings at Santanoni fighting for their lives. The NYSDEC's policy of neglect, while certainly not as deliberately destructive as their policy of building removal by fire, was taking its toll, and water and gravity were doing all the work.



Main Camp Porte-Cochere (Figure #21)

Historic preservationists, realizing that if something was not done immediately the great camp might be lost, decided to take action during the early 1990s by forming a group

⁴⁸ *Santanoni: From Japanese Temple to Life at an Adirondack Great Camp*, 194.

named Adirondack Architectural Heritage (AARCH). The first director of AARCH, Howard Kirschenbaum, was one of the leaders of the movement to save Sagamore and subsequently to save the Sagamore service buildings. Kirschenbaum, who retired from his position as the director of the Sagamore Institute shortly before taking his new position at AARCH, was well aware of the challenges that saving Santanoni would encompass. From the very beginning of its formation AARCH was dedicated to finding a solution to the situation at Santanoni. With the creation of AARCH serving as a rallying point, allies in the effort to save Santanoni soon emerged.

The Town of Newcomb (the town where Santanoni is located) was particularly interested in seeing Santanoni preserved and restored. Santanoni and Newcomb had a long and meaningful relationship dating back to the Pruyn's decision to hire residents from Newcomb to work at Santanoni, continuing through the town's considerable efforts during the search for Douglas Legg. Newcomb realized, along with many other Adirondack municipalities, that the financial future of the region depended heavily on the tourism industry. Logging and mining were no longer going to be enough to sustain many of the hamlets, villages, and towns located in the region. Newcomb, under the leadership of its chief executive George Canon, knew that its fate as a municipality was tied directly to the preservation of Great Camp Santanoni.

Probably the biggest ally that AARCH had in its efforts to save Santanoni was the general public. Once the Santanoni Preserve became part of the New York State Adirondack Forest Preserve it was totally open to the public. In the twenty years between the time that Santanoni came under the state's control and when AARCH was formed and began its efforts to save the great camp, numerous visitors went to explore what was previously off limits to the general public. Some of those who visited were simply going to check out the

trails in a new part of the Forest Preserve, only to stumble upon the Farm Complex or Main Camp without knowing anything about the great camp.

Others came to the Santanoni Preserve specifically to check out the great camp. The popularity of great camps amongst the general public had grown tremendously and many curious visitors went to Santanoni to see and experience a great camp firsthand. The Sagamore Institute even led organized tours of Santanoni. AARCH's strategy to save Santanoni was considerably different than what was tried previously. Timing surely influenced the way in which AARCH approached their efforts. Santanoni was dying a slow death and if something was not done immediately it would probably be lost. AARCH realized that in the:

Eighteen years since the State's acquisition of Santanoni, the major players in Adirondack policy formation had been unable to agree on a solution. Rather than have everyone sit around the table again only to repeat an exercise in futility, AARCH determined initially to work Santanoni's supporters only.⁴⁹

AARCH and the Town of Newcomb worked tirelessly on the behalf of Santanoni and ultimately their lobbying efforts paid off. During the fall of 1991 New York State (Governor Cuomo) "committed to find a means of preserving and maintaining Camp Santanoni."⁵⁰ Both AARCH and the Town of Newcomb should be commended for their efforts to save Santanoni; if they had not intervened at the time that they did, Santanoni would have more than likely been lost. Their collective effort was extraordinarily effective. Shortly after the governor's decision to preserve and maintain Santanoni was made public, work began on stabilizing and preserving the buildings at the great camp.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 195.

⁵⁰ *Camp Santanoni Historic Area: Unit Management Plan*, ix.

The solution agreed upon emphasized that the “buildings would be preserved but not actively used. They would be, in effect, an educational exhibit whose interpretation would enrich the public’s understanding of Adirondack history and architecture.”⁵¹ AARCH’s work in preserving historic resources located in the Adirondacks may have started with Santanoni, but it expanded to much more in the decades that followed. AARCH was even chosen for “an award from the Adirondack Council, the region’s primary conservation organization, for the AARCH’s work in protecting the Adirondack Great Camps and fire towers.”⁵² The story of Santanoni’s preservation did not end here. The resolution agreed upon was not without ambiguities. Questions about how to go about the preservation of Santanoni remained and in 1992 the NYSDEC began work on a unit management plan which “would describe in detail how the Santanoni Preserve would be used and managed.” AARCH would assist with the creation of a historic structures report and together with “the Town of Newcomb would continue to provide interpretation at Santanoni and make plans for actual stabilization work to begin.”⁵³ Another chapter in the story of Great Camp Santanoni had just begun.

⁵¹ *Santanoni: From Japanese Temple to Life at an Adirondack Great Camp*, 201.

⁵² Stipe, Robert, ed., *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century* (The University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2003), 242.

⁵³ *Santanoni: From Japanese Temple to Life at an Adirondack Great Camp*, 202.



Main Camp Sleeping Lodge (Figure #22)

Chapter 5: Achieving Balance

While the NYSDEC set out to produce a unit management plan for Santanoni in 1992, the *Camp Santanoni Historic Area: Unit Management Plan* was not published until 2000, a full eight years later. AARCH and Newcomb were successful in convincing the owners of Santanoni, New York State, to preserve the historic great camp, but they had trouble getting the state to follow through on its commitment. Early on it was evident that the NYSDEC was not equipped to hand the preservation and restoration of Great Camp Santanoni. Furthermore, it was unreasonable for anyone to think that the NYSDEC could handle such a comprehensive responsibility given that the fact that they did little in the previous twenty years to indicate they were capable of doing the job. In fact, the state sold Great Camp Topridge because its upkeep was deemed to be too much of a financial burden, a great camp that was in much better overall shape when they acquired it than Santanoni was by the early 1990s.

Starting in the fall of 1992 with restoration of the cedar shingle roof on the Artist's Studio and continuing through today, the true managers of Santanoni have been AARCH and the Town of Newcomb. After getting permission from the NYSDEC to proceed with the restoration of the Artist's Studio's roof, the project was conceived and guided by AARCH, while Newcomb provided the funding for the materials and the contracted labor. From that point forward AARCH and Newcomb led the way on the preservation and restoration of Santanoni. Beginning in the mid-1990s and with NYSDEC's permission they began work on shingling the 16,000 square foot roof at the Main Camp, a process that would not be totally complete until 1999. For cost purposes the roof at the Main Camp was covered with asphalt shingles rather than more historically accurate cedar shingles. During this period the roof of

the Barn was restored utilizing cedar shingles. It was another project for which Newcomb provided the funding for materials, although the NYSDEC did invest significant time in the project in terms of labor.

The NYSDEC took the lead, both in terms of securing funding (through a grant from the state Environmental Protection Fund) and beginning work, on the last minute restoration of the Herdsman's Cottage. The work on the Herdsman's Cottage is symbolic of a disturbing trend that continues to this day in regard to the preservation and restoration of Santanoni's many buildings. Rather than being proactive and preserving buildings before they reach a breaking point, the tendency has been to wait until the buildings are on the verge of structural failure (or are already in the midst of structural failure) before taking action to save them. Examples of this trend include the preservation of Santanoni's Herdsman's Cottage, Boathouse, and Bathhouse. No one at the NYSDEC wanted to see the buildings at Santanoni demolished by neglect (this was especially true of Chuck Vandrei, the NYSDEC's historic preservation officer and staunch supporter of the preservation work being done at Santanoni), but the fact remained that the preservation and restoration of Santanoni was simply never a top priority for NYSDEC as a whole.

Furthermore, the NYSDEC was never equipped to handle the responsibility of historic preservation project with the size and scope of Santanoni. The unit management "planning process for Camp Santanoni began in earnest in 1995," Santanoni was already listed on both the New York State and National Register of Historic Places.⁵⁴ It would take the state another five years to complete to the unit management plan. The *Camp Santanoni Historic Area: Unit Management Plan* was completed in August of 2000. As part of the unit management plan Great Camp Santanoni was designated a Historic Area by the Adirondack

⁵⁴ *Camp Santanoni Historic Area: Unit Management Plan*, 3.

Park Agency, a designation it shared with only two other historic sites in the Adirondacks, John Brown's Farm and Crown Point. Unbelievably, Santanoni is the only one of the three Historic Areas managed by the NYSDEC. Both John Brown's Farm and Crown Point are managed by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.

It is hard to pinpoint the exact reason for this, but there appears to be at least one possible explanation. The Camp Santanoni Historic Area (the Main Camp, the Farm Complex, the Gate Lodge, and the road connecting the three components) is located right in the middle of Adirondack Park and is essentially surrounded by the Forest Preserve. It is located in a part of the park that is supposed to be more "forever wild" than most. In contrast, John Brown's Farm is located in Lake Placid, a burgeoning metropolis compared to most Adirondack towns, villages, and hamlets. Moreover, Crown Point is located on the far eastern edge of Adirondack Park on the border of New York and Vermont along the shores of Lake Champlain. As a result of the jurisdictional divide (it is understood that the NYSDEC is the leader when it comes to matters relating to Adirondack Park) between the NYSDEC and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, Santanoni has suffered.

Santanoni would be better served by a state level office that specializes in the preservation of historic resources rather than being left in the hands of a state level department that looks at historic preservation as a financial drain on their already limited resources. The unit management plan published in 2000 made clear the level of interpretation, preservation, and restoration that would be allowed at Santanoni. First, the only parts of the Santanoni Preserve included in the newly created Historic Area would be the 32.2 acres of land that make up the Main Camp, the Farm Complex, and the Gate Lodge. The remaining approximately 12,868 acres of land that were originally part of the Santanoni

Preserve were not included in the Historic Area. Second, the Historic Area would remain part of the Forest Preserve and, in keeping with the “forever wild” nature of the Forest Preserve, certain guidelines would have to be followed. In those guidelines four points are made clear, the first three of which are:

The primary guidelines for historic areas will be to preserve the quality and character of the historic resources, that is, to the greatest extent feasible, in a setting and on a scale in harmony with the relatively wild and undeveloped character of the Adirondack Park.

All historic areas will be designed, managed, and interpreted so as to blend with the Adirondack environment and have the minimum adverse impact possible on surrounding state lands and nearby private holdings.

Construction and development activities in historic areas will: avoid material alternation of wetlands; minimize extensive topographical alterations; limit vegetative clearing; and, preserve the scenic, natural and open space resources of the historic area.⁵⁵

Based on these guidelines, the preservation of historic resources within the Forest Preserve, like Santanoni, would not be a problem as long as the act of preserving those resources did virtually nothing to disturb the surrounding Forest Preserve.

No motorized vehicles would be permitted in the Camp Santanoni Historic Area, meaning that anyone who wished to visit the great camp would have to make the ten mile round trip by foot, bicycle, horse, or carriage. Furthermore, the unit management plan made it clear that:

The buildings would not be used for public accommodations or the serving of food. The buildings would, in effect, be exhibits that would be interpreted to the public. The interpretation would help visitors appreciate the relationship of Santanoni and other Adirondack camps in the growing conservation movement in the Adirondacks and the nation. Exhibits and guided tours would be appropriate forms of interpretation.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan* (Adirondack Park Agency, 2001), 42.

⁵⁶ *Santanoni: From Japanese Temple to Life at an Adirondack Great Camp*, 206.

The unit management plan was fairly specific in terms of how each of the existing buildings at Santanoni would be preserved and/or restored. For instance, when planning for the preservation of the Bathhouse the plan notes “structurally this small building is in fair condition but like the boat house was an integral part of camp life. It is proposed that this structure be maintained and reset on its mud sills at its current location.”⁵⁷ Unfortunately, approximately eight years after the unit management was published the bathhouse was no longer in “fair condition” but rather on the verge of structural failure. A preservation carpenter (hired by AARCH and paid by Newcomb) was hired during the summer of 2008 to begin to stabilize and preserve the ailing building.

In the years that followed the publication of *Camp Santanoni Historic Area Unit Management Plan* surprisingly little changed in the way the NYSDEC approached their responsibilities as managers of Great Camp Santanoni. Even after Santanoni was designated a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service in 2000 the NYSDEC did not take appropriate action in regard to the preservation and restoration of Santanoni. National Historic Landmarks, of which there are less than 2,500 in the United States, are “acknowledged as among the nation’s most significant historic places” and “possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States.”⁵⁸

In addition to the difficulties presented by the preservation and restoration of Santanoni’s buildings, the unit management plan the NYSDEC noted that:

⁵⁷ *Camp Santanoni Historic Area: Unit Management Plan*, 42.

⁵⁸ *National Register Bulletin: How to Prepare National Historic Landmark Nominations* (National Park Service, 1999), 9.

Acts of vandalism have occurred at Camp Santanoni; fortunately these have been limited to window breakage and unauthorized entry into buildings. Imprudent attempts to build fires or accidents with camp stoves have resulted in several charred patches on veranda floor boards, and several fires have been built within an unsafe distance of the structures.⁵⁹

During the twenty year period that Santanoni was more or less abandoned and neglected by the NYSDEC, visitors hiking on the numerous trails surrounding Santanoni stumbled across the great camp without expecting to do so. Some of these visitors, thinking that the buildings were deserted, took “souvenirs” such as brass fittings from the built in bench seating located in the Main Lodge’s great room. Unbelievably, even after the unit management plan was published the NYSDEC did not hire a full-time staff person to serve as an onsite historic preservation specialist for the great camp. Someone (or more than one person) who could provide information to visitors, unlock doors to those buildings open to the public, work on long-term preservation and restoration projects, and keep watch over the structural integrity of the buildings themselves.

The decision by the NYSDEC not to hire a historic preservation specialist to act as a site supervisor at Santanoni proved to be a terrible mistake. In July of 2004, the Barn at the Great Camp Santanoni Farm Complex burned to the ground. The cause of the fire is somewhat uncertain, although one of three teenagers who were visiting Santanoni admitted to smoking inside of the Barn on the same day that it burned down. The Barn was perhaps the most beloved building in the entire great camp. It could be rebuilt. Enough documentation (architectural drawings, historic photographs, modern photographs) exists to rebuild the Barn virtually exactly as it was, but at approximately one million dollars the cost is currently prohibitive. Furthermore, there are questions about whether or not

⁵⁹ *Camp Santanoni Historic Area: Unit Management Plan*, 33.

“reconstruction” would be permitted within Historic Areas located in the Forest Preserve (though the foundation of the Barn is still in place).

Following the Barn’s destruction, AARCH wrote a resolution that was presented to New York State and in particular the NYSDEC. Within the resolution there were five simple steps regarding the future of Santanoni:

1. Update and implement a fire protection plan for all the camp’s remaining buildings.
2. Ensure the state pays its share of the costs for stabilizing and conserving the remaining buildings and infrastructure at Santanoni
3. Hire a full-time, professional site manager and adequate staff to supervise, operate and interpret Santanoni for its visitors. (Optimally, staff would include a conservator, an assistant, and three resident guides, one living in each of the camp’s three complexes.)
4. Rebuild the Santanoni barn – but with the understanding that doing so should not come at the expense of the buildings still left at Santanoni.
5. Push the state to designate a specific line in the Department of Environmental Conservation budget for the preserving and operating Camp Santanoni.⁶⁰

When Chuck Vandrei, the historic preservation officer for NYSDEC, asked some of his colleagues at the NYSDEC about the possibility of reconstructing the Barn they responded by rolling their eyes.⁶¹

AARCH and Newcomb continue to be the de-facto managers of the great camp. In 1998, a local expert in log construction, Michael Frenette, was hired by AARCH (and paid by Newcomb) to begin work on the restoration of much of porch system at the Main Camp. Since he was first hired in 1998 Michael has spent a portion of each summer working at Santanoni. The exceptional quality of Michael’s (and his team’s) work and his passion for the great camp made him a natural fit for the many preservation and restoration projects he has

⁶⁰ Manchester, Lee, Lake Placid News, *Preserving Santanoni* (September 10, 2004).

