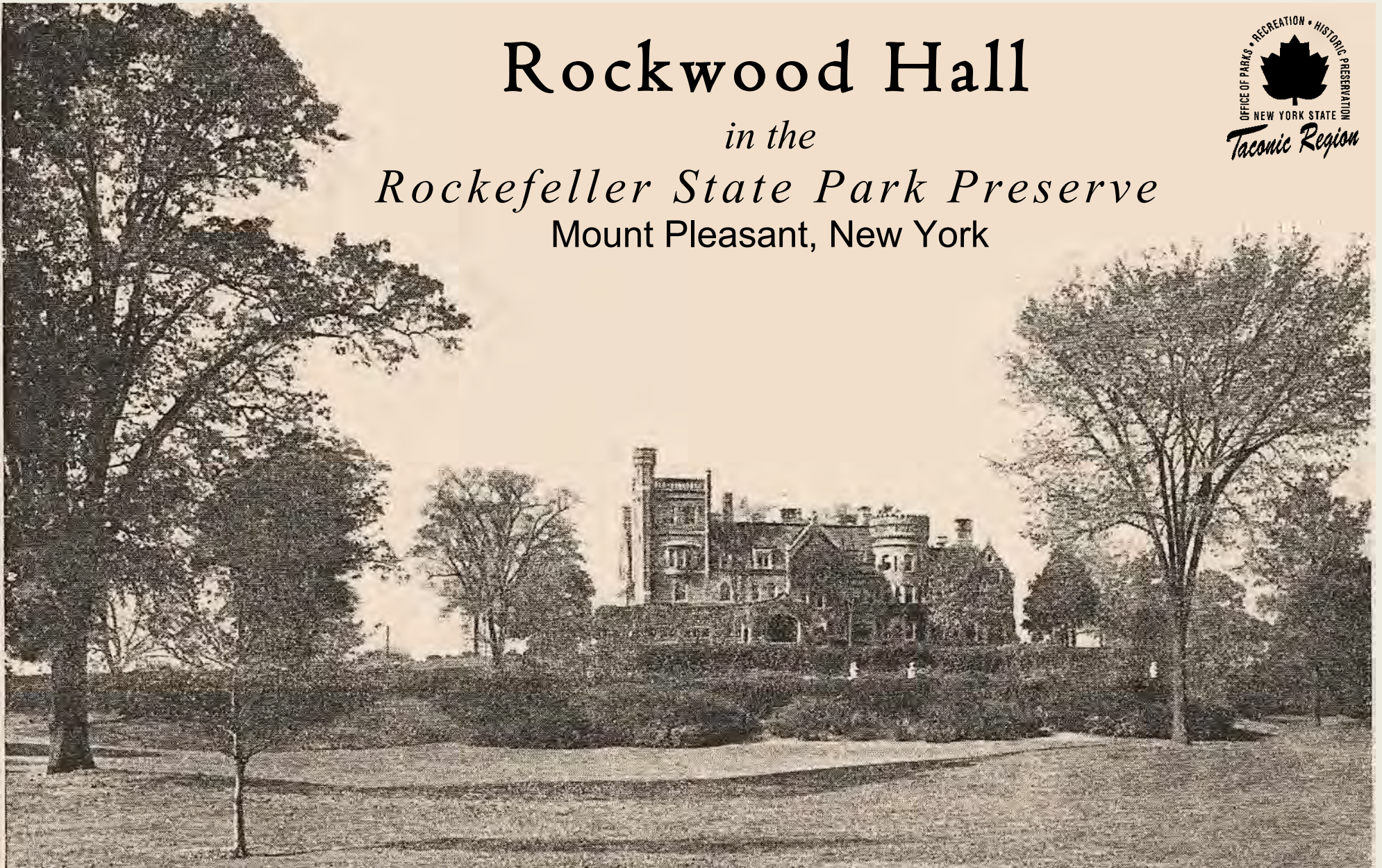


# Rockwood Hall

*in the*

*Rockefeller State Park Preserve*

Mount Pleasant, New York



Rockwood Hall is the site of the former home of William Rockefeller (1841-1922), brother of John D. Rockefeller and co-founder of the Standard Oil Company. Laurance S. Rockefeller donated the property to New York State as park land in 1999





## The Original Inhabitants

Native Americans once lived on these hills along the Hudson, which they called “**Muhheakantuck**” - the “river that flows both ways”.

The **Weckquaesgeek**, who were a part of the Algonquin-speaking Lenni Lenape tribe, lived in wood and skin-covered wigwams.

They were primarily sedentary and agrarian, but established seasonal and hunting encampments. The Hudson Valley was rich in fish and

oysters, bears, wolves, deer, beaver, muskrat, and squirrels – all vital foods. In addition, they farmed and harvested wild herbs, tubers and walnuts, acorns, hazelnuts, hickories, and natural products for baskets, tools, canoes, and clothing.



