

# An Elegant Wilderness

Great Camps *and* Grand Lodges  
*of the Adirondacks 1855–1935*

Gladys Montgomery



ACANTHUS PRESS

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# White Pine

OSGOOD POND

1907-13

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On July 4, 1909, *The New York Times* reported that Mrs. Archibald White intended to one-up Frederick Vanderbilt's two-story lakefront pagoda for viewing the St. Regis yacht races with an observation tower, constructed on four transplanted 100-foot-tall pine trees set into a poured concrete foundation. That weekend at White Pine, 30 houseguests participated in a tennis tournament followed by a play performed on a sylvan stage; special effects included electric lighting, red and green "fire," and the burning of a funeral pyre on the lake "amid an elaborate pyrotechnic display." *The Times* observed, "The costumes were beautiful and striking, especially that of Waldemar in his leopard skins."

If the high jinks at White Pine were surpassingly original, so was its design. Sited on 19.6 acres purchased in 1907 from Paul Smith, it is the only work in the Adirondacks by architectural designers William G. Massarene and Addison C. Mizner. Rare for its era, White Pine's design combined the Arts and Crafts style with elements of modernist

architecture. Massarene was the forward thinker who designed the steep, angular roofline of the boathouse and was responsible for the camp's Japanese teahouse.

One July Fourth guest in 1909 was Addison Mizner, who replaced Massarene as designer, creating a new living room cabin and other structures in 1911-13. Five years after finishing White Pine, Mizner relocated from New York City to Palm Beach, Florida, where he had a seminal influence on the Mediterranean style, designing houses for wealthy clients; he went bankrupt after his development plans for Boca Raton were shattered by a hurricane in 1926.

When completed, White Pine comprised some 20 buildings scattered along the wooded lakeshore and on an island in the lake; at night, electric lights gave them a fairyland air. Structures included the owner's cabin, four sleeping cabins, a dining hall, a carriage house, an ice-house, a tennis court and viewing pavilion, a two-lane bowling alley, two boathouses, and the Japanese teahouse, which was reached via an arched *sori bashi* bridge over a lagoon. Stone walls, paths, and gardens were designed by noted horticulturist Fred Heutte in the 1920s.

White Pine was the first Adirondack camp to feature what its builder, Ben Muncil, called "brainstorm

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*Bridges in varied forms, including an arched Japanese example, connected a nearby island to the principal compound at White Pine, whose boathouse, with its modernistic roofline, was designed in 1907 by architect William Massarene.*



The main facade at White Pine was ahead of its time in terms of massing and use of angles. Its "brainstorm siding," milled weatherboarding with unsawn edges, was a rustic idiom credited to builder Ben Muncil, who pulled its name from the headlines of a scandal.

siding"—picturesque wooden clapboards with exposed unsawn edges, which Massarene sketched in July 1907. As legend has it, Muncil and Charlie Nichols, the manager of Paul Smith's sawmill, took the term "brainstorm" from the headlines: it was used in the first U.S. insanity defense in the trial of Harry Thaw, who killed Stanford White because of the architect's premarital affair with Thaw's wife, Evelyn Nesbit, a Gibson girl and actress.

Muncil and Nichols's word choice may have simply described a crazy idea, but it may also have been a private joke at the expense of Archibald White and his flamboyant wife, Olive Celeste Moore, who, like Nesbit, was a comely brunette singer and actress.

In 1902 Olive, the daughter of a Minnesota banker, had a minor role in Florenz Ziegfeld's New York musical *Red Feather*. She met Archibald, a recent widower, in

New York, expressed affection for his young daughter, and the couple married in 1905. According to an article in the *New York Telegraph*, the bride wore a costly diamond tiara, a gift of the groom, who owned a New York townhouse at 11 East 45th Street and subsequently purchased Woodlea, an 800-acre Hudson River estate, which Stanford White designed for Elliott F. Shepard, whose wife was a sister of William K. Vanderbilt.

White's ability to treat Olive to \$100,000 necklaces and \$30,000 emeralds came from a variety of national and international business interests. The Cincinnati businessman was president of Ohio's Columbia Gas & Electric Company. In 1885 he began purchasing Midwest salt manufactories, he became president of the National Salt Company, which dominated the evaporated salt industry in the U.S.; and in 1900–01 he helped establish a



President and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge in 1926, when they used White Pine as the Summer White House. So fierce were the mosquitoes that season that the president considered spraying with the same poison used in Cuba.

consortium to supply all of the world's salt, some 6 million tons a year, with one-third coming from the United States. Branching into banking, he cofounded the Atlantic Securities Company and White & Co., and joined with Augustus Belmont, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Robert Goellet, and others to form the Windsor Trust in 1902. In 1911 he was one of the backers of the Vanship dirigible, which was slated to fly from Cincinnati to Europe.

The *Times* said, "New York soon took notice of the splendor of Mrs. White's town house and of her frequent trips to Paris, where . . . she engaged elaborate apartments and entertained French artists and musicians." In his autobiography, pianist Arthur Rubinstein described meeting Olive, who was visiting Europe unaccompanied by her husband. She was, he says, "frivolous and sweet . . . with too much make-up and the wrong rouge on her

lips, but good-hearted and irrepressibly gay. She treated Alex [a German baron] and me frequently to a hot kiss, without giving it too much meaning." Rubinstein quoted Olive as saying that Archibald, who ordered her to return to New York, "must have heard some horrible gossip about us." When Archibald met the ship at the pier, the baron received a beating, and the incident landed husband, wife, and alleged lover in jail, a scandal that made the newspapers.

