This two-part series entitled "Twin Peaks"
by Brian Anglin has been made available
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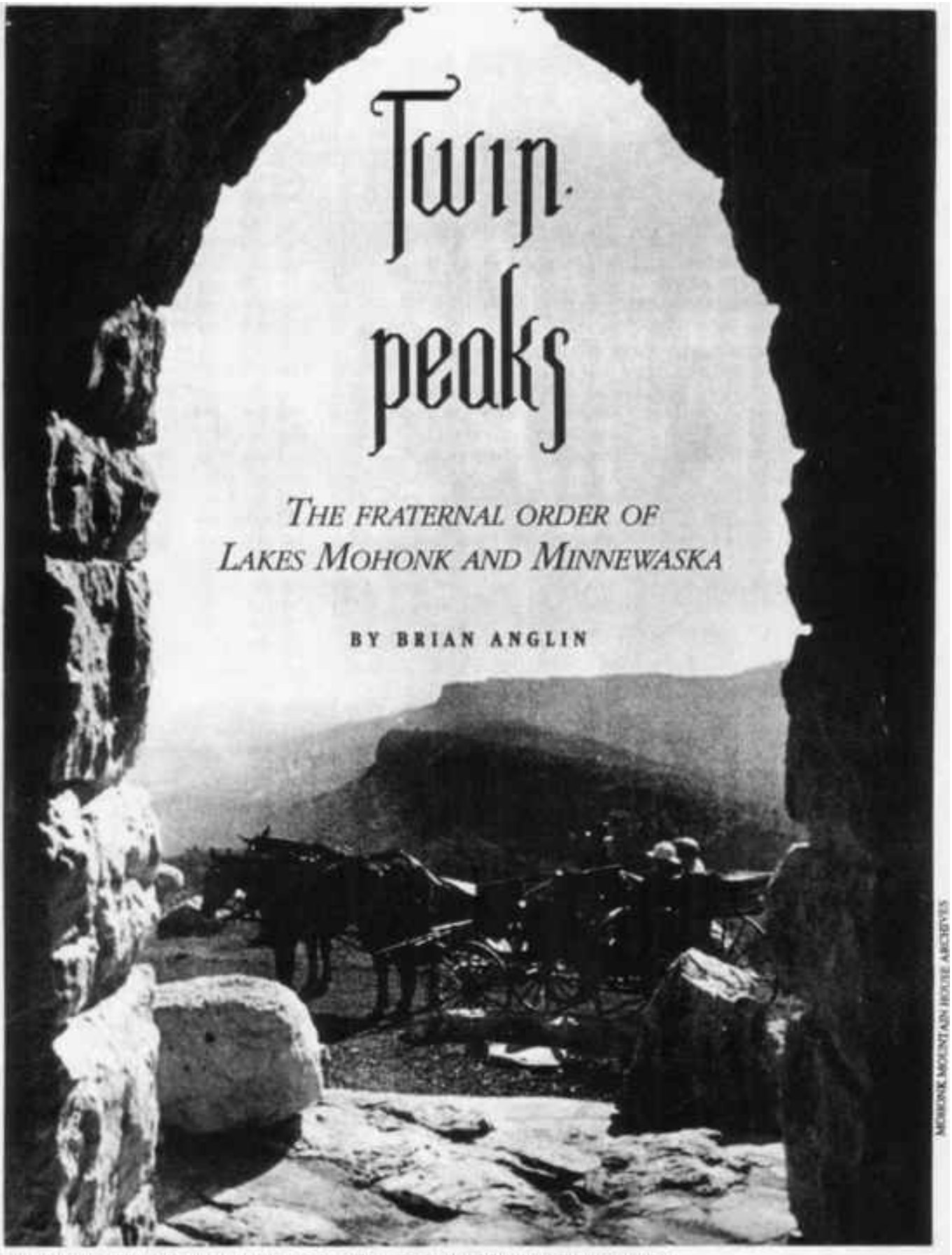

The Trapps, as seen through the door of the Albert K. Smiley Memorial Tower in 1939.

MOHONK MOUNTAIN HOUSE ARCHIVES

Golf practice in the Mohonk garden before 1900.

Bert Smiley walks into his ground floor office at Mohonk. The space is about the size of a college dorm room. The view of the grounds outside the window behind his desk is partially blocked by vegetation.

Sitting at a conference table off to the right, Smiley rests his elbows on the well polished surface. He is the president of Mohonk Mountain Houses and chief executive and administrative officer for the business. He has overall responsibility for the 275-room hotel and the surrounding 2000 acres of land.

