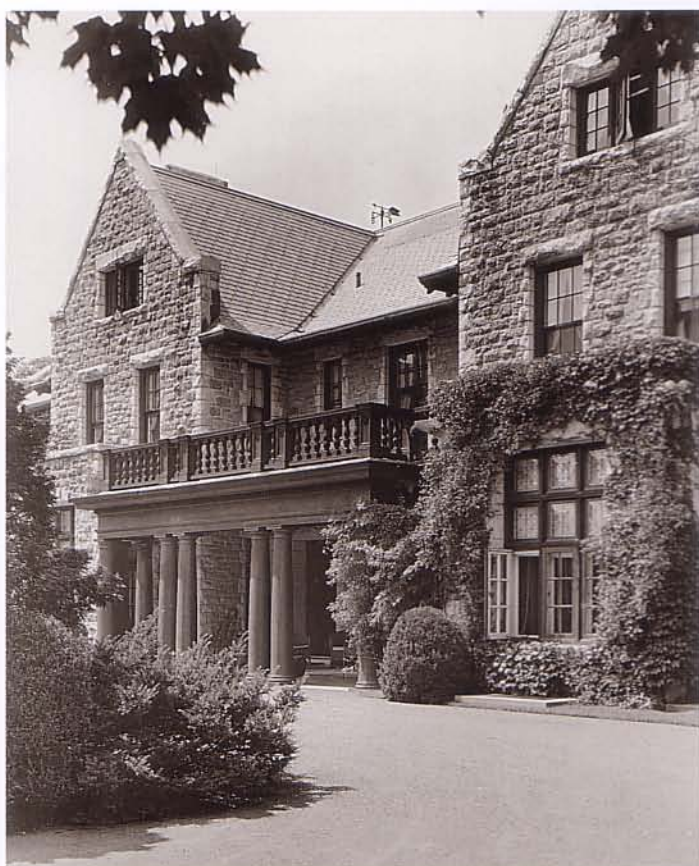


# UPTON PYNE

**N**OW JUST A MEMORY, the handsome stone mansion known as *Upton Pyne* once reigned as the crown jewel of one of the Bernardsville mountain colony's largest estates. It was built by Percy Rivington Pyne (1857–1929), a well-known New York financier and philanthropist, as a summer home for his family, which included his wife, the former Maud Howland, and their five children, Grafton Howland, Herbert Rivington, Mary, Percy Rivington Jr., and Meredith Howland.

Born to Percy R. Pyne Sr. and the former Albertina Shelton Taylor, Pyne was the grandson of Moses Taylor, a wealthy New York merchant and banker who established the import and shipping firm Moses Taylor & Company and later served as president of National City Bank of New York, a precursor to today's Citibank. Percy R. Pyne Sr., who was born and educated in England, came to the





*Upton Pyne occupied a hilltop site overlooking Ravine Lake. The estate grew to more than 500 acres.*

United States in 1835 and was employed by Moses Taylor's firm as a clerk. He became a partner in 1842 and remained there until he retired from active business in 1887, marrying his partner's daughter along the way, in 1855. Percy Sr. also succeeded his partner and father-in-law as president of National City Bank, upon the latter's death in 1882, and served in that capacity until 1891. The younger Percy Pyne's brother, Moses Taylor Pyne, was a major benefactor and trustee of Princeton University. His Princeton estate, *Drumhwaquet*, is now the official residence of New Jersey's governor.

Percy R. Pyne graduated from Princeton then began working for National City Bank under his grandfather Taylor's tutelage. He never severed his connections to that bank, and was serving on its board of directors at the time of his death in 1929, the same year it became the largest commercial bank in the world. Throughout his long business career, Pyne was active in many corporations and companies, including the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad Company and the Cayuga & Susquehanna Railroad Company. He was also keenly interested in scientific research and served on the executive committees of the American Museum of Natural History and the New York Zoological Society. Pyne was a tireless and generous philanthropist, supporting countless charities and hospitals with his time and money.

After first renting a summer home in Bernardsville, Percy and Maud Pyne began to acquire land in the area, eventually amassing an estate of more than 500 acres. Built between 1899 and 1900, *Upton Pyne* was named after the English village that was home to Pyne's ancestors. The architect, James Lawrence Aspinwall of Renwick, Aspinwall & Owen, designed the three-story structure in the style of an English manor house. Featuring twenty main rooms and nine servants' rooms, *Upton Pyne* was constructed on a bluff above Ravine Lake.

Aspinwall, who was descended from an old and prosperous shipping and mercantile family that was related to Pyne's wife's family, joined the office of architect James Renwick Jr. in 1875. Renwick, one of the leading architects of his day, is most famous for having designed—with assistance from Aspinwall—both the Episcopal Grace Church, on Broadway at Tenth Street, and St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. Aspinwall became a member of the firm Renwick, Aspinwall & Russell in 1880 and is credited with the design of a number of buildings in New York, including the American Railway Express Building, the New York Infirmary for Women, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

The Pynes selected James Leal Greenleaf to design *Upton Pyne's* landscape. Greenleaf, who taught and practiced

civil engineering before turning to landscape design, got his first important landscape commission in the late 1890s, working with the Olmsted Brothers firm to lay out and design the extensive waterworks on the vast estate of James B. Duke near Somerville, New Jersey. In addition to *Upton Pyne*, Greenleaf's other estate commissions in the Somerset Hills included *Blairsdon*, *Pennbrook*, and *Wendover*.

*Upton Pyne* adjoined the property above Ravine Lake on which the original Somerset Hills Country Club, with its nine-hole golf course, was built in 1897–98. After the club moved to its present, larger course on the former Frederic P. Olcott estate in Bernardsville in 1918, most of the land that comprised the original club was purchased by Percy Pyne, and a house, named *Dogwood Hill*, was constructed

near the site of the original clubhouse for Pyne's eldest son, Grafton, and his wife. Several years later the house burned down, but was rebuilt. The house was later acquired by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Engelhard and renamed *Cragwood*.

In addition to *Upton Pyne*, the Pynes maintained a year-round residence in New York City. The town house that was built for them between 1906 and 1912 on Park Avenue remains an enduring example of neo-Federalist architecture. Designed principally by William Mitchell Kendall of McKim, Mead & White, the elegant details and balanced proportions of the building were duplicated by the architects who planned the adjacent buildings. The block is today considered to be among the city's finest examples of that architectural style.

*Part of the original landscape designed by James Leal Greenleaf, whose work is also represented at several other area estates, including Blairsdon, Pennbrook, and Wendover.*





*Recreational activities at Upton Pyne included a grass tennis court and a cricket pitch.*

Pyne took a keen interