

## THE HISTORY OF THE INN (Cunningham house)

History of "The Inn" Laura Cunningham residence , 74 Ridgely Drive, on former Leggett Estate, adjoins original Leggett estate properties including Francis H. Leggett "Ridgely Manor" (now known as Vivekananda Ridgely Retreat ) at 101 Leggett Road, Stone Ridge; the entire estate has strong qualifications for landmark designation, even National Register of Historic Places. I am applying for designation for only my own residence at 74 Ridgely Drive, which predates but became part of and still adjoins every border of the former Leggett estate, and occupies the center of what was once a several hundred acre "Ridgely Park", sharing the original driveway, The Avenue, and has vistas on all sides of the original estate.

### **Famous Persons associated with the estate:**

Francis H. Leggett, Swami Vivekananda, Lord David Margesson.

The Inn predates Ridgely Park, the original Francis H. Leggett estate. The Inn is listed in the 1810 census. In the cellar are beams that are not from a lumberyard and may even be much earlier, even late 1700's.

The main Leggett estate was created in 1892 but Francis H. Leggett acquired the Inn and also purchased many other properties along Leggett Road, which he also built. He and his architect Charles Coolidge Haight apparently updated The Inn in 1892 and some architectural details such as small windows framing the front door are identical to the Manor and the original Inn (once a "select boarding house" and before that a farmhouse)

was attached to what had been a summer kitchen and servants' house, which sat atop a cistern right behind the main house. This small house was moved to connect to the main building, connecting with an addition (1892) This addition, once joined, became part of The Shawangunk Inn, also known as The Innlet, extra guest quarters, while the main section was still called The Inn. Francis H. Leggett rented The Inn and Innlet as a "summer cottage" to his friends and relatives from 1892-1909 (time of his death). Many famous personages stayed in the Inn (letter is attached which Historian Charles Cullen discovered which records the visits of some well-known individuals.

Famous Personages connected to the property:

### **Architect Charles Coolidge Haight:**

The remaining part of the original Leggett estate, composing of the Manor, the Stables and the Casino was built in 1892 , designed by famous architect Charles Coolidge Haight. Haight was also the architect of already National Register landmarked buildings in New York City . He worked on other buildings which Leggett purchased, including Clematis Cottage at 55 Leggett Road and on the expansion addition and details such as windows and transoms in The Inn.

### **Francis H. Leggett** (born 1840 , died 1909

Very prosperous businessman who started and owned Leggett Foods. Leggett made a great fortune, and owned warehouse in Tribeca, and homes in England, New Hampshire, and Paris. He was internationally known for his grocery business He partnered with A.Hammond who was a

timber baron (who named a famous schooner the Francis H. Leggett after his friend and associate) . Leggett was the primary developer of this Leggett Road and its surrounds. In a very real way, he created this section of Stone Ridge. He called his estate "Ridgely Park" and had it designed in the Frederic Olmsted manner as a park with "romantic vistas" and a winding curved driveway, lined by sugar maples . The driveway still exists and leads to The Inn.

Leggett was also part owner of the lands which later became the National Redwood Forest, through his partnership with A. Hammond. Leggett's direct descendants owned the original Ridgely Manor estate and The Inn until I purchased The Inn with 12.17 acres in 1981.

The Leggett family had often occupied The Inn and Innlet.

Francis H. Leggett's daughter , Frances Leggett Margesson married an English Lord, Lord David Margesson.

**Lord David Margesson** was the Secretary of Navy (War) from 1940-42, under Winston Churchill. The title was inherited by their son Francis Margesson who sold the house to me. Frances Leggett was an author (*Late and Soon*) and though she divorced Lord David Margesson, she was connected to many famous English personages through him, including his mother Isabel Margesson. Lord David often visited Ridgely, the Manor and the Inn.



It was through Francis H. Leggett's second wife, Betty MacLeod, and her inseparable sister, Josephine MacLeod, that Francis H. Leggett became a devotee and close associate of the most famous personage connected to the properties:

### **Swami Vivekananda:**

**Swami Vivekananda** (Bengali: ] ; 12 January 1863 – 4 July 1902), born **Narendranath Datta** ), was an Indian Hindu monk, a chief disciple of the 19th-century Indian mystic Ramakrishna. He was a key figure in the introduction of the Indian philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga to the Western world and is credited with raising interfaith awareness, bringing Hinduism to the status of a major world religion during the late 19th century. He was a major force in the revival of Hinduism in India, and contributed to the concept of nationalism in colonial India. Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. He is perhaps best known for his speech in which he introduced Hinduism at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893. The famous speech began with the words - "Sisters and brothers of America ... "

Swami Vivekananda spent considerable time on the property beginning in 1895 and often visited The Inn. A photograph of him on the porch of the Inn is included in the book *Saint Sara*, a history of Sarah Bull, and the story of his blessing the two women and the house, is included in several books, listed in the bibliography, *Late and Soon*, (1968 John Murray Publisher, London, England, later Houghton Mifflin, Boston, Massachusetts by Frances Leggett (daughter of Francis H. Leggett) and *Josephine MacLeod and Vivekananda's Mission by Linda Prugh*, published by Sri Ramakrishna

Math Chennai, India (detailed description of the blessing in The Inn on page 195).

Born into an aristocratic Bengali Kayastha family of Calcutta, Vivekananda was inclined towards spirituality. He was influenced by his guru, Ramakrishna, from whom he learnt that all living beings were an embodiment of the divine self; therefore, service to God could be rendered by service to humankind. After Ramakrishna's death, Vivekananda toured the Indian subcontinent extensively and acquired first-hand knowledge of the conditions prevailing in British India. He later travelled to the United States, representing India at the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions. Vivekananda conducted hundreds of public and private lectures and classes, disseminating tenets of Hindu philosophy in the United States, England and Europe. In India, Vivekananda is regarded as a patriotic saint, and his birthday is celebrated as National Youth Day.

He died in India on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1902, during a long meditation. It was believed that he had attained an exalted state which ruptured a blood vessel in his brain. Ever since that time, devotees have arrived at Ridgely, now a retreat, and paid their respects for the day of meditation, talks and walks along the shrine trail which encircles the current acreage of the Retreat and borders the property now owned by Laura Cunningham. The Swami Vivekananda became acquainted with Francis H. Leggett in 1895 – having met him through his soon to be sister-in-law, Josephine MacLeod, who was a follower. Soon, Frank Leggett was impressed and drawn to the young Swami and invited him to his estate Ridgely in Stone Ridge in 1895.

They became so close that Vivekananda accompanied Frank Leggett and his soon to be bride Betty Sturges to Paris, where Frank and Betty were married. Vivekananda stayed at their Paris home.

There soon followed two 10-day visits to Ridgely that same year 1895. During those visits, he was described as a charismatic figure, striding the grounds in his saffron robes. He often meditated under a large oak tree (a young oak is now growing on that spot, at a significant corner of the property- the grandson of Frank Leggett, Lord Francis Margesson's ashes are buried there}.

The summer of 1899 was known as "The Great Summer" for the Swami stayed at Ridgely, for 10 full weeks.

### **The Vivekananda Retreat (Leggett Estate)**

The Retreat as it is today: 82.6 acres, 3 buildings: The Manor, the Stables, and the Casino.

These buildings were all built in 1892, by Francis H. Leggett and the Manor was designed by the famous architect Charles Coolidge Haight.

At the time of Leggett's purchase of the original 130 acres lands, he also acquired two already existing properties, the Little Cottage (71 Leggett Road) and the Shawangunk Inn, 74 Ridgely Drive (Laura Cunningham residence ) both now privately owned.

Francis H. Leggett's concept was to create a Park, Ridgely Park, English style, a smaller version of Tuxedo Park and more like estates in England. A Manor house that would preside over several large "cottages" which would be seasonal rentals.

He later purchased more homes along Leggett Road. Clematis Cottage retains its original character, as does Swamis' Cottage, or Little Cottage at 71 Leggett Road. Charles C. Haight stayed in Clematis Cottage while working on Ridgely Manor, and doing some renovations on the Inn.

The landscaping is alleged to be the work of former associates of the famous Fredric Law Olmsted. The grounds certainly follow his concept of "the romantic vista"- bucolic lawns and some pasture, bordered by wilder stretches of forest. There are views of the Catskill mountains in the distance on one side, and the Shawangunk Ridge on the other.

Contributing factors:

The drive that winds through the original estate and is still present is called The Avenue.

In 1998, almost 100 years after "The Great Summer", the followers of the Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna Order purchased the Leggett Estate, as the 3-building, 82.86 acre property. Some 50 acres had been sold or donated to the creation of Ulster Community College. The pre-existing houses and lands that had been acquired later were sold to private owners, including The Inn, Cunningham house.

The Retreat established The Shrine Trail which encircles the property, with intermittent small statuary or symbols representing different faiths: a small Buddha, the Holy Virgin, a Jewish Star...

The Inn, now privately owned, can be seen in the distance.

Francis H. Leggett died commuting from Binnewater to Weehawken on



August 29, 1909, but the estate remained in the family until the Vivekananda purchase in 1998

Laura Cunningham purchased the Inn and 12.17 acres on July 2, 1981.

Frances Leggett, Frank's daughter, had married David Margesson, who held a prominent position in England as Secretary of the Navy during World War II. For his service, he was awarded a hereditary title of Viscount Lord Margesson. They divorced in 1940.

When the couple divorced, Frances and her three children returned to Ridgely Manor where she remained until her death in 1977.

After her death, her son, Lord Francis Margesson and his wife, Helena and their four children moved into the Manor. Lord and Lady Margesson remained until the sale in 1998.

The existing Retreat houses: The Manor, the Stables and Casino remain almost untouched by time. Many original furnishings remain. The only alterations are the accommodations to allow handicapped access. The current Swami is Gitaprana (Dorothy Baloff) and the current use is for occasional retreats and frequent Vedanta classes. Vivekananda is accepted as a Church and was removed from the Marbletown tax rolls but makes donation in lieu of taxes.

Adjoining Neighbor:

The Pine Farm: The oldest and most significant factor is the Pine Farm (1750, a central room said to be much earlier, 1600s.) , the pre-revolutionary stone house that was also incorporated by Francis H. Leggett when he established Ridgely Park in 1892. The Marbletown Bicentennial



book contains this quoted history and a photograph of an early version of the stone house. "Isaac Hasbrouck, son of Jacob, son of Jean, the Patentee (Patentees were the first 14 Huguenot landowners in Ulster County, immigrated there in 1673. , was born in 1722. He married, in 1745, Mary, daughter of Jacobus Bruyn of Shawangunk. They moved to the town of Marbletown and lived in the house in which their son, Severyn afterwards resided, which is still standing, about a mile east of Stone Ridge and now owned by James Pine." *History of New Paltz: Lefever*. In addition: The family are direct first generation descendants of the original Huguenots who settled in Ulster County

### **Description of the Inn, the house itself:**

The Inn is a sprawling Colonial-style residence, with wide board floors, 3 original fireplaces, and a full unfinished attic and unfinished basement. There is a front porch and two side porches. It has 7 bedrooms and 6 bathrooms, a full kitchen and a pantry kitchen.

The configuration of rooms and porches changed in 1892 when two building were joined, the main house "The Inn" and a smaller house "The Innlet". The position of the driveway was changed to include a stone carriage step engraved May 9, 1849.

Behind the house, is the cistern/foundation now adapted for use as a pool.

In front of the house, in the ruin of a burned barn, (circa 1947) rests the remains of a rustic tennis court.

There is a barn (1800s) with cupola that sits at a right angle to the house.

The driveway forms a circle in front of the house, and also loops behind the house to reconnect with the main driveway,