When he finds out that there is going to be a magazine article on Mohonk, he laughs modestly. "You probably know more about the history of the place than I do," he confesses. "I am not kidding."

Bert Smiley grew up at Mohonk until he was 15, when he started getting summer jobs away from home. "I started going away, and I really stayed away pretty much except for vacations and visits," he explains. "I decided I wanted to go out and seek my fortune."

Nature walk led by Albert K. Smiley in August 1890.

Smiley got his undergraduate degree in mathematics and launched into his first career in the computer industry. At 29, he went to Princeton to earn his Ph.D. in economics, and then became an economist in Washington. His return to Mohonk in 1990 marked the beginning of his third career.

"It sounds as if I just jumped back into the business, but in fact I was on the board of directors since 1969," Smiley says. "So, believe it or not, I have been a board member for the last 20 years."

The hotel had been managed by nonfamily members. In 1990, the, board of directors refused to renew president Don Woodworth's contract because he demanded complete control of executive decision-making. Before that, Mohonk president Bernard Gavin resigned in a cloud of mystery.

The top job at Mohonk was ripe for a family member, Bert Smiley thinks. "I was ready for them, and I guess they were ready for me," he says. "We needed somebody, and I think there was a sense among the directors that we wanted some family representation directly in the operation in the executive ranks. It had been a family business for 103 years, or whatever it was, and I think there was a sense that that was one of the keys of our success .... I think we have certain traditions here, and there was a feeling that we didn't want to change them."

That tradition, Bert Smiley explains, has to do with exploring man's ideal relationship to nature and, as a natural progression, man's ideal relationship to man.

Mohonk has an annual budget of more than $10 million and supports 250 year-round employees. In the summer, about 550 people work at the hotel. In the course of a year, about 90,000 guests from all over the world come to visit the historic hotel and spend money in the Hudson Valley.

Running Mohonk, Smiley explains, is a creative act. "You are creating something of value for the guests," he says. "And also, I think it is obviously beneficial to the people who have jobs here and the local merchants that we deal with."

It started with the toss of a coin.

It was 1869, and Alfred Homans Smiley had just finished the summer's harvest at the family farm in Poughkeepsie. A fan of family outings, the Quaker-born farmer turned his gaze west for adventure. Smiley had heard of two points of interest. Heads, the group would journey to West Point for the day. Tails, the family would make the trek to Paltz Point.

It was tails ....

At least that was the gist of the story.

Jane Smiley, archivist for the Mohonk Mountain House and the Smiley family, sits in a conversation nook outside the dining room at the Mohonk Mountain House. As she talks about the founding of Mohonk and Minnewaska, Jane Smiley's eyes rest on the historic pictures of her husband's ancestors hanging on the wall.

After taking a ferry across the Hudson River on that September day, Jane explains, Alfred Smiley and his family drove horses and surreys to the foot of Paltz Point, what is now commonly known as Sky Top. From there, the family followed wooded hillsides around a bend to catch their first glimpse of Lake Mohonk.

Rugged glacial rock formations, partially covered by a heavy growth of trees and shrubs, rose high above the still, cool water.

Alfred Smiley and an expedition of ambitious hikers left the weary at John Stokes' tavern on the lip of the lake and scrambled up the steep, rocky path to look out on the surrounding valleys from the barren apex of Paltz Point. Standing on Paltz Point, Alfred looked out over farmlands of the Wallkill Valley to the east. To the west, his gaze drifted over the Rondout Valley to the edge of the Catskill Mountains. In the farthest reaches of his vision stretched the lands of five adjacent states.

The family spent the night on the coarse mattresses of the tavern while Smiley talked business with the proprietor. Stokes admitted that he was in dire straits and said he wanted to unload the property to pay off his debts. The innkeeper asked $40,000 for the inn, the lake and 300 acres of land, which didn't include Paltz Point. Someone else owned that.

Unfortunately Alfred didn't have that much money; the Poughkeepsie farm generated just enough money to feed and clothe himself, his wife and his six children. Not wanting to miss out on the deal, however, Alfred asked his identical-twin brother, Albert Keith Smiley, to buy the property.

Alfred Smiley sent a telegram to his brother in Providence, Rhode Island, where he was principal of a Quaker boarding school. "Await a letter and come immediately," he wired.

Albert Smiley sent back word that he was much too busy to make the journey. The semester had recently begun, and Albert was planning for the 200 students and 18 teachers in the school.