⁶¹ Manchester, Lee, Adirondack Daily Enterprise, *Fire destroys Santanoni barn; arson possible* (July 15, 2004).

undertaken at Santanoni. Michael's most ambitious and extraordinary work at Santanoni started in 2003.

In that year Michael began the restoration of the Santanoni Boathouse. The Santanoni Boathouse was suffering from such serious structural failure that if Michael did not begin work on it when he did, the building would have been lost forever. Utilizing as much of the existing building fabric as possible, Michael and his team completed the restoration of the Boathouse in 2007. When the Boathouse restoration was complete, a ceremony was held by AARCH to celebrate the building's miraculous resurrection. Susan Pruyn King, the granddaughter of Robert and Anna Pruyn, attended the ceremony and was so awestruck by what she saw that she was nearly brought to tears. Following the completion of the Boathouse restoration, Michael and his team began work on restoring the Main Camp's porte-cochere during the summer of 2008.

Newcomb's financial commitment has proven through time to be truly amazing. Each summer the town provides the financial backing to pay for summer interns (typically college students majoring in historic preservation or a related field), who are sought and hired by AARCH, to come to Santanoni to work on a variety of hands-on work projects and to interpret the great camp to visitors. During the summer of 2008 four interns were hired, the highest number ever, and together the interns accomplished a significant amount of work including the complete re-staining of most the buildings at the Main Camp. More importantly, the interns were there each day to interpret Great Camp Santanoni to the thousands of visitors who visited the historic site during the summer months.

While AARCH and Newcomb have fulfilled their unexpected roles as the true site managers of Santanoni quite well they both realize that the current stewardship situation at Santanoni is unsustainable in the long term. The time has come and passed for New York

State, and specifically the NYSDEC, to fulfill its responsibilities as the owner of this National Historic Landmark. This paper could continue listing all the ways that the NYSDEC's stewardship of Santanoni has been ineffective and at time negligent, but the point has been made: while the NYSDEC set out with good intentions in terms of their responsibility to Santanoni and while they have done some wonderful things for the great camp, as a whole their management history has displayed their inability to be the primary steward of this historic property. With that noted, solutions to the current situation are not easy to come by. But it is time for hard decisions regarding Santanoni, and for that matter the preservation of all historic resources located on state-owned lands in Adirondack Park, to be made.

At the 1978 conference at Great Camp Topridge between the New York State Office of Parks and Recreation and the NYSDEC, a number of solutions to the problems associated with the "management of historic structures in state ownership in the Adirondack Park" were proposed. Workshop participants proposed that a constitutional amendment be passed as a "long-range solution to the problem." A vote of workshop participants showed support for the idea with "21 in favor of the resolution, 8 against, with 5 abstentions." Participants agreed "that any constitutional amendment should be narrowly drawn so as to be clearly explainable to the general public and to avoid any unnecessary adverse threat to the wild forest character of the Forest Preserve."⁶²

It is now 2009 over thirty years after the conference Topridge and New York State is still dealing with many of the same issues. Even in 1978, conference participants recognized:

⁶² *Cultural Heritage in the Wilds* (New York State Office of Parks and Recreation & New York State Office of Environmental Conservation, Conference Report, 1978), 50.

That while the conference had focused upon the Great Camps, they are only one type of historic preservation opportunity in the Adirondacks. Any solution, constitutional amendment or other form, must stress historic preservation problems for the whole of the Adirondack historic-cultural heritage, not only the Great Camps.⁶³

An amendment to the New York State Constitution allowing for the effective management of historic resources located on state-owned lands in the Adirondacks needs to be passed and should have been passed long ago. Furthermore, history has proven that the NYSDEC is not an organization capable of handling the responsibility of being the primary manager of a historic resource the caliber of Great Camp Santanoni, a National Historic Landmark. If the great camp remains a state-owned historic resource then the primary steward of Santanoni should naturally be the Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (just as they are the managers of the only other two Historic Areas in the Adirondacks).

