

Introduction: Norrie Point Environmental Center in Mills-Norrie State Park, Staatsburg, NY

The facilities that we visit today in Staatsburg, including the Norrie Point Environmental Center in Staatsburg are actually the product of several very generous gifts of land and some purchases. The original 323 acres grounds were originally given to the State of New York in 1934. That same year the State acquired Esopus Island. The gentleman farmer, President of the United States Franklin Delano Roosevelt, sent the Civilian Conservation Corps to build the park from 1934-1937. Key infrastructure included a new camping area and the construction of a restaurant called the "Point Inn" which served diners from 1937 to the early 1960s. The WPA continued working on the site from 1937-1941. Many locals during the Great Depression later recalled the park as a very special place to go hiking and swimming during troubled economic times.

In 1938 the park expanded with the addition of 190 acres of land and the 1894 mansion, a gift of Gladys Phipps. The park became the "Ogden Mills and Ruth Livingston Mills Memorial State Park" that same year. The home is considered a prime example of Gilded Age architecture and can boast because of its ties to McKim, Mead and White. In 1952 the Norrie Boat Basin opened, allowing from the area local access to the riverfront. From 1952-1961 the park was further enlarged with the addition of 125 acres of land that included the original 9-hole golf course and the land to expand another 9 holes. The Dinsmore Golf Clubhouse was opened in 1965. It is considered the third oldest golf course in the United States.

From 1963-1971 the Land Acquisition Bond Act allowed the park to absorb another 265 acres of land that included the Lewis Gordon Norrie Playground. He was nineteen year old member of a locally prominent family and was killed instantly in an alcohol-related automobile accident in 1924. A small monument was built in his memory can be found along the entry road to the park. The former residence of Lydig Manson Hoyt, "The Point," was also added in 1963. Locals call the ruins "Hoyt House," but it should be noted that it was designed by Calvert Vaux, the same man who designed Central Park. Its slow deterioration has been a source of major controversy for the state. It wasn't until 1971 that Gladys Mills Phipps gifted the contents of the mansion to the people of New York State. In 1970 the park became officially a State Historic Site.

The State acquired the former Staatsburg School property the State in 2003. After renovating the structure the Taconic Regional Offices were moved from the basement of the mansion to the school. With the acquisition of 97 additional acres of what was once the Hopeland, the park experienced its latest expansion. The mansion was the residence of H.M.S. Titanic victim John Jacob Astor's son Vincent Astor.

Today, the former "Point Inn" is home to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Norrie Point Environmental Center and is the headquarters of the Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve. Environmental programs are continuously offered to people of all ages. Students from grade 6 to college also conduct formal studies on the site which includes fully equipped laboratory, classrooms, and meeting facilities.

Primary Sources

-*The New York Times* article on the Vincent Astor wedding, May 1, 1914:

<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F60C11FF3C5E13738DDDA80894DD405B848DF1D3>

-Master Plan for the Mills Norrie Historic Site (1913):

<http://nysparks.com/inside-our-agency/documents/MasterPlans/MillsNorrieStaatsburghStateHistoricSite/MillsNorrieStaatsburghStateMasterPlan.pdf>

Print/Web Resources

-Official site of the Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve:

<http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4915.html>

-Norrie Point website:

<http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/92349.html>

-Website for the Ogden Mills and Ruth Livingston Mills Historic Site:

<http://nysparks.com/parks/33/details.aspx>

-Images from “Hudson Valley Ruins” website by T.E. Rinaldi.

<http://www.hudsonvalleyruins.org/rinaldi/PAGES/thepoint.htm>

Teaching About Mills Norrie Environmental Center

Lesson Plan Introduction

The story of the Mills Norrie Environmental Center wouldn't make much sense without understanding how the park's various components came together. As the narrative illustrates, the park includes an historic mansion, a marina, a golf course, and several recreational opportunities (hiking, fishing, bird watching).

Suggested Grade Level: 8+

ACTIVITIES MENU

Activity 1: Civilian Conservation Corps and Norrie Point

- The original facilities at the Mills Norrie facility were constructed from 1937-1941 by the Civilian Conservation Corps. It radically altered the landscape of the park's acreage.
- **Choose a park** that was constructed in the United States during the Great Depression and
- **Construct a PowerPoint or on a poster board:**
 - List all of the projects completed by the Civilian Conservation Corps at the specific park you chose.
 - If possible, locate or draw a map of the park in the presentation.
- A list of Civilian Conservation Corps camps can be found at:
 - http://ccclegacy.org/CCC_Camp_Lists.html

Activity 2: Fish and bird life of the Hudson River Valley

- **Research** various fish and birds that inhabit the Hudson River. Lists are:
 - FISH: http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/remediation_hudson_pdf/hrepfishlist.pdf
 - BIRDS: <http://www.hras.org/pdffiles/BIRDOFWe.pdf>
- Choose three birds and three fish and **report** on them in **PowerPoint** form.

Activity 3: Advocate for an endangered species

- The Audubon Society has identified several bird species that are endangered in the Hudson River Valley.
 - A list of these birds can be found at: <http://ny.audubon.org/hudson-river-valley-conservation>
- Choose a bird species and:
 - **Write your legislator** to advocate for more resources to protect this species.
 - **Create a bumper sticker** with an image of the species and a slogan designed to protect the bird.

Activity 4: The effects of global warming and human action on the Hudson River and Hudson Valley flora and fauna

- **Research** some historical images of the Hudson River Valley, flora, and fauna across history.
- **Compare and contrast** any changes in flora and fauna using a **Venn Diagram**.
- **List** several species of plants, birds, and fish that might be extinct or are endangered species in the Hudson River Valley.
- **Draw conclusions** regarding changes in history and economy in the Hudson River Valley that might have had an effect on the changes in the flora and fauna.
- **Design** a social action to draw the attention to the changes in the Hudson River Valley.