That wasn't good enough for Alfred. He sent another plea to his brother. The principal made the journey. When he saw the place, Albert left directions with his brother to negotiate the purchase. Stokes finally agreed to sell the place for $28,000.

Jane Smiley laughs when she talks about John Stokes' tavern and inn. "It was for drinking and dancing on Saturday night," she explains. "It was a very rough, crude place."

John Stokes opened the mountain inn on July 4, 1859, with a party that was to set the Shawangunk hospitality scene for the next decade. There were fistfights and whiskey aplenty, the history books say.

From then on, parties of up to 40 people would come up the west side of the mountain to laugh, dance, play cards, and, of course, drink all night long at John Stokes' inn.

Although the Smiley family's account of that period says it's so, Jane Smiley isn't convinced that John Stokes actually chained unruly drunks to the tree outside the inn. And she is not sure Mrs. Stokes bought up her neighbors' chickens and slaughtered them on the spot whenever large groups of hungry customers came to visit.

"Anyhow, it was a legend," Jane Smiley says with a shrug. "Whether it is true or not, I just wonder."

Jane Smiley, who moved to Mohonk when she married Dan Smiley in 1972, continues the story of Mohonk. Her narration is smooth and practiced from conducting tours through the historic hotel.

Most tour guides take an hour to tell the story. Jane confesses it takes her at least two. "And some people even stay to the end," she says.

Albert was not rich, either. He and his wife could only scrounge up the cash for half the purchase price. A mortgage was taken out for the balance and the first round of improvements. The question was: How was he going to pay for it?

"The interesting irony is that the last thing they were interested in was a business, quote-unquote," explains New Paltz high school teacher Al Smiley. "The business was a secondary necessity to support the creation of a quiet place for reasonable discourse."

The school day has just ended. The modern-day Al Smiley recounts the story of his great-great-grandfather - and namesake - in a quiet voice. He wears a brown polyester tie and a white shortsleeved shirt, and a pocket calculator with his name carved in the back of it sticks out of his shirt pocket.

Al Smiley leans forward in a booth at the College Diner in Ohioville. The daily bustle and clanking dishes of restaurant life can be heard in the background.

When the Smiley family purchased Lake Mohonk, the English teacher explains, the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were in vogue. The naturalistic philosophies of these two American authors inspired many to walk into the mountains and ponder life. The twins were just men of their time engaged in the philosophical and religious questions of the era, Alfred says.

"My sole purpose was to provide a home," Albert Smiley admitted at the end of the 19th century. "And in order to pay for it I started in a business for which, above all things in the world, I had a distaste and no experience."

He was talking about the hospitality industry.

During the winter and spring of 1870, the Smileys remodeled John Stokes' inn to accommodate up to 40 guests. An addition was built onto the back, and verandas were added. A network of roads and paths was surveyed and cut into the woods, and William Burgess was hired to manage the inn.

Today, the scenic verandas are a trademark of the Mohonk Mountain House. Both sides of the seven-story resort are tiered with porches outside every room.

"That way, people could sit in rocking chairs and feel close to nature without getting their feet dirty," Jane Smiley notes.

The Mohonk Mountain House opened for business on June 1, 1870. Guests, often personal friends of the Smiley family, could spend the night at the inn for $3.

Dinner was an additional $1.50.

This was a Quaker hotel, and temperance was observed. Dancing and public card playing was prohibited. Instead, the facility offered nature walks, lectures, evening concerts, boating, fishing, bowling and a ten-minute prayer service every morning after breakfast. The Sabbath was strictly observed.

John Stokes pleaded with the brothers to build a bar and set up a racetrack to draw in crowds. But the twins held fast to their ideals.

And people came anyway.

Even Albert Smiley was surprised at the success. He explained Mohonk's strange rules at the dedication ceremony of the hotel's parlor wing in 1899:

"Everyone said it was mad and foolish to try and carry on a hotel business that way and that nobody but 'cranks' would come to it. I expected to lose by it, but we stuck to it. And sometimes we had to be a little severe, often losing important guests because they didn't like the regulations, and we said the world is wide, and they could go some other place."

The proprietor made it clear, however, that he had no personal prejudice against entertainment. People were free to drink and play cards in the privacy of their rooms. A few might have even danced.

William Burgess was an incompetent manager, so Alfred agreed to look after the business for his brother. For two years, Alfred commuted across the Hudson River to Mohonk while his sons continued to work the family farm. He moved to Mohonk with his family in 1972.

Alfred proved an excellent manager. "Alfred was ingenious," Jane says. "Alfred was a very sound businessman."

