



Passers-by could be forgiven for not noticing the grave site of Julian Bur-

roughs. It's easily overlooked by those cruising along Route 9W in West Park, NY. The entire cemetery there is dwarfed by a complex of stone barns just south of it—flashes of them through the trees are glimpses of another era, perhaps even another country.

There is no New York State Historical marker to indicate the history of those barns. And, there is no indication that Julian Burroughs designed them and oversaw their construction. Standing at Julian's grave you can view his great achievement.

Had Julian Burroughs not been the son of a nationally beloved and famous father, we locals might know more about him today based on his legacy in stone. On the other hand, had Julian's father remained a subsistence Catskill Mountain farmer like most of his Roxbury, NY siblings, Julian might have never become the man he did—and that would have seriously diminished the history, the built environment, and the beauty of the Town of Esopus, New York.

Julian's father, John Burroughs, was the author of 23 books and hundreds of articles—a naturalist, a literary critic, and a "Vagabond," traveling about with the likes of Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, Thomas Edison, and Teddy Roosevelt. John's other famous friends included environmentalist John Muir, and author Walt Whitman. A



young Theodore Dreiser, future author of classics stories including *A Place in the Sun*, *Sister Carrie*, and *An American Tragedy*, once sat in West Park, NY, on the rustic porch of John Burroughs' iconic cabin, Slabsides, patiently waiting hours to interview the man for an article in *Success Magazine*. The outside world was coming often to the Town of Esopus. And, almost any mention of the name "Burroughs" focused on John.

As John's only child, Julian grew up in a comparatively privileged home on the Hudson River in West Park, NY. The house built by John, and known as "Riverby," still stands just east of Route 9W, but not visible from it.



Above: Photo of boathouse on the Hudson below Payne's Omega. The arched entrance features a wrought Iron peacock screen designed by Julian.



According to an article by Julian in Gustav Stickley's June, 1912, issue of *The Craftsman*, titled "Boyhood Days With John Burroughs," his father never fell in love with the Hudson. During John's formative years in

Roxbury, NY, the Catskill Mountains and his woodsy family farmland had captured his boyhood heart and never set it free.

As John Burroughs himself lamented in an essay, "A River View," reprinted in Edward Renshan's *A River View and Other Hudson Valley Essays by John Burroughs*,

A small river or stream flowing by one's door has many attractions over a large body of water like the Hudson. One can make a companion of it; he can walk with it and sit with it, or lounge on its banks, and feel that it is all his own. It becomes something private and special to him.

Julian, however, growing up on the Hudson's shore, loved the river, eventually building his own home just north of his parents' in 1902. Planning and building his home was absorbing for Julian and foretold of his ultimate legacy.

Julian's daughter, Elizabeth Burroughs Kelley, in the forward to her father's book *Hudson River Memories*, which she also edited, noted of him, "Few, if any, I think have known the river as well as he did or loved it as much." In Julian's own words from that book,

"As for me, though I have learned to know the trout stream under my

father's tutoring to become something of a trout fisherman, I can never love it as I do the big river, the flow of tide, the dash of spray, and wide sweep of wind and water."

Julian and his wife, Emily, lived and raised their three children (two girls and a boy) next to Riverby. The family resided there continuously except during Julian's 1914-1918 employment as the Superintendent of Colonel Oliver Hazard Payne's estate, "Omega."

During the five or so years at Omega, the young Burroughs family lived in the estate caretaker's home, also on the Hudson. That stately caretakers' house had been purchased by Payne and added to the Omega property.

Julian was a graduate of the Riverview Academy, a private prep boarding school just down the Hudson, in Poughkeepsie. From there, he went on to Harvard, graduating Cum Laude in 1901.

At Harvard, Julian participated in the Photographic Club. Later in life, Julian sold his photos, often to illustrate a story he had written. His keen eye for the moment and its environment brought him job offers from large city newspapers to report on sporting events. He chose to remain in Esopus.

Julian not only loved the Hudson, he loved the land along its shore. After college he farmed there growing celery (a delicacy then), and grapes. These crops were easily shipped along the Hudson by boat and rail. Julian was equally passionate about building design and construction, though he had no formal training in architecture.

When the Payne's estate caretaker passed away, Julian was recommended for the position. With it came a house, a maid, an automobile and a chauffer, and a lot of responsibility—not to mention envy and resentment from those, often long-time employees, passed over for this plum position.

Possibly more important to Julian than the perks of the position, was the opportunity to design and build structures. The enthusiasm of Payne for Julian's designs paired with



Above: Photo of bridge over Black Creek just south of the Black Creek Apartments, shown below. Designed and built by Julian Burroughs.



Above: Photo postcard, postmarked 1913. Handwritten "Cottages on Col Payne's Place." This was housing for Payne's workers in West Park. Known later as the English Village for Convalescents. Now, Black Creek Apartments.



