

## “... the blueberry, Meenahga”

by Marion M. Dumond

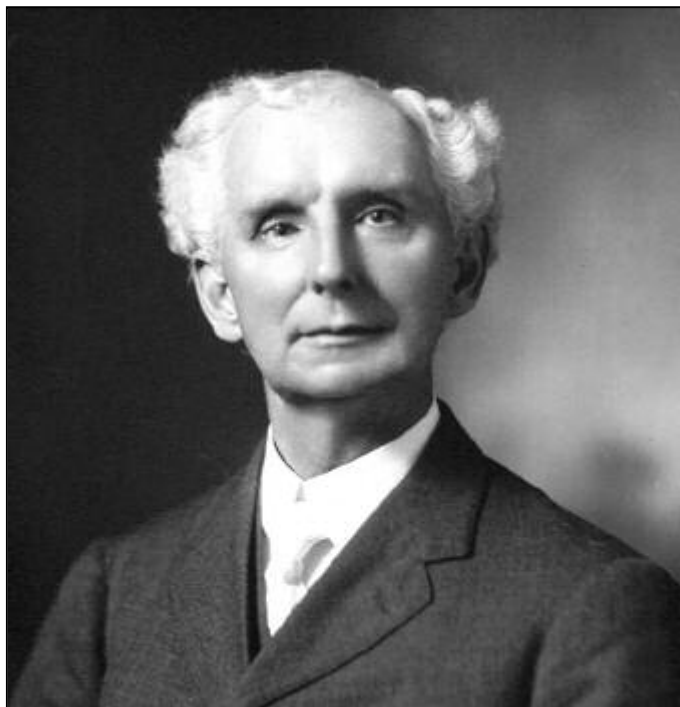
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In the late 1800s, long before the days of air conditioning, Ellenville residents used to camp in nearby higher elevations to escape the more oppressive heat in the valley. One of the favorite locations was the lower part of the **Shawangunk Mountains**, before the turn to go on up into Cragmoor. The men would commute each day into Ellenville by horse and wagon.

Young U. E. Terwilliger, a successful insurance and real estate agent in the village, decided that more people would enjoy “the Mountain” if they had cottages equipped with some of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century’s amenities in which to stay. To that purpose, he purchased more than one hundred acres from Casper Fisher and his son Charles. He adapted the Fisher home to a small boarding house and erected four cottages, which were ready for the summer of 1882, and built an additional cottage the next year.

U.E. Terwilliger (see photo below) was no stranger to “the Mountain.” His grandfather Cornelis (or Cornelius) had purchased land between the schoolhouse (District 11) and the **Gully Road** to Cragmoor. He and his wife Maria raised their ten children there. One son, Eli D., was one of the Town of Wawarsing’s leading citizens and owner of the famous *Terwilliger House* in what is now known as **Liberty Square**. Another son, Jonathan C., was a respected builder. U.E. was Jonathan’s son. Coincidentally, the land which U.E. purchased from Casper Fisher had itself been purchased by Fisher from David Haight who had bought it from Abraham and Martin Terwilliger, a different branch of the Terwilliger family.

Mr. Terwilliger was a literate gentleman, largely self-educated, who enjoyed reading and he chose as the name for his boarding house and cottages an Indian word from Longfellow’s “Song of Hiawatha.” In the part of the poem



when Hiawatha wandered fasting in the forest, he “Saw the blueberry, Meenahga.” Mr. Terwilliger chose to incorporate the availability of mountain blueberries with his appreciation of Native American culture and named his enterprise **Mount Meenahga House and Cottages**.

The cottages were very popular and U.E. (he preferred to use his initials, rather than his given name, Uriah) had so little trouble in keeping them filled that he purchased more land and, within ten years of the original project, built a large boarding house with public rooms and large bedrooms. Although untrained in architecture and landscaping, U.E. designed his estate and supervised its development. Charles Fisher worked as a carpenter for U.E. for many years, building the summer houses (photo, next page) which added so much to the charm of **Mount Meenahga**.

Carriage drives and paths were installed. Terwilliger was an early environmentalist who preserved as much of the natural habitat as possible; trees were cut judiciously, usually only to open up roads and views. A large recreation building provided space for a bowling alley, pool and billiard tables, a children’s playroom, and a large room for amateur theatricals and dancing. Two tennis courts and a croquet court were options for outdoor exercise and, long before golf was available at many places, Mr. Terwilliger hired the expert Thomas Bendelow to lay out a nine-hole course that was completed in 1899. It was a difficult course, more up-and-downhill than level, but **Meenahga**’s guests enjoyed it. In addition to a reading room in the main house, supplied with newspapers, magazines and books, U.E. built a separate library building so that readers would not be bothered by the noise of normal residential traffic and/or conversation in halls and on porches.

Somehow, U.E. found the time to run **Mount Meenahga** and develop his Ellenville business simultaneously, but not alone. His wife and his two children, Bert and Louise, worked at the hotel, but also enjoyed the social life. Carriage or surrey rides around the estate or to **Sam’s Point** or Cragmoor were always popular. Hayrides on summer evenings appealed to the young people, as did trips to the *Ulster County Fair*, the *Sun Ray* bottling plant, and similar Ellenville attractions.

The Terwilliger children grew, went away to school and returned summers to help at **Meenahga**. Son Bert returned permanently to share in both the insurance business and **Meenahga** and, in 1899, married Florence Tone, a graduate of Wellesley College who had come to Ellenville for a position at the *Ellenville High School*. The guest list at **Meenahga** included artists, financiers, business tycoons, statesmen, judges and many family groups with no particular fame. The guest register was signed by John W. Foster of Washington, DC, soon to be Secretary of State. Rev. and Mrs. Allen Dulles were accompanied by their son, John Foster Dulles. John Vernou Bouvier Jr. was a guest in the late 1880s as a young man just out of college (his future granddaughter, Jacqueline Bouvier ↗