In the first decade of business at the Mountain House, building and grounds
improvement was the priority. The house was enlarged in. 1871. A telegraph office was installed in 1873 for the reservations office and the convenience of guests. A dining room was constructed in 1874. The laundry and icehouse were enlarged in 1875, a four-lane bowling alley built in 1876. The Rock Building, oldest existing

section of the present-day mountain house, was completed in 1879. Miles of roads mid paths were cleared to facilitate access to the ridge's most beautiful vistas.

There was often tension between the twins as to how the business should be run. When Alfred wanted to add more rooms to the facility to increase revenue, Albert directed his brother to cultivate a flower garden on the ridge's unyielding rock.

Albert was the boss. It was his hotel. He got his garden.

"With all of the conclusions to which thee seems to have come, I do not at all agree," Alfred admonishes his brother in an 1872 letter. "Next season thee will have all of the expenses of a first-class hotel, and thee has had no hesitation about adding expensive kitchen and water closet arrangements and yet does hesitate at the only point where an increased revenue may be expected. These matters seem very clear to me, and I wonder thee doesn't see them too."

Jane Smiley cautions against over generalizations, but ventures her view about the twins' personalities anyway. "They were identical twins, and they thought and reacted alike in many situations," she explains. "But it turned out that there was a difference. I think we can say with assurance that Alfred was the more practical one, and Albert ... I won't say he was a dreamer, but he had a definite aesthetic taste. The gardens, for instance, meant a great deal to him."

"I'd say Albert, perhaps, seemed to be the dreamer in terms of the concepts," Al Smiley says of his ancestors. "Alfred seemed to be the nuts-and-bolts guy, getting the job done, you know what mean?"

Alfred sent messages to his brother at least three times a week. The letters documenting the brothers' relationship during the formation of Mohonk were recently discovered in an old shoe box in the family vault marked "old letters only." Jane Smiley came across it when she was working in the vault one day.

It must have come as a blow to Albert when Alfred said he was leaving Mohonk to start his own mountain house about seven miles to the south at Lake Minnewaska. The history books written by Smiley family members and their friends assure readers that there was no discontent between the brothers.

"I don't think there was any disaffection between the brothers," agrees Jane Smiley. "I think it was quite clear that there was a growing demand for this kind of summer resort in this kind of location."

Al Smiley agrees. "Their relationship was so good that what one brother recommended the other accepted with great trust," he says.

Once both resorts were up and running, guests at Mohonk could hike to Minnewaska in the morning and take an afternoon meal at the Minnewaska Mountain House, and vice-versa. Tennis matches, golf tournaments and other joint activities were scheduled between the resorts.

The story of how the Smileys stumbled across Lake Minnewaska, is similar to the founding of Mohonk. In 1876, Alfred Smiley took his family for a picnic to Peterskill Falls. While there, the driver told him of a another lake on top of the mountain towering above the Peterskill. At the time, it was called Coxing Pond.

Alfred and some of his children worked their way through the woods to discover the lake, which was somewhat larger than Mohonk, with the sparkling water the color of lapis lazuli. The rock cliffs surrounding the lake were striking and sheer, intermittently covered with thick foliage.

By now, Alfred had money of his own. On his way home, the Quaker entrepreneur stopped by the property owner's house in the Trapps and negotiated the purchase of the lake. George Davis said he would sell the lake and 500 acres of land for $1000. He added that he could get a hold of an additional 2000 acres of land from surrounding property owners for another $2000.

That night, Alfred sent a letter to his brother:

"I have just returned from a trip to Lake Minnewaska and am suffering from a high Minnewaska fever," Alfred penned. "Indeed, if matters work favorably, I shall buy it at once .... I think the lake has extraordinary attractions, and I should wish to hold it for the boys. In some points, it is finer than Mohonk, and in others, it is quite inferior. At that price, it is dirt cheap."

Jane Smiley says the name Minnewaska does not mean anything. It was completely made up. Mohonk is a corruption of the Delaware Indian word Mogonck, which some believe to mean "lake in the sky." Others, however, believe the word referred to the white Shongum grit of the ridge or a swamp at the base of the mountain.

Shawangunk, pronounced Shongum, means either "place of white rocks" or "warm fur coat" in the Indian language, Jane says. "It's just not clear, but place of white rocks' makes sense, and I would be happy to stick with that."

For the next three years, Alfred managed the Mohonk Mountain House and rode his carriage to Minnewaska every day to oversee construction of his own summer resort. On June 14, 1879, the Minnewaska Mountain House opened for business.

