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Dinsmore estate in Staatsburg:

The Locusts was magnificent

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In the late 1800s, Staatsburg was famous for its elegant riverfront estates, Hoyts, Morgans, Mills, Norries, Lewises and Livingstons built country homes along the river bluff, bringing their friends up from New York City on the railroad for weekend house parties.

Life in the country was leisurely, but never informal. Gentlemen wore morning coats and top hats to stroll through the formal rose gardens with their wives, who were always properly covered in high-necked dresses and carried lace parasols to protect their skin from the harsh sun. Children rolled hoops and played croquet on the manicured lawns overlooking the Hudson. And later, in the 1890s, their fathers put on knickers and played golf on a small, 9-hole course built by their neighbor, William B. Dinsmore.

Dinsmore's estate, The Locusts, was built in 1873 on a 2000 acre farm that he had inherited from his father in 1868. Situated near a locust grove on a bluff overlooking the Hudson, the Victorian manse was just up river from the Ogden Mills' property. It was famous for its more than 50 acres of lawns and gardens, and especially for the exotic flowers raised in Mr. Dinsmore's greenhouses.

The Locusts was also a stock farm, where gentleman farmer raised prize-winning Jersey cattle.



THE LOCUSTS – William B. Dinsmore named his stately country home on the Hudson after the locust grove that stood near the manse he built in 1873.

Dinsmore butter, shipped to New York City every week from the farm, commanded twice the price of ordinary butter because of its high quality.

The estate remained in tact until 1941, when Dinsmore's granddaughter, Helen Huntington Hull, tore down the old mansion to make room for her own version of a coun-



JERSEY HEADQUARTERS – The Dinsmore Place in Staatsburg was famous for its elegant white barns with cloverleaf windows that housed a prize winning herd of Jersey cattle.

try house, now owned by New York City stock broker Justin Colin.

The mansion is gone, and so are the formal rose gardens, but many of the old barns still stand, familiar landmarks with their clover-leaf windows and green cross beams. A few deserted greenhouses remain, dusty reminders of Dinsmore's favorite hobby. The piggery, which housed the providers of bacon for Dinsmore's table, now is a hunting lodge. Mrs. Hull gave it to her nephew, Robert Huntington, who uses it as a weekend game shooting retreat.

Founded Adams Express

William B. Dinsmore, the original owner of the property, was born in Boston in 1810. He became a bookkeeper for Alvin Adams, who had established a business on the Norwich Railroad Line from Boston to New York.

Dinsmore was an immediate success, became Adam's partner, and was sent to New York City to run the Adams & Co. office there. By 1842-

43 he had extended the business to Philadelphia, and shortly thereafter to Baltimore, Washington, D.C. and Pittsburg.

Dinsmore created "one of the most charming of the many fine residences which line the banks of the Hudson."

—James Smith, *History of Dutchess County*

By 1854 the partners formed a joint stock association called Adams Express Co., with Adams as president and Dinsmore as treasurer. Adams Express closed its offices in the south during the Civil War, but, according to Beer's Biographical Record of Dutchess County, Dinsmore's employees followed the Union soldiers, "establishing offices wherever their tents were pitched, thus giving the soldiers the opportunity to send and receive money or packages."

At the Vicksburg surrender, accounts tell of an Adams Express agent who eagerly rushed in to set up an office in an unoccupied house.

He was about to raise the company flag when General Grant rode by and said, "Will you do me the favor to allow me to hoist my flag first."

In 1856, Dinsmore became president of the company. Beers says that "his integrity was unquestioned", and united with his force of character, wealth and ability, placed him among the leading businessmen of the time.

He married Augusta Snow of Brewster, Mass. in 1842, and soon thereafter came up the Hudson, gradually buying up farms in Staatsburg and building a home for his family.

Unbounded hospitality

Beers says, "His beautiful country sea on the Hudson, at Staatsburg, was the scene of unbounded hospitality, for although naturally economical, he always lived in accordance with his circumstances,

and made wise use of his wealth instead of hoarding it unduly."

Along the half mile of riverfront property he laid out extensive drives and walkways, brought in specimen trees and shrubs in addition to the black walnuts and locust indigenous to the land, and changed the flower beds with each approaching season.

He took up horticulture as a hobby, and built at least five greenhouses, some as elegant as those at the New York Botanical Gardens. Water was piped in from a nearby stream. No expense was spared for the sake of Mr. Dinsmore's flowers. It took nine boilers to keep hot water flow-

ing through 10,000 feet of pipe to keep the greenhouses at the correct temperature for each specimen.