Above: Hand-colored postcard of John Burroughs home, Riverby, built by him in 1873 in West Park, NY. The building survives, but barely. Julian's home is just north of Riverby. Also in disrepair as of the author's last visit in 2021



the Colonel's open checkbook, allowed Julian

to not only design, but oversee the construction—to build, and to build with bluestone he ordered harvested from the estate's grounds— all without worry about the expense of his designs. From this came the stone barns pictured on page one, which today are being prepared for their next life as described in the Town of Esopus public hearing notice of February 2024:

The Project includes lodging accommodations, and ancillary facilities and services, including conference facilities, restaurants, and craft spaces, as well as a pool facility, landscape features, walking trails, and other similar recreation areas. The resort and amenities for the current Project will be created through the adaptive reuse of the existing structures and through the addition of limited new structures.

This is not the first time the site will become a destination. In the December 21, 1968 issue of *Kingston Daily Freeman* appeared an article featuring a photo of the iconic barns with the headline: "Barns Blossom Into Museum & Boutique," by Tobie Geertsema.

The photo caption said the barns appeared to have "...been transplanted from the English countryside." Indeed.

Geertsema described the structure: "What Burroughs designed for Payne were barns that only an earthquake could topple. Built of two-foot thick cutstone walls, they boasted reinforced concrete floors and roofs of steel truss construction."

This reuse of the barns was directed by Philip Hellreigel and James Shields of the insurance firm Doren Phillips, Inc. They invested in the rehabilitation of the neglected but structurally fine buildings, and hired local architect, Al Mauri, to create a restaurant in the former milking barn, soon to be called "The Creamery." This building is on the far west side of the large clock tower. The complex was rechristened Wildwycke Village. (See postcard on page 11). Hellreigel made the eastern wing of the barns into his insurance office and his home. Between the Creamery and the living

quarters were shops.

Although design of these beautiful barns was sometimes mis-credited to the heralded New York City firm of Carrère and Hastings, which was responsible for designing the massive 42,000 square foot Beau-Arts style Payne mansion, the barns were the exclusive design of Julian.

Elder daughter, Elizabeth Burroughs Kelly wrote in her book, *A West Parker Remembers When*, that her father's position at Omega was one of comparative ease for her parents. They attended the New York City Metropolitan Opera, availing themselves of the Colonel's box; her father had time to trout fish with his chauffeur, Peterson; but possibly the most joy for the distaff of the family were the trips on the *USS Aphrodite*, the Colonel's 344 foot steam powered pleasure yacht. They often went on short sojourns aboard her to places along the Hudson, and sometimes as far as Newport, RI. For Julian, in addition to the time with his family, the joy was the planning and designing of buildings, large and small for the estate.

In addition to the stately barn complex, Julian oversaw the maintenance of another set of buildings, sometimes called the English Village. It housed Payne's farm and domestic employees. It is pictured on page 11 as it appeared in 1913. Today it's the Black Creek Apartments.

Just south of that apartment complex is another Julian creation—the gracefully arched stone bridge over the Black Creek, visible today from Route 9W. And, to house a smaller boat to go from shore to to the *USS Aphrodite*, Ju-



Left. Advertising postcard for Wildwycke Village, not postmarked. Reverse reads: "Wildwycke Village (center) including: (Clockwise from top right) Wilkwycke House, fine New England style food; The Village Gift Shop, unique country nicknacks; The Eagle Room, a quiet after-hours lounge; The Apple Tree, custom made furniture and the finest utensils for gourmet cooking. Wildwycke Village, West Park, NY (914) 384-6600." Author's collection. Approximate date 1977. Below: 1917 stone ordered for Omega. Today, it is in the wall of an outbuilding at Julian's house by Riverby, West Park. Photo 2021 by author.



lian designed a beautiful stone boathouse with a wrought iron grate resembling a peacock.

Wildwycke Village was brought to is financial knees during the 1973 stagflation and oil embargo. The site has had a few uses since including occupancy by an electric boat building firm and a wooden furniture manufacturer. For much of the time since Wildwycke, it has been unoccupied except for raccoons, partiers and squatters.

In Julian's many newspaper obituary notices he is remembered most often for designing these buildings for Payne's Estate. He is also noted for his hobbies—landscape painting and color photography; his many magazine articles which were illustrated using his own photos; and the thing I found most surprising,

"He was also a singer of operatic compositions and made some of the first records distributed by Victor Talking Machine Corporation," from the *East Hampton Star Newspaper*, December 23, 1954. This may be only partly correct, because he sold the talking machines, but I'm not sure he actually recorded on them.

Not in his obituaries that I read was Julian's interest in experimental buildings of cement. That made a lot of sense as he loved designing and building, and lived so near Rosendale with its abundant cement mines.

Among the things I learned visiting my friend Rich Barley, at the time the caretaker living in Julian's house, was the origin of a polished stone inscribed with a latin saying. It had been placed in the wall of one of Julian's experimental outbuildings.

The marker, dated 1917, the year Payne died, had been carved at his order for the Omega estate. On Payne's death, Omega passed to his nephew whose wife did not like the stone. Julian brought it to his house and installed it where it was on April 19, 2021, when I photographed it.

In latin it reads: HORAE PEREUNT ET PUNIUNT. In English: "The hours perish and punish."

May that be a reminder to us all.

###

John Burroughs' Slabsides and Woodchuck Lodge are both on the National Register of Historic Places, as is Col. Payne's "Omega."