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“Twin Peaks” by Brian Anglin
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Twin peaks: the sequel

For this entire century, the long shadow of the Smiley family has shaped the stewardship of the Shawangunk Ridge



ROW, ROW: Guests at Mohonk take a relaxing row across Lake Mohonk.

Story by Brian Anglin
Photographs by Jim Fossett

When Ken and Lucille Phillips talk about Minnewaska, they don't talk about the azure lake outside their living room window or the state park in their backyard. They talk about the two great hotels that looked down on the glacial lake for more than a century before they went bankrupt and the buildings burned to the ground.

"We had a lot of fun at Minnewaska," Mr. Phillips says, leaning back into a late Victorian armchair. "We worked from daylight to dark."

"We really did," his wife agrees.

Mr. Phillips smiles.

The two sit in the sunken living room of their custom-made cliff house. The walls are pink. The deep, soft carpet is pale green. Exotic butterflies preserved in glass are scattered throughout the room. A weather-worn baby grand rests under the staircase leading to the attic balcony. The piano doesn't play too well, Mr. Phillips notes, but the grandchildren like to bang on it.

The Phillipses don't own the house in which they live. You and I own it. According to the terms of the 1987 purchase of Minnewaska by the state, the senior Phillipses have the right to live in it for the rest of their lives.

Much of the furniture in the Phillips' 1970s stone house was salvaged from the Wildmere and the Cliff House, the two Victorian inns built at Minnewaska in the 1870s and 1880s. It is the heyday of the summer resorts on the Shawangunk Ridge that Ken and Lucille Phillips remember most about Minnewaska. It was there, in 1927, that Mr. Phillips started out as a chauffeur.

"I had the great qualifications of being just 18 and having a chauffeur's license. I didn't drink and I didn't smoke," the 83-year-old recalls.

"And that was very important," Mrs. Phillips adds.

Over the next 28 years, Phillips worked his way up from chauffeur to garage manager to personnel manager to general manager. In the meantime, Mrs. Phillips worked for the resorts as a secretary. In 1955, the Phillipses bought the 10,000-acre resort and played host to 30,000 guests a year.

"It was a very interesting life," Mr. Phillips says. "We worked like slaves."

"It was a dream come true," Mrs. Phillips sighs.



Sitting in the College Diner after a day of teaching at New Paltz High School, Al Smiley remembers Minnewaska before Mr. Phillips was king of the mountain. As he talks about what the resort was like before his family sold it to the Phillipses, Smiley sinks back into the booth and avoids eye contact. Some of his memories are uncomfortable.