Disease carried by early European explorers weakened the tribes and various treaties with Europeans over the succeeding decades eventually served to end many of the tribe's land claims along the Hudson River.



## Early European History

The first European to hold title to this property was a Dutchman named **Adriaen Van der Donck** (left), who in 1645 acquired a very large tract of land from the Dutch West Indies Company.

He sold his holdings in 1693 to **Frederick Philipse I**, who obtained a royal charter from King William III and Queen Mary of Great Britain and established Phillipsburg Manor, an estate of over 50,000 acres in Westchester County and the present-day Bronx.





The vast land holdings were handed down to Frederick's son **Adolphus**, and eventually to **Frederick Philipse III** (left), who supported the British in the American Revolution and later fled to England. After the Revolution, New York confiscated his property, which was divided up into almost 200 different parcels. Among the eventual owners was **Commodore Alexander Slidell Mackenzie**, who lived on the land known today as Rockwood Hall from 1840 until his death in 1848.

## Creation of an Estate

Wealthy merchant

**Edwin Bartlett**

acquired the Mackenzie holdings in 1848 and built an English Gothic-style castle of locally-quarried stone, which he called Rockwood.

In 1860 he sold the property to his business associate, **William Aspinwall**.



*Photolithograph from A. A. Turner, Villas on the Hudson, 1860*

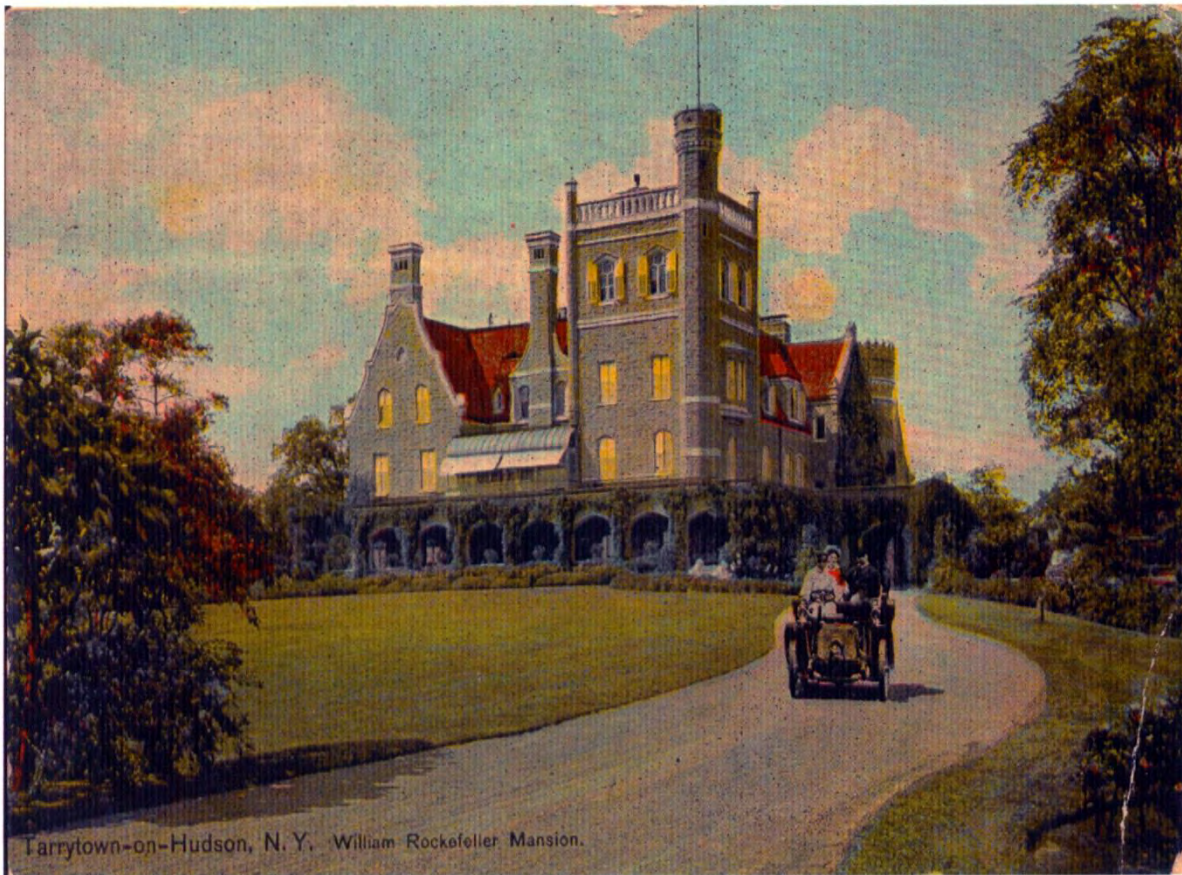




Aspinwall used the estate as a summer residence, improving the building and land and enlarging his holdings to about 200 acres.