Should New York State decide to sell or grant Santanoni to a private owner, then they should be prudent to avoid the same mistake they made when they sold Great Camp Topridge. They would need to place historic easement on the property to ensure that none of the existing historic fabric at Santanoni (buildings and archaeological sites) would be lost. Moreover, if the state did sell Santanoni they would do well to sell it to a nonprofit organization committed to preserving, restoring, and interpreting Santanoni (much like the Sagamore Institute has done at Great Camp Sagamore). However, the idea of selling Santanoni to a private owner is a little hard to fathom. Both the initial purchase price and the costs associated with upkeep, much less the preservation, restoration, and interpretation of the great camp, would be staggering.

This paper does not advocate for the selling of Santanoni, but rather for the responsibility of the management to be transferred to the Office of Parks, Recreation, and

⁶³ Ibid., 66.

Historic Preservation, accompanied by the allocation of appropriate funding to support the full preservation, restoration, and interpretation of the great camp. In addition, at least one historic preservation specialist needs to be hired to work at Santanoni on a full-time, year round basis, supervising all three sections daily, completing preservation and restoration work projects and, most importantly, interpreting the site to the visiting public. Currently, Santanoni is only open for interpretation during the summer months, with the summer interns serving as the primary guides to the site. Full color, weather proof, and illustrated interpretative signage needs to be installed for all three sections of the great camp. Also, a self guided walking tour should be printed so that visitors who visit Santanoni during the fall, winter, or spring (most of the year) are provided with some form of interpretation. If at all possible the public should continue to be allowed to visit Santanoni at no cost.

Great Camp Santanoni is a National Historic Landmark located in New York States Adirondack Park Forest Preserve. It is currently inadequately preserved, restored, and interpreted. It has been and in some ways continues to be neglected by its caretaker, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. However, Santanoni is loved by people throughout the United States. The story that Santanoni tells is significant locally, regionally, and nationally and is the reason why the National Park Service designated it a National Historic Landmark in 2000. The problems facing Santanoni stem, at the most fundamental level, from the inability of New York State to satisfactorily balance historic preservation and environmental conservation in Adirondack Park, and specifically its inability to care for those historic resources that are situated on state-owned land in Adirondack Park.

What is certain is that the state cannot continue to keep doing things the same way they have been doing them, while expecting there to be a different result. Millions of acres

of land maintained their pristine nature due the “forever wild” provision that was included within Article XIV of the New York State Constitution, which was passed over one hundred and twenty years ago. Unfortunately, in cases involving historic resources located on public lands in Adirondack Park, the “forever wild” provision has proven to be harmful. The Adirondacks are full of both awe-inspiring natural creations and awe inspiring cultural creations and it is important to not look at them as mutually exclusive. One cannot help but wonder if “conservation policy in the Adirondacks could be contested along a continuum of more-or-less choices rather than according to all-or-nothing slogans.”⁶⁴

This paper is going to close with a story. During the summer of 2008 I had the pleasure of meeting the daughter of one of the full-time staff members who worked at the Santanoni Farm Complex while it was still fully operational. While I met her on more than one occasion, but on this particular occasion I ran into her at the Farm Complex. We had a wonderful conversation about the farm and what life was like for her growing up in a place like Great Camp Santanoni. She even took a few moments to show me the location of where a greenhouse was once located. Towards the end of our time together she expressed to me her desire to see Santanoni fully restored. She made it clear to me that she felt that progress on the preservation and restoration of the buildings at Santanoni was moving along too slow. While researching for and writing this paper I came to wholeheartedly agree with her sentiment. After nearly forty years of state ownership, it is safe to say that progress at Santanoni is moving too slowly. It is time for New York State to make long delayed decisions and to take action on behalf of this incredible historic resource.

⁶⁴ Minter, Ben and Robert Manning, eds., *Reconstructing Conservation: Finding Common Ground* (Island Press: Washington, DC, 2003), 188.

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