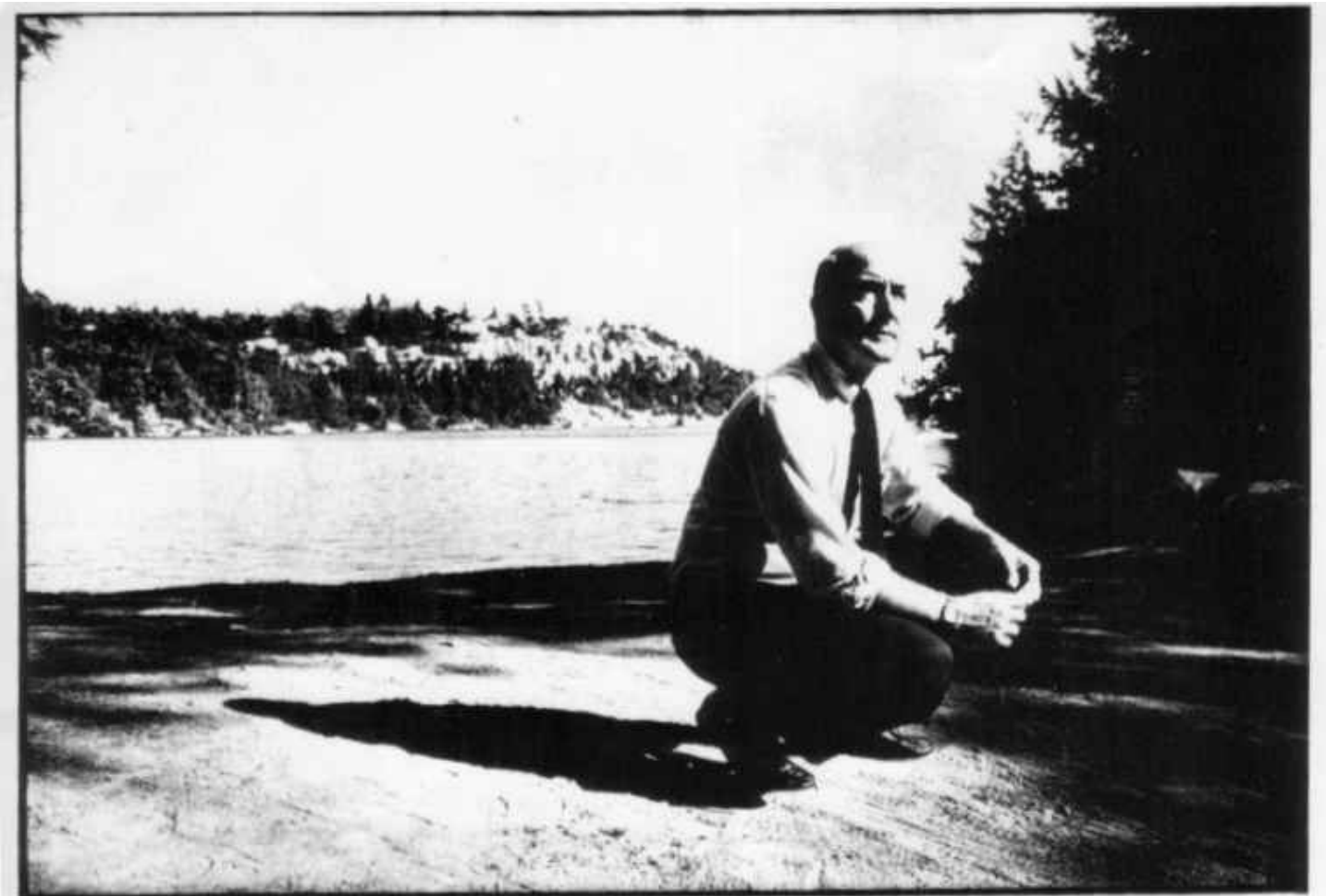
When you ask him how the transfer of title 38 years ago affected him, he hedges. "I am not sure I want to get into that," the English teacher says. "It is very sensitive to an awful lot of people."

But he is proud to talk about his ancestors.

Alfred Homans Smiley, Al Smiley's great-great-grandfather, founded the first Minnewaska Mountain House in 1876. The resort became known for its beautiful scenery, comfortable hikes, peaceful atmosphere and remarkable ability to rejuvenate the human spirit.

Just 90 miles outside of New York City, the 3000-acre business thrived despite its ban against alcohol, dancing and drinking. In fact it did so well, the Quaker entrepreneur built a second Victorian inn on the cliffs surrounding Lake Minnewaska in 1887. The first hotel was renamed the Cliff House, the second called the Wildmere. Together, Minnewaska Mountain Houses boasted more than 350 rooms.

"You will need no introduction to the soul of Minnewaska," a 1927 pamphlet promoting Minnewaska reads. "It is apparent when first you gaze out over those broad encircling valleys to sunset behind yonder green-clad mountains beyond. It sounds in the whispering pines, the lapping of waters against the cliff. It is mirrored in the lake's clear reflection of green-mantled crags."



CHILDHOOD HAUNT: Alfred Smiley on the public beach at Lake Minnewaska. The majestic Cliff House once stood on the windswept escarpment behind him.