Aspinwall died in 1875, and his son, **General Lloyd Aspinwall** (left), a New York lawyer who served in the 22nd New York State Militia in the Civil War and became a Brigadier General in the National Guard, lived on the estate until 1886, when the property was sold to **William Rockefeller** for \$150,000.





**Rockwood Hall:**  
*"The most magnificent  
residence on the Hudson"*

When William Rockefeller bought the 200-acre estate and castle from William Aspinwall's heirs, he set out to create the perfect country estate. As one of the world's wealthiest businessmen, he was able to expand the property to more than 1,000 acres.





## Built Like a Fortress

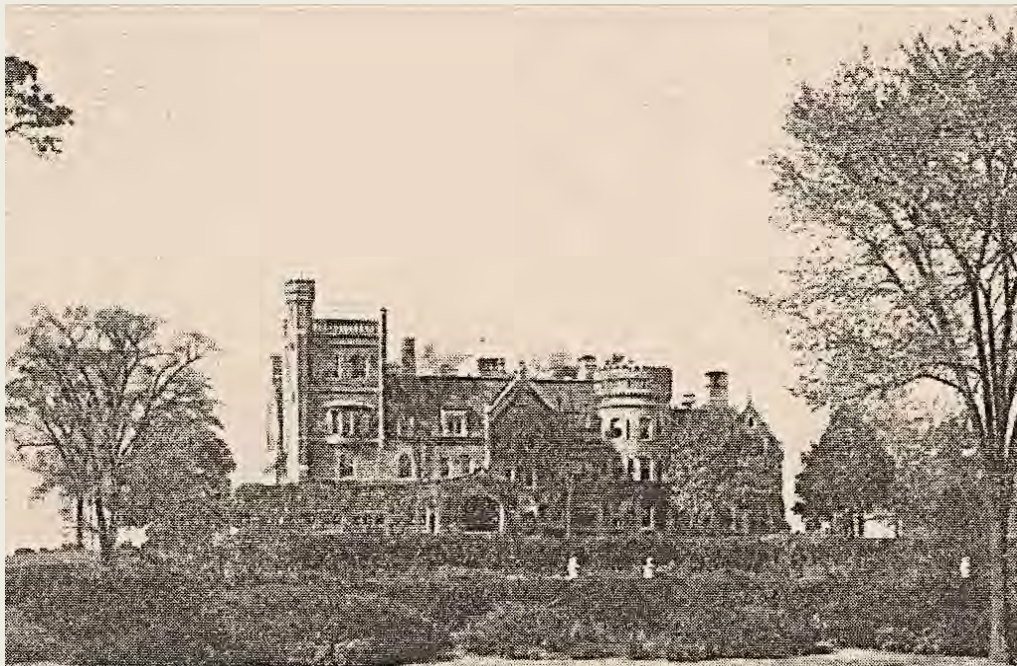


Accounts differ as to whether he demolished the original castle and then built another -- or simply extensively renovated the original structure. The resulting 204-room mansion was the second largest private dwelling in the United States,



exceeded only by the George Washington Vanderbilt II's Biltmore estate in Ashville, North Carolina.

Set 150 feet above the Hudson River and 500 feet back from it, the manor house was built in the castellated Elizabethan style.



It was 174 feet long by 104 feet wide - with outside walls of granite, inner walls of brick and a four-inch air space in between. The walls were three-and-a-half feet thick at the foundation and two feet thick at the upper floors.