By 1887, the Wildmere was opened and the original hotel was renamed the Cliff House. Together, they were called the Minnewaska Mountain Houses.

"And then what was Albert suppose to do? He couldn't do it all on his own," Jane Smiley asks.

When Alfred moved his family to the next lake over, Albert retired from his academic profession and dedicated himself to running Mohonk. But he was not very good at it. So the retired principal did what anyone in his position would do. He turned to his younger brother, Daniel Smiley, and wooed him into the family business.

Daniel, 27 years younger than his older brothers, had just finished college and was starting a promising career as an instructor and assistant principal at the prestigious William Penn Charter School in Pennsylvania.

Albert invited him to Mohonk for a summer-long visit. The two went on walks and talked, and Albert would note the places his 24-year-old brother thought were attractive. Albert observed that Daniel noticed that a curved road was more aesthetically pleasing than a straight one.

Daniel was engaged to Effie Newell, who thought she was marrying an academic man, not some seedy innkeeper. The love letters between Daniel and his bride-to-be are stored in the Mohonk Mountain House archives.

The young Smiley proved a shrewd businessman, making it possible for his older brother to cultivate his garden, entertain guests and pursue his philanthropic interests. "Albert didn't have to give his full attention to the resort, since he always had a good right-hand man to attend to the practical details," Jane Smiley comments.

The same year Alfred quit his job at Mohonk, Albert Smiley was appointed by president Rutherford B. Hayes to the United States Board of Indian Commissioners. Albert didn't like the way the board operated. The different organizations working on the "Indian Question" had little contact with each other, and the board of commissioners only met once a year in Washington, D.C., to discuss Indian issues.

"One short day seemed to me totally insufficient time to thoroughly complete the discussion," Albert Smiley wrote at the time. "And I tried in vain to prolong the discussion."

By the 1882 board meeting, Albert had had enough. He stood up and invited the whole group to continue the discussion the next fall at Mohonk. In 1883, invitations to the first lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian were sent to 50 people. Smiley picked up the tab.

Mohonk was the ideal spot for lengthy debates. The high-minded sentiments and spirited discussions which characterized the conferences were followed by a chance for delegates to relax and mull over the proceedings. The conferences opened their sessions at 10 a.m., adjourned for lunch at noon, and resumed at 8 p.m. after dinner.

The afternoons were often filled with a longer carriage ride or a trip to Minnewaska. In 1884, the evening session began late because the participants had not yet returned from the neighboring resort.

The Mohonk Indian conferences eventually brought together as many as 200 prominent men and women from all aspects of concern for Indian Affairs. In 1890, a few Indians were even invited. The three-day conferences shaped the thinking on Indian policy for the next 33 years.

President Hayes asked Albert to hold a similar discussion on the "Negro Question." Held only twice, these conferences were a bust. "They had no blacks," Jane Smiley confesses. "Albert felt his regular guests and the white people he was inviting to participate in the conference would not come if there were black people there."

Jane shakes her head solemnly. "That is a part of our history," she says. "It is not a part we like to play up, but we have to recognize it.

In 1895, Albert kicked off the Lake Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration. This one took hold. Annual discussions on creating world peace through arbitration were held at Mohonk until 1916.

Albert Smiley treated his younger brother like a son. In fact, Daniel was the closest thing Albert and his wife Eliza Phelps Smiley had to a son. Their only daughter had died when she was a child, and the couple remained childless.

At the dedication ceremony for the Mohonk Gatehouse on Route 299 in New Paltz, Albert would talk about his relationship with his younger brother Daniel. Mohonk guests had built and gave the stone tower to the Smileys to commemorate their 50th wedding anniversary.

"In the sunset of life, it is an unspeakable gratification that we have a younger brother and his wife who, with their children, are all interested in maintaining a Christian home where just dealing will prevail, where warm greetings will be extended and kindly interest shown to all," Albert &aid.

By the end of the nineteenth century, it was clear that the Smiley family had done well on the Shawangunk Ridge. Despite their own managerial idiosyncracies, the twin brothers had created successful enterprises. Their mountain houses had proven commercially viable, and gave them the status and the means to exercise leadership in whatever high-minded way they pleased. What would the new century bring? And how would this peculiar and headstrong family adapt to it?

Brian Anglin, a New Paltz resident, is editor of the Huguenot and Highland Herald. The second episode of "Twin Peaks" will be published in the fall issue of Ulster Magazine. Stay tuned.