Al Smiley adds his perspective. "We had fun," he says. "It was all educational. It was not Johnny Carson. It was not ha, ha and ribaldry and all the rest."

Before he set off on his own enterprise, Alfred Smiley had spent nine years managing his twin brother's hotel on the peak next door. At the Mohonk Mountain House, Alfred and his brother Albert Keith Smiley had already converted a wild country tavern into a summer oasis for rich people who wanted to be close to nature without booze or bawdry.

Today the 300-room Mohonk Mountain House, surrounded by a glacial lake, white rock-cliff walls and thousands of acres of preserve land, is still visited by more than 80,000 paying guests each year.

When Alfred died in 1903, sons Edward and George Smiley took over the business. Edward was the oldest of three sons, and George the youngest. By then, Minnewaska had grown to include 10,000 acres of land, including Lake Awosting, the largest of the glacial lakes in the Shawangunks.

The partnership between the brothers continued for 20 years. In 1923 Edward sold his interest to George and left Minnewaska. Edward had five daughters, and George had two sons. The brothers wanted Minnewaska to remain under the Smiley name.

According to Jane Smiley, Mohonk's archivist and the Smiley family's historian, a similar passion for progeny swelled at nearby Mohonk as well. But Albert had no sons and his only daughter died as a child. So the hotel proprietor took in his younger brother Dan and showed him the ropes. Daniel Smiley became heir to the property.

The hotel wasn't just handed over. Daniel Smiley's first child was named Albert Keith Smiley, Junior after his uncle. When Albert K. Smiley, Junior and his wife had a son, they named their baby Daniel Smiley, Junior after his grandfather.

Jane Smiley's voice becomes animated as she describes the family tree. "It bothers me very much that this family misused Junior on two occasions," she says. "I don't know why they did it."

Though each generation of boys has its share of Alberts and Daniels, the family has given up on the fancy nomenclature. It's just one big family. Dan's family.

Back at Minnewaska, George's oldest son, Charles, was raised to take over Minnewaska. But Charles died when he was 18 years old, leaving Alfred Fletcher Smiley, his younger brother, sole proprietor of the business when his father died in 1944.

Lucille Phillips, who worked for Fletcher for 21 years, remembers Fletcher Smiley having mixed feelings about his inheritance. "He was the grandson, and he always considered Minnewaska sort of a white elephant, a great chore that he had to do," she says.

Al Smiley puts it a little differently. "Grandfather often talked about the burden of detail and stewardship," he says. "It was very much a burden."

The New Paltz English teacher explained his grandfather's position. "He had really fostered his mechanical interests all of his life, so he was caught up short," Al explains in the College Diner.

Technically, the Minnewaska side of the Smiley line stopped with Fletcher. Fletcher and his wife Ruth had four daughters. Fletcher's grandson Al Smiley changed his name to continue the family name.

Fletcher struggled to maintain the Wildmere and the Cliff House for the next decade, but times were becoming harder. His health was failing. People were coming for shorter stays. Costs were increasing and receipts were slipping. None of Fletcher's sons-in-law wanted to learn the business, and his grandchildren were too young. Al was only a teenager.

"At that time they didn't think a woman could run a hotel," Mrs. Phillips observes.

Fletcher and his right-hand man, Ken Phillips, started looking for someone to buy the resort. Not just any investor would do.

"Grandfather's concern was continuity", Al Smiley explains. "It wasn't a sell, take a killing and run. You know what I mean?"

But nobody wanted to buy it.

Except for the Phillipses.

"So anyway, Ken and I were sitting around talking and we said, My goodness, if he wants to sell it, then why don't we buy it," Lucille Phillips recalls.

During the discussion, Mrs. Phillips has poured lemonade and prepared a platter of brownies. The pink floral pattern on the party napkins match the living room walls.

When the Phillipses decided they wanted to purchase Minnewaska, they were vacationing in Texas. Fletcher Smiley was wintering in Florida, so the couple drove on over to talk business.