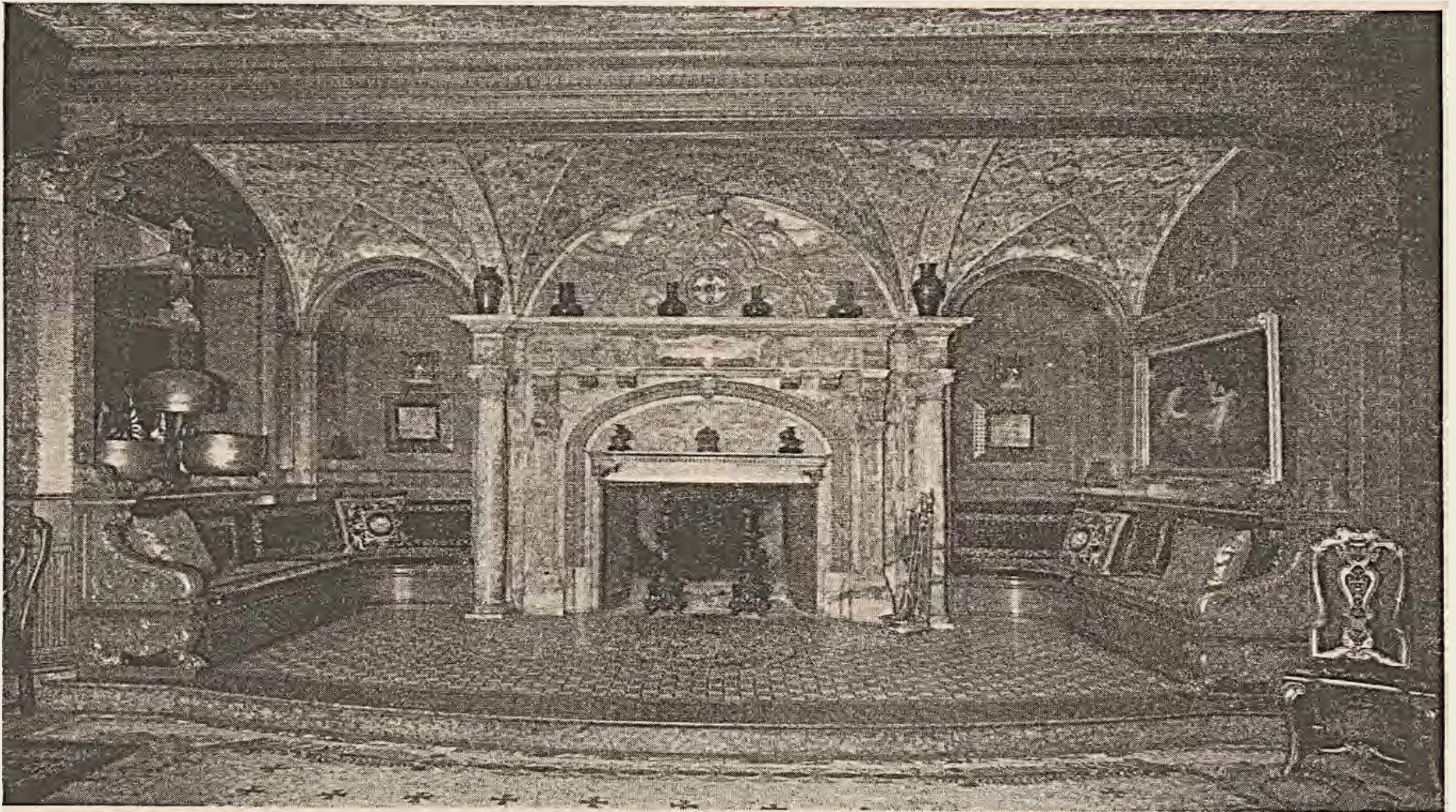




ROCKWOOD HALL, NEAR TARRYTOWN, THE COUNTRY HOME UPON WHICH MR. WILLIAM ROCKEFELLER IS SAID TO HAVE SPENT THREE MILLION DOLLARS.

*From a photograph by W. C. Harris.*





THE ENTRANCE HALL

The first floor included a drawing room, hall, library, music room, dining room, breakfast room, billiard room and study, as well as a small conservatory and a guest dressing room.





*The Library*

On the second floor, there were five large master bedrooms with bathrooms attached; two small bedrooms with toilet and lavatory attached; open fireplaces in all bedrooms and in the hall.

On the third floor were six large bedrooms with bath attached; one bedroom, bath separate. All bedrooms and the hall had open fireplaces.



*The Dining Room*



## Engaging a Master Landscaper



William Rockefeller took a direct interest in the design of the landscape, engaging various firms of the renowned landscape designer Frederick Law Olmstead.

Rockwood Hall is considered one of the

premier architectural landscapes in an estate setting by Olmstead – whose many well-known projects include Central Park and Prospect Park in New York City and the Emerald Necklace chain of parks and waterways in Boston.



There was a great deal of forestry practiced not only in setting out young trees, but transplanting large trees. The property had many specimens of rare trees, including



Present day view of weeping hemlock & American sycamore planted on the estate.

Golden Oak, Weeping Beech, Purple Beech, Cutleaf Beech, English Beech, American Beech, Ginko, Weeping Willow, White, Red and Scarlet Oak, Norway Spruce, Colorado Blue Spruce, Pink Horsechestnut, White and Pink Dogwood, Dwarf Japanese Maple, etc.



## **Six-Mile System of Carriage Roads**

Graceful carriage roads led the family and visitors into the landscape. Their design goal was to create a sense of the peacefulness of nature and to sooth and restore the spirit.

Hastings block was used on two miles of the drives near the mansion. The Hastings block is a paving block constructed of traprock, which is laid on a 16” stone base.





The remaining drives were constructed of compacted crushed stone. The drives were sixteen feet



wide with an eight-inch crown in the middle. An extensive drainage system was designed to control any water on the roads.