In May 1911, as Olive boarded the *Mauritania* bound for France, she was served with divorce papers; White claimed desertion and neglect, because, as the *Times* put it, "she does not like Cincinnati and her husband doesn't like Paris." Later, it commented on Olive's "louche and pretentious entertainments," her "penchant for rainbow colored lingerie," and her many creditors, including a



The roofline of the boat house from above.

dressmaker who sued her for \$16,519. Given her expensive lifestyle, Olive had every reason to remain the wife of a wealthy man; in July 1913 the *Times* described “a housewarming dinner given by Mr. and Mrs. Archibald White at their mansion in the Avenue de Ségur, followed by an entertainment at which the hostess sang Czech melodies and danced ragtime to the strains of a negro orchestra. The evening closed with a Tango competition. The guests included [American] Ambassador [to France Myron T. Herrick] and Mrs. Herrick, the Infante Luis Ferdinand, the Duke and Duchess de la Rochefoucauld, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Carroll, and Mrs. Potter Palmer,” an Adirondack neighbor.

Scandal stalked the couple. In 1904 White and three other National Salt directors were sued by the company’s preferred shareholders for skimming funds. Other problems traced to his association with German ambassador Count Johann H. von Bernstorff, to whom Olive introduced him in about 1905. A photograph from White Pine, captioned “the Bathing Beauties,” appeared

in the international press; it showed the count in a morally outré pose with his arms around Olive and another young woman, all wearing bathing suits. Rumors—true, according to White Pine staff at the time—circulated that Olive and von Bernstorff were having an affair. In 1915, as World War I raged, White was accused of laundering funds for Bernstorff’s purchase of a munitions factory and of passing the ambassador information during a 1914 Christmas party at White Pine. In 1916–18 he was implicated as the front for Bernstorff’s 1916 purchase of *Fair Play*, a pro-German New York newspaper. White was also mentioned in the press when Olive’s brother, Carlos E. Moore, was accused of leaking information related to the Allied war effort from the office of J. P. Morgan, where Moore was a clerk. White dissolved his banking firm in 1917, and this notoriety probably catalyzed the couple’s eventual divorce in 1918. Olive pursued her career on the New York musical stage and in silent film; Archibald married a Cincinnati woman and died in 1924.



The living room at White Pine featured a stage, designed to showcase the acting and singing talents of its original owner, Olive White, a New York chanteuse considerably younger than her wealthy husband.

The White family sold White Pine in 1920 to Irwin and Laura Kirkwood, who owned the *Kansas City Star*. The Kirkwoods added 25 acres to the property and offered the camp to President Calvin Coolidge as the 1926 summer White House. Trees were removed to afford a better view of the lake; the president became an avid angler and spent his leisure moments fishing.

In its July 19 issue, *Time* magazine reported that Coolidge arose to view the portrait of Napoleon Bonaparte in his bedroom and inspect "civilization in the abstract," as Architect William G. Massarene calls the \$500,000 White Pine Camp. [Coolidge] hears the soft voice of luxury speaking through French tapestries, Oriental rugs, Italian paintings, a Japanese pagoda, an alpine rock garden, a billiard cabin, a bowling alley, a grand piano, a personal telephone exchange, [and] private house-movies."

Even Coolidge had to endure an Adirondack scoutge. "In the cool of the evening before dinner the President walked forth into the forest," *Time* continued. "Beneath

a spreading pine tree he stopped, waved his arms about his head, legs; retreated. Mosquitoes had bitten him. The next night, the beasts became so annoying that ever-thoughtful Major Coupal equipped the President with a small bottle of citronella. Meanwhile, fifty marines scratched and swore that mosquitoes are worse than cooties. Commander Boone considered the advisability of spraying the waters around the camp with a poison which was successfully used at Quantico."

In 1930 Laura Kirkwood's estate sold White Pine to Adele Levy and Edith Stern, daughters of Julius Rosenwald, leading Chicago philanthropist and co-owner and head of Sears, Roebuck & Company. In 1948 their families donated the camp to Paul Smith's College, and in 1983 it passed to another buyer. In 1993 preservationist Howard Kirschenbaum formed a partnership to purchase and operate the property. Now, after a significant, ongoing restoration program, White Pine offers guest lodgings in its original cottages and is open for historic tours.



*Above: Graffiti on a wall in the lower floor of the main lodge commemorates the madcap weekend in 1920 when White and friends consumed their remaining supply of liquor, prior to turning the camp over to its new owners, Irwin and Laura Kirkwood, who owned the Kansas City Star.*

*Left: "A shot seen 'round the world'" was this photograph—"The Bathing Beauties," taken at White Pine—of German ambassador Johann von Bernstorff with his arms around Olive White and another comely young woman, which sparked an international moral and political scandal in the World War I era.*

*Opposite top: The bowling alley at White Pine was similar to many others in the Adirondacks and at other upscale American leisure residences.*

*Opposite bottom: Visitors relax on the porch of White Pine's Japanese teahouse, sited on a small island across a lagoon from the main house. Note the arched soei bashi bridge, at left, and, on the teahouse, the shallow kipped roof with the log detail at the peak.*