200 feet of orchids

Each greenhouse was devoted to one type of plant. The grapery was 140 feet in length. Tea roses took up 230 feet. Tropical plants and orchids had 200 feet to themselves. Bedding plants, which were layed out in fanciful designs in the gardens at appropriate times of the year, had their own special greenhouse.

In addition to its magnificent gardens, the Dinsmore farm was famous for its Jersey cattle. This prize-winning herd, which was first imported to the farm in 1860, was housed in elaborate white barns with cloverleaf windows, some of which are still visible from the road that runs through Staatsburg beyond the Mills Mansion.

The farm was divided up into 100 acres of woodland, 300 of meadow, and the rest for grazing, except for about 75 acres which was planted each year in corn, oats, rye, potatoes and carrots. Another 2 acres was kept just for vegetables for the Dinsmore table. Crops were rotated every three years, with 500 tons of hay being raised annually.

The chief gardener, Thomas Emerson, came from Dumfries, Scotland to Dinsmore in 1870.

Emerson was instrumental in creating some of the more artistic gardens.

Since he was a native of Scotland, the country where golf started, he may well have helped lay out a course for Mr. Dinsmore.

Dinsmore golf course

According to John Feeney of the Taconic State Parks, Dinsmore formed a golfing association in 1893 made up of neighboring es-



tate owners like Hoyt, Mills and Norrie. A nine hold golf course was laid out on property owned by the Dinsmores. Richard Huntington, a local architect and a relative of the Dinsmores, designed the course, which was in the general area now occupied by the southern nine holes of the Dinsmore Golf Course. A

sketch of the early course, dated 1887, hangs in the Dinsmore Golf Course clubhouse, but the only date Feeney knows for sure is the 1893 date of the founding of the golf association.

The course was given to Taconic State Parks by Helen Huntington Hull, a descendant of the Dinsmores,

in 1963. She stipulated that the course be named the Dinsmore Golf Course.

After William B. Dinsmore II died, his aunt, Madeleine Dinsmore inherited the property. In 1941, her niece, Helen Huntington Hull, decided to build a house there.

Mrs. Hull, whose mother was a Dinsmore, was married to Vincent Astor for 26 years. After she divorced him and married Lytle Hull, she came up to Staatsburg to build a country home.

New house in 1941

She bought about 70 of the original 2000 acres, razed the old house and had architect John Churchill design a new home. It was built near the site of the original mansion, positioned so that the ancient elm tree shaded the terrace overlooking the river.

She preserved and continued to use the farm buildings and greenhouses, pursuing her grandfather's interest in horticulture. Mrs. Hull's specimens won many prizes and ribbons at New York flower shows.

Jack Dugliss, caretaker of the Colin estate, worked for Mrs. Hull for six years. He remembers "a house filled with flowers and people." Mrs. Dugliss says that Stanley Martin, Mrs. Hull's butler for 18 years, always speaks of her as "the last of the great ladies."

An ardent supporter of the New York City Opera Company, Mrs. Hull frequently entertained musicians at her Staatsburg home. Arthur Rubinstein, Nathan Milstein, Leonard Bernstein and Cole Porter were just of the few who visited "the old Dinsmore place."

Dugliss remembers "busloads" of musicians being brought up to Staatsburg for parties to benefit the Philharmonic.

Today the house is used as a



1941 EDITION – Helen Huntington Hull, Dinsmore's granddaughter, tore down the turreted mansion in 1941 and built her own version of a country home. The elm tree by the terrace, supposedly planted in 1700, is one of the oldest in Dutchess County. The estate is now owned by Justin Colin of New York City.



CLOVERLEAF DESIGN – Barns and sheds built in the late 1800s still stand, curious reminders of Dinsmore's desire to make his country seat one of the most elegant along the river. Unique cloverleaf windows were used in all Dinsmore barns, some of which may still be seen along the road leading from Staatsburg to the Mills Mansion.

country retreat by the Colins family. The corkscrew evergreens which Mrs. Hull brought down from the Astor estate in Rhinebeck still line the driveway, the terrace is still sheltered by the ancient

elm, and the fanciful barns are still used for horses. But gone are the elaborate rose gardens, the glittering greenhouses, filled with exotic plans, and the grand lifestyle which was "The Locusts."