"We said, If you want to sell it, then why don't you sell it to us?" Mrs. Phillips says. "And he said, You mean to tell me you would take this on?"

The couple told Smiley that they had no idea how much the hotel was worth, but said they would pay whatever the banks would loan them. A small down payment was worked out, and long-term payments arranged. Fletcher and Ruth Smiley, his wife, were allowed to live and dine at Minnewaska for the rest of their lives.

"In other words, we treated them like honored guests as long as they wanted to stay here, "Mrs. Phillips continues.

Mr. Phillips says the agreement was to both parties' advantage. "The fact that he could live here and enjoy his home at absolutely no cost meant a lot to Mr. Smiley," he adds. "We even bought his gasoline when he was south. I would get a monthly bill."

"And he had a Cadillac car," Mrs. Phillips notes.

Mr. Phillips nods. "That's right. He had a Cadillac automobile, and he had another car. He lived high on the hog, let's put it that way. But that was our deal, and this was all right."

The Phillipses drove a convertible Mercedes Benz.

Mr. Phillips says Fletcher treated him like a son. During World War II, Phillips was exempted from military service because he was essential to Minnewaska.

"We didn't always agree, but it was our understanding that I was of no value to him if I agreed with him all of the time," Phillips explains. "He treated me very, very well."

According to Al Smiley, who was 18 years old when the hotel was sold, the arrangement wasn't so smooth. But he refuses to explain what he means.

"The promise was, shall I say, arranged, if you get my drift," Al Smiley says. "That is the chess game that is played on many fronts."

When the transfer took place, Minnewaska was in debt. "The firm did not have an abundance of cash," Mr. Phillips recalls. "As a matter of fact, it was behind the eight ball."

Fewer than a third of the rooms had running water.

But the Phillipses say they survived. "We worked hard," Mr. Phillips explains. "We worked around the clock, and we were fortunate enough to be able to buy Minnewaska and pay for it. It wasn't easy, but we did it. Didn't we, dear?"

"Yes, we did. Yes, we did," his wife agrees.

The first things Phillipses did was build a new roof over the Wildmere, install an elevator and work on the water system. Other than that, Mrs. Phillips says, nothing much changed.

Except for the wine cellar.

In the early Sixties, the Phillipses decided that they needed to generate more money. The cost of doing business was increasing, and visitors taking shorter vacations. The summer-long guest at Minnewaska was becoming an anachronism.

So in 1966 a bar was built in the basement of the Cliff House to increase cash flow. For the first time in the resort's 85 -year history, alcohol was served on the premises.

The bar was completed at the-same time a group of Ulster County Presbyterians were visiting the resort. Prudently, the Phillipses decided to postpone the grand opening until the religious entourage had signed out and passed out of hearing range. But the church members had heard rumors.

"I heard you have a wine cellar here," one pastor said to Mrs. Phillips.

"We opened it for them, and they had a great time," Mrs. Phillips notes. "And guests who we were sure were teetotallers were down there, and they enjoyed it. The guests said it was long overdue."

The Phillipses laugh as they tell the story. They remember their oldest son's analysis of the shift in tradition. "It's gone from class to trash," Mrs. Phillips jokes.

Al Smiley says his grandfather was not happy with some of the Phillipses' business decisions. "There was the necessity, quote, unquote, to move a bar downstairs," he grumbles. "That killed grandfather."

The Minnewaska Mountain Houses went modern. A golf course was added, motorboats were allowed on the lake, a glossy advertising campaign promoting the resort as an "adult's" hotel was launched, a ski lodge and slopes were developed, and a decision to keep the hotel open year-round was made.

"The efforts to fade into a year-round resort was disastrous," Al Smiley notes. "But now, to what extent that was the management, I'll leave that for others to say. My views become viewed as fingerprinting."

Al takes out a color postcard of an orange sailboat cutting through Minnewaska's blue waters and tosses it on the diner table. "That necessity to go glitz..." he mutters. "This screams at me. It is such a shock to a very, very well established tradition."