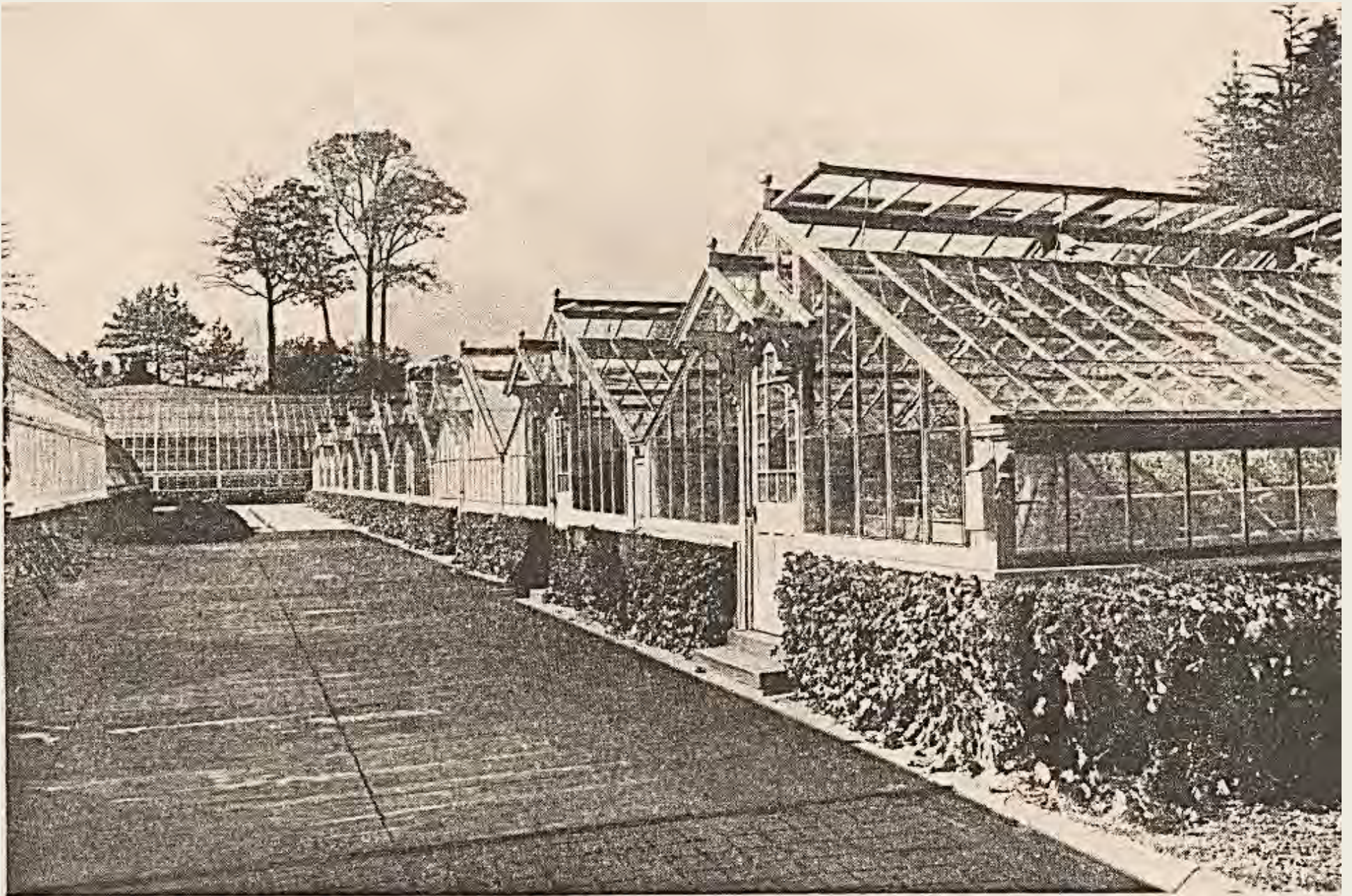
## Model of Self-Sufficiency

William Rockefeller  
built an estate  
capable of providing  
for many of its  
ongoing needs.



Its many outbuildings included a three-story coach stable, a carpenter's shop, a paint shop, a farm barn, a hennerly, 17 greenhouses and a 4-acre outdoor nursery containing more than 1,000 rare and valuable trees and shrubs.