Although half the people who visit Mohonk come back for another visit, the average guest stays only two nights.

Bert Smiley -- short for Albert -- is president of Mohonk Mountain Houses and chief financial and executive officer for the business. He talks about the hotel industry with the confidence of an economist, which he is. The 50-year-old received his doctorate in economics at Princeton when he was 29. Mohonk is his third career.

The Hudson Valley, Bert Smiley says, is becoming a short-getaway kind of vacation land. "People used to come with their steamer trunks for a month or two months, you know," he explains. "And people don't often take vacations that way any more."

When people stay for shorter amounts of time, hotels have to increase the traffic through their rooms in order to survive, Smiley explains.

"Well, I think you have to adapt," he says. "Vacation patterns are not the same they were 20 years ago, but I don't think that means you necessarily have to ape resorts in Miami."

Mohonk has been responding to the changing times, Smiley notes. A free children's program has been launched to attract family business. A concerted effort is being made to attract conferences during off-peak times.

"It is gradual, incremental improvements," he says. "It doesn't happen overnight. Maybe it is not as exciting as going out and building a new resort, but I think that is what is needed."

In the meantime, the hotel has lifted its ban on dancing. (Now a whole weekend is dedicated to it.) The dining room serves wine. Recently, the hotel has established the Cappuccino Corner, a latenight cafe where guests can sit, talk and sip exotic coffees and cordials.

When Mohonk applied for a liquor license, Daniel Smiley, Junior resigned from his post as secretary and treasurer of the board. Her husband couldn't bring himself to sign the papers, Jane Smiley said.

Most Mohonk old-timers have adjusted to the change. "They assumed that I felt it was all wrong to have any kind of liquor," Mrs. Smiley says. "So when they mentioned the Cappuccino Corner, they were startled when I said, Oh, well, liqueur. That's sophisticated. That's quiet. It's off by itself. That's all right. And then Ben Matteson spoke up and said, Well, I think you ought to be able to get a whiskey and soda."

Jane laughs. She promises that there will never be a bar or a floor show in the hotel.

Bert Smiley backs his aunt's stand. "I think there is a way to successfully adapt or even enhance the place without really making radical changes," he asserts. "So we feel like you can do things that are worthwhile that are consistent with our social responsibilities."

Taxes have been a thorn in the hotel industry's side, Ben Smiley says.

In 1969, the Mohonk Trust was formed to improve human understanding and cooperation on a world basis -- and to ease the tax burden on the hotel. Because the trust is a separate non-profit organization, it doesn't pay property taxes on its 5500 acres of land.

But the bite of school, local and county property taxes on the mountain house has been substantial. Between 1988 and 1991, Bert explains, property taxes for the hotel's 2000 acres have increased 49%.

"That kind of thing creates problems," he says.

The recent introduction of state and local occupancy taxes have increased the cost of staying at Mohonk by an additional 7.2%, including a 5% tax because Mohonk's room rates are above \$100 a day. And that is on top of Ulster County's standard 7% sales tax, scheduled to increase to 7.75% this November.

Ben Smiley says taxes in similar mountaintop resorts in the Poconos of Pennsylvania are only 6%.

"Some people develop strong preference for one place or another," Smiley emphasizes. "And they will keep coming back, but the group-businessmeeting planners have learned to look around and see where they are getting the best deal."

After the 5% state occupancy tax was levied, Smiley says, occupancy rates in Ulster and Sullivan county hotels dropped from more than 60% down to 50%.

All in all, Bert Smiley says, the Mohonk Mountain House has survived the recession well. He attributes the hotel's success to the people who work for him.

Mohonk's customers have adjusted to higher rates in recent years. The hotel is filled on most weekends, often with younger families from New York City.

The number of old-time guests who used to stay at a substantially lower mid-week special rate has been reduced, and management is debating how to increase occupancy during the week. But Mohonk remains profitable nonetheless.

Bert Smiley realizes the financial picture can change for the worse at any time. "Minnewaska did eventually cease operation as a resort, and so did Grossinger's," he says. "It is always a bad sign when people like you are dropping around you. That should tell you something."

You see, the very uniqueness that is created is often the thing that keeps something alive," says Al Smiley, leaning his elbows on the diner table. "As soon as that uniqueness is lost by virtue of either your practices or so forth, you can kill the business."

In 1970, the Phillipses were \$1.3 million in debt, and the banks wanted their money. Wallkill resident Halsey Sherwood lent the Phillipses \$100,000 to put off foreclosure. For the first time, Ken Phillips talked about selling the property.

"Naturally, I am being very careful in selecting prospective buyers," he told a *Kingston Freeman* reporter at the time. "I don't want to sell the property to anyone who is going to tear the mountain apart."

The state started eyeing Minnewaska. Nash Castro, the general manager of the Palisades Interstate Parks Commission at the time, remembers his first visit to the property. He toured the site with a colleague who had camped at Minnewaska and with Laurance S. Rockefeller, the president of the commission.

"There was considerable enthusiasm on the part of all three of us," Castro notes. "It is a unique resource."

Armed with a presentation prepared by Castro and his friend, Rockefeller set off for Washington to get funding for a new state park. He returned with a promise of \$2.5 million from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

And then negotiations started in earnest. At 2a.m., only eight hours before the property was to be auctioned off by the banks, the state officials struck a bargain with Mr. Phillips. The hotel proprietor turned over 6725 acres surrounding Lake Awosting to the state for \$1.5 million. The state had offered Phillips \$2.5 million for the entire property, but Phillips wanted to retain the two hotels and the restaurant lodge at Ski Minne.

"Mr. Phillips wasn't keen on selling the whole thing," Castro recalls.

The sale enabled the Phillipses to pay off their debts and focus again on the hotel industry.

Over the next five years, Mr. Phillips eased his way out of the public eye. His son, Ken Phillips, Junior, was managing the family business. But Ken Junior wasn't having much more luck than his father. The Cliff House had been abandoned in 1972, property taxes had increased from \$23,430 in 1964 to \$142,357 in 1974, and there was very little snow that winter to support Ski Minne.

The state didn't make things easier. "New York State ought to be ashamed of itself the way they treated the hotel industry," the former hotel owner says. "I don't want to talk about other people's sins, but just look at the places that have failed." He mentions Grossinger's, one of the largest resorts in the state that is now out of business.

"Oh, well, it was water over the dam," his wife reminds him. "And we still live here, and we love it."

By 1975, Minnewaska Mountain Houses were in debt again to the tune of \$750,000. And this time, Castro said the state didn't have the money set aside for large land acquisitions.

Ken Junior started looking for alternatives to supplement the hotel's million dollar-a-year gross income. The young entrepreneur drew up plans to build 48 resort townhouses behind the old hotel on Sunset Trail. He also proposed a 150-unit trailer park at Ski Minne and conversion of the abandoned Cliff House to timeshare condos.

"Decisions must be made with the head and not the heart," Ken Junior told reporters at the time. "The answer is in breaking away from the hotel idea and starting to recognize that there are some good firm ways to support this beautiful acreage in such a way that it can pay its taxes. I am confident these ideas will work, but it's just a matter of getting the financing to do them."

Ken Junior's projects would have required \$2 million in new capital. Although the Phillipses found people to place down payments on some of the townhouses, they could not convince a bank to lend them the money to build. "We haven't made what the banks consider to be serious, intelligent business decisions in the past," Ken Junior admitted.

So the Phillips family put Minnewaska up for sale in 1977 at an asking price of \$3 million.

The Palisades Interstate Parks Commission came up with another \$1.08 million in December 1977 to buy another 1400 acres of the Minnewaska estate. The state obtained a 200-acre easement to prevent major construction on critical land surrounding the azure glacial lake.