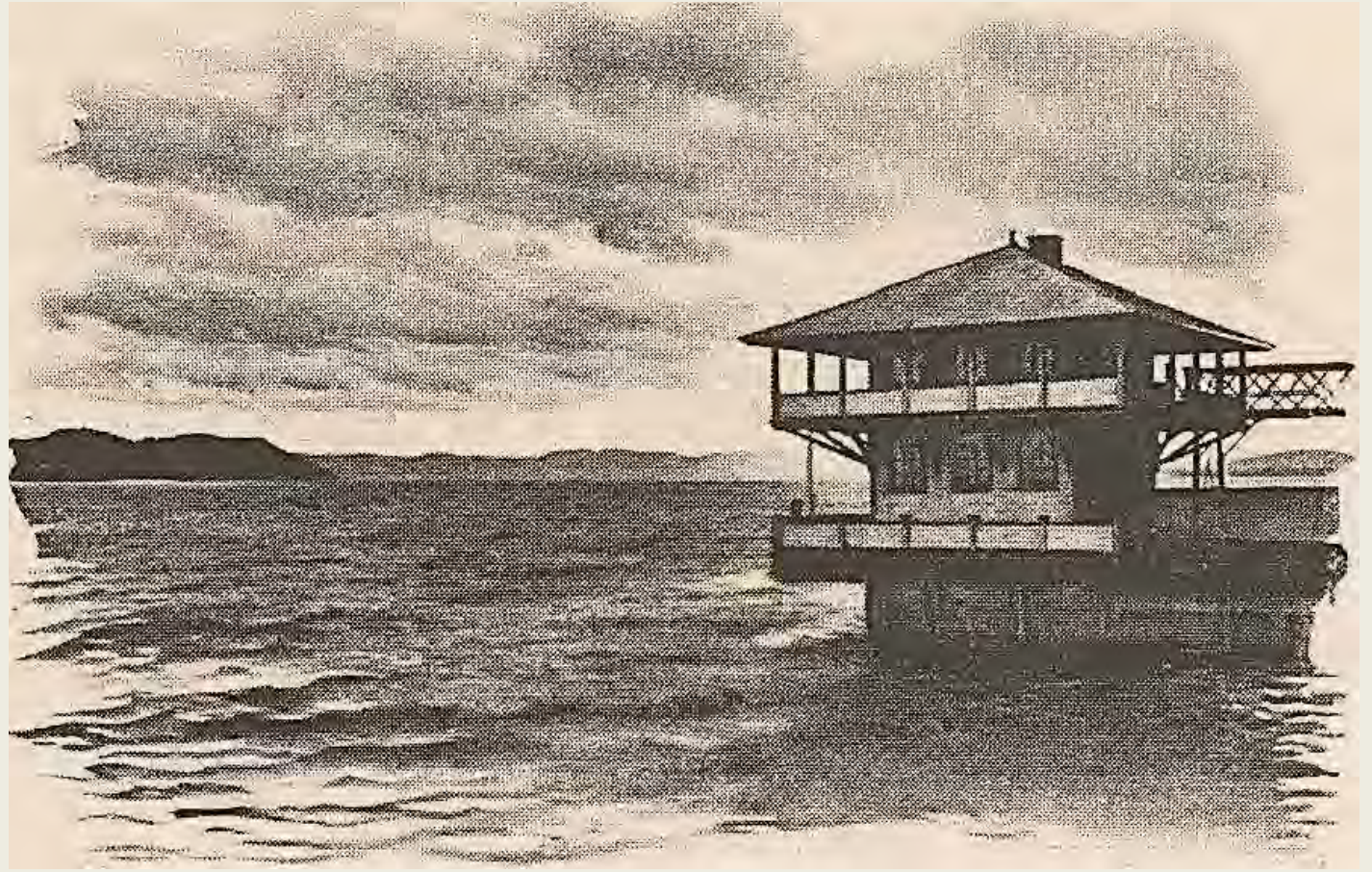




Seventeen greenhouses were used to grow figs, melons, grapes, peaches, nectarines, vegetables, roses, orchids, gardenias, carnations, potted plants, ferns and palms. The estate also had a mushroom cellar.