The Phillips family was left with about 1200 acres, including the hotels, Lake Minnewaska and Ski Minne.

Even with the money from the state, however, the Phillipses were still \$800,000 in the hole. Ken Junior renewed his efforts to find the money to renovate the old Cliff House and build luxury town houses on the remaining property.

A month later, the Cliff House burned to the ground.

At about 8:30 p.m. a light was seen in a second-story window of the dilapidated hotel. By the time firemen arrived on the scene, the four-story wood structure was fully engulfed in flames.

The Phillips boys salvaged what they could from the ground-floor rooms. But Lucille Phillips, her grandchildren and the people ice skating on the frozen lake watched on as the 99-year-old mountain house and all its authentic antique furniture was destroyed.

"I watched, and I cried, and I wailed," Lucille Phillips wrote in a 1978 letter to the *Huguenot and Highland Herald*. "*Cliff* House was a beloved part of my life, and it was agonizing to stand by helplessly. I prayed that the trees around the house would be spared. They were."

The cause of the blaze was never discovered. Ken Junior termed the fire a final blow. "In a way, the old Cliff House died last spring when vandals broke in and smashed over 100 windows," he said at the time. Phillips guessed that the fire was started by people "relaxing" on the mattresses kept on the second story.

The building was uninsured. The insurance was cancelled when the family shut down the sprinkler system in 1972.

Some people contend the fire might have been set by the Phillips family themselves. Ken Phillips and his wife shake their heads. "I didn't get a red cent," he says.

Just when things seemed they couldn't get any worse, Marriott came along. In May 1979, the international hotel chain promised to build a \$35-million, five-star resort on the Shawangunk Ridge and save Minnewaska from bankruptcy. The billion-dollar corporation offered to build a 400-room luxury resort, 300 condominiums, an 18-hole golf course, tennis courts, swimming pools, an ice skating rink, an indoor equestrian center, a skeet range, hiking and riding trails, and a completely modernized downhill ski center.

After Bill Marriott, Junior had personally seen the property, Marriott executives revealed their ambitious plan. They would pay hundreds of thousand of dollars in property taxes, generate 450 jobs with an annual payroll of \$6 million, and contribute nearly a million dollars a year in sales taxes. They said the region would also benefit from a million-dollar annual advertising campaign promoting the resort.

In addition, the Phillips family said it would build a restaurant and another 300 condos on the 700 acres it would retain on the ridge.

But it wasn't that easy.

The golf course overlapped part of the state's conservation easement, Marriott petitioned the surrounding communities for a 87.5% abatement in property taxes for the first ten years. The hotel chain only offered the county \$100,000 to cover the \$500,000 in back taxes owed on the property.

Four months after Marriott announced its intentions, local residents opposing the luxury resort had organized into Citizens to Save Minnewaska. That group and several others concerned with the region's the region's environment claimed the environmentally sensitive ridge could not support the kind of intense development proposed by Marriott.

Al Smiley was one of those people. "If you have to cover the mountain with condos to make it viable, then you are not big enough," he says.

Even if the land could support the use, the protestors argued, Marriott would not be a healthy contribution to the community. The resort would be a self-contained mecca for rich people, they said.

People would eat, sleep and shop in the mini-mall on the mountain. And the local jobs created, they said, would be low-paying.

Then-assemblyman Maurice Hinchey sided against Marriott. "Go up against people who say, Damn the environment, full speed ahead with business, tax abatements for corporations, more considerations, less restrictions, less paperwork," he wrote in a newsletter on the issue. "We've got to think about tomorrow as well as today and the kind of life our children and grandchildren are going to have around here, and not how much money we are putting in our own pockets."

The New Paltz school board offered Marriott a 75% abatement in property taxes for ten years.

Citizens to Save Minnewaska filed suit against Marriott to block the development, claiming there wasn't enough water on the mountain to support the hotel and condominiums. It argued that the hotel chain had no business putting a golf course on the state's conservation easement.