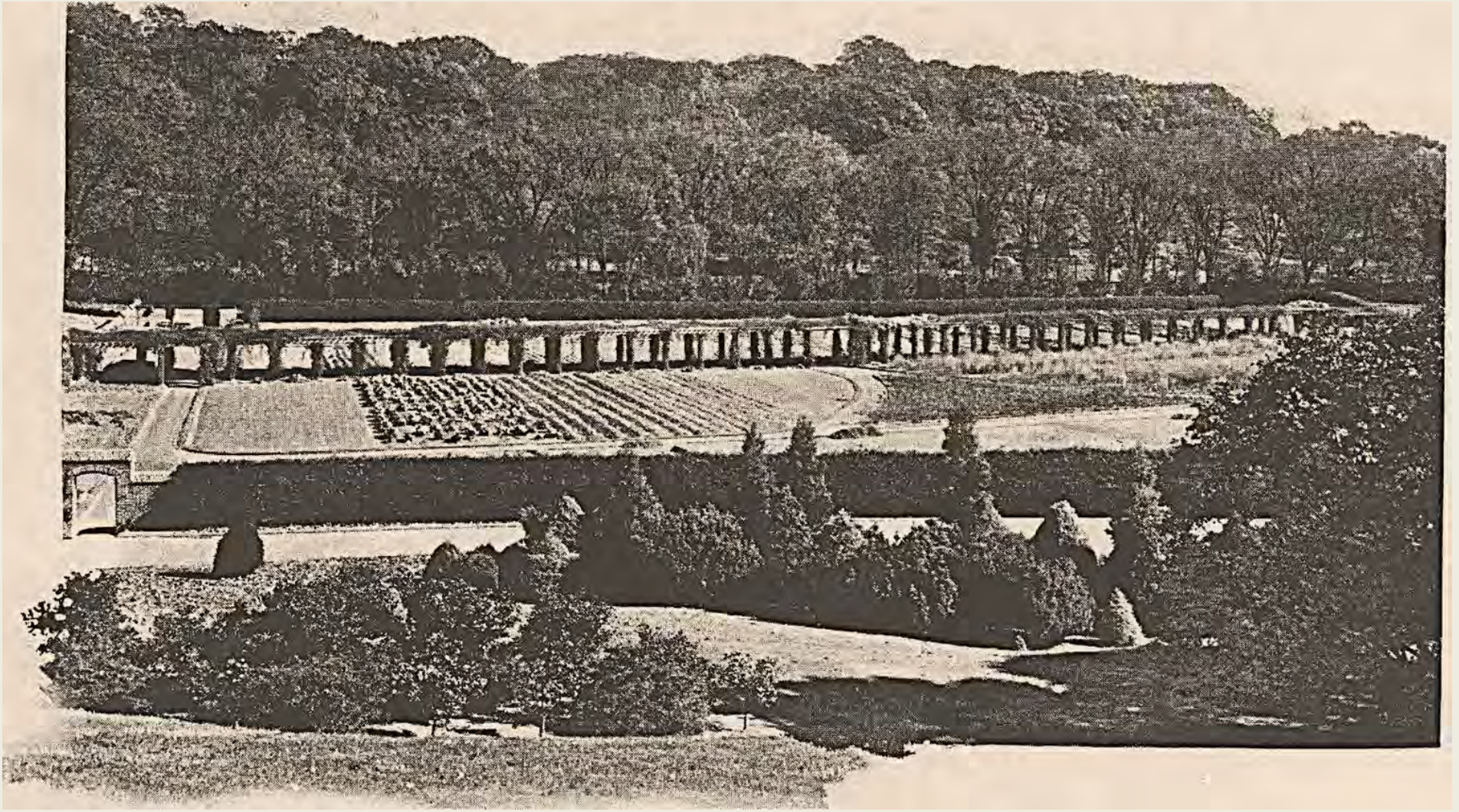
The boathouse was reached by a 150-foot steel bridge over the New York Central Railroad. About 50 feet upstream was a dock which could accommodate a 700-ton coal barge



The estate had a sumptuous boat house and substantial dock. In the early days, the estate had its own electric lighting plant. It also had a spring which provided about 75 gallons of drinking water per minute. A siding was added to the New York Central tracks along the Hudson River, where Rockefeller kept his private railroad car. Near the mansion was a stone ice house with a capacity of 400 tons.



With rooms for storing meats and vegetables, its ingenious refrigerating system used rock salt and operated on the same principle as an ice cream freezer. The principal crops raised on the estate were hay and potatoes.



Rose pergola and vegetable garden



Farm Barn, William Rockefeller's Estate, Tarrytown, N. Y.

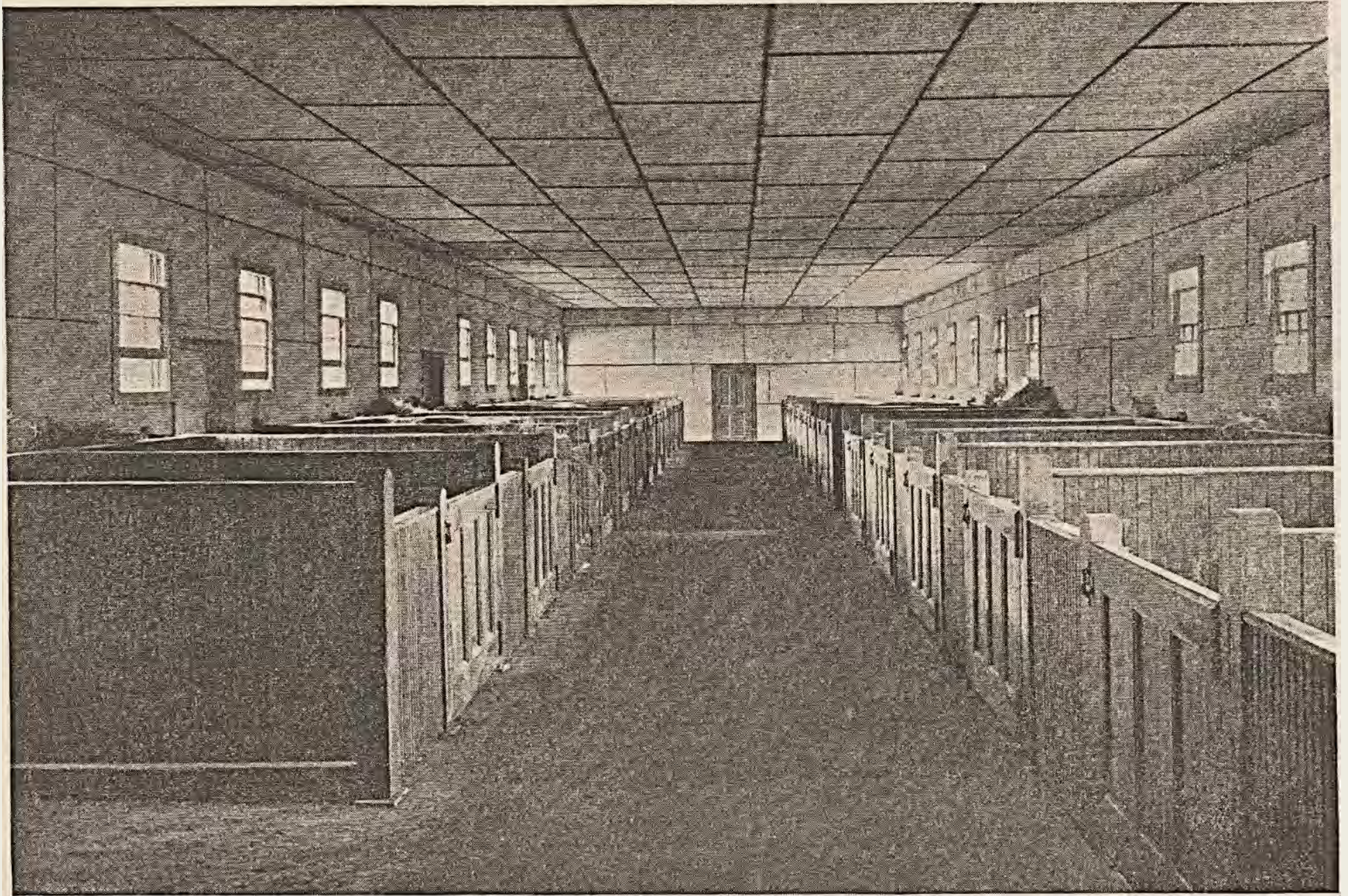






A flock of more than 100 Southdown sheep helped to enrich the soil and trim the lawns





The cow barn had 32 Georgia pine box stalls for cows and two bull box stalls







## Estate to Golf Course to Park

William Rockefeller lived at Rockwood Hall until his death from pneumonia on June 24, 1922, at age 81. His heirs decided to sell the property, but when an individual buyer could not be found, a group of investors formed Rockwood Hall, Inc. and purchased the estate.

They converted the property into an exclusive country club with an 18-hole golf course, swimming pool and other recreational facilities. Their venture was unsuccessful, however, and in 1936 Rockwood Hall, Inc. declared bankruptcy.





After obtaining control of the property in bankruptcy court in 1937, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. leased the mansion to the short-lived Washington Irving Country Club. In the late 1930s the coach house and stable were remodeled and some



summer theater productions were held, but these ceased after 1939. John D.

Rockefeller, Jr. had no real use for Rockwood Hall and in late 1941 and early 1942 had the buildings razed. Today visible remnants include the foundation of the main house and a gatehouse on Route 9 in Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.



On April 8, 1946 he deeded the Rockwood Hall property to his son, **Laurance S. Rockefeller** (left). In 1970 Laurance sold 80 acres to the International Business Machine Corporation (IBM) – a property now owned by New York Life. Laurance intended the sale to offset the loss of tax revenue to the town of Mount Pleasant due to the planned donation of Rockwood Hall to New York State.

Beginning in the early 1970s, Laurance Rockefeller leased the property to the State of New York as a public park for one dollar a year, and underwrote the maintenance



costs. In 1998, Laurance gave the property to the Laurance S. Rockefeller Fund, with the stipulation that the Fund donate its undivided interest in the property. Half the interest was given to the State of NY for park purposes and half to Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. The State then purchased Memorial Sloan Kettering's half interest to gain full ownership of Rockwood.

*“We like to think of this as the first step toward the larger concept of preserving all the family lands and sharing them with the public.”*

*Laurance S. Rockefeller - March 27, 1972*