The anti-Marriott cause became a social movement supported by more than a half-dozen environmentalist groups and thousands of residents. The campaign was funded entirely by donations, benefit concerts and fundraisers, including an album cut by local musicians.

The suits and the public opposition stalled Marriott, and the Phillips family's indebtedness continued to increase. In October 1979 the disco in the basement of the Wildmere spun its last album. In November the Wildmere closed its doors to the public. For a fee, the grounds were made available to day visitors.

In 1981, Ski Minne went up in flames. The building was insured to the tune of \$85,000.

The battle raged on for six years, and in that time the pricetag on the project increased to \$100 million. The courts ruled that another water source had to be found and that the golf course had to be relocated.

"It took us years, but we finally proved that their engineers were whores," Al Smiley notes, but he doesn't smile. "There wasn't water there, but you pay 'em [engineers] enough and they will tell you whatever you want."

Soon after the 33-acre Lake Minnewaska had been featured in the "I Love New York" promotion campaign, Marriott withdrew its plans to develop the Shawangunk resort. In 1985, the Phillipses put the Victorian hotel on the market for \$5.5 million.

The state offered \$3 million for the final chunk of the Minnewaska estate. Ken Junior kept looking for someone to develop the property. Although a series of preliminary negotiations took place with a number of investors, nothing took hold. The state announced that if necessary it would take the property by eminent domain.

The next year, the final vestige of historic Minnewaska disappeared in a blaze of glory. The uninsured five-story Wildmere caught fire minutes after the Phillipses held a press conference attacking the state's move to condemn the property. Ken Phillips said he found paper on fire in the east end of the wood structure. He salvaged what he could from the family offices. He said the fire must have been set intentionally.

"It had to be set," Ken Phillips said at the time. "There's nothing in there to make the fire burn." The east end was locked and without electricity.

In 1987, the state was finally ready to proceed with condemnation. At the last moment, the Phillips family decided to throw in the towel. The last of Minnewaska was added to the state park for \$6.775 million. Today, the 10,000-acre park is used by hikers, bikers, swimmers, cross-country skiers and other tourists for a day fee of \$2.

"It seems it ended all right," Phillips says. "You know, Minnewaska is a beautiful place. A lot of places were interested in the money and not the preservation. We, the Phillips family, put preservation first."

After years of talk about developing the property for recreational purposes, the state has, to the surprise of very few, so far not done much at Minnewaska, citing both the lack of a complete master plan and budgetary constraints. A series of planning options have been explored. Early on, the state rejected a modest 50-room inn on the land, and later a major increase in the number of parking spaces for recreational visitors.

"I thought it was a pre-ordained outcome," says Gerry Benjamin, chairman of the Ulster County Legislature and one of two Ulster County members on the citizens' committee giving the state advice on Minnewaska. Benjamin said the environmental community "was pressing for the minimal use." Concerned with giving the state government cash flow with which to manage the park, Benjamin argued for some limited development. But he was in a minority.

A final master plan and environmental impact statement are now close to completion. If the latest plan is adopted, rock climbing, ice skating and camping will be added to the **recreational uses** on the property. A 5500-square-foot visitors' center, employee housing and an 11,000-square-foot maintenance facility will be built. The park will have a total of 740 parking spaces; currently there are 425 parking spaces. Although he is happy that the land is preserved as a park, how it got there is a painful story for Al Smiley. "It was a miserable failure by any definition," he concludes. "It was a very, very do-or-die situation, and it died."

Meanwhile, Ken Phillips keeps tinkering away at his house, even though the state owns it. Maybe some day, he says wryly, he will finish it.

Brian Anglin is editor of the Huguenot & Highland Herald and a Gardiner resident. He wishes to acknowledge the assistance of the Elting Memorial Library in the historical research for this article. Any errors, of course, are the author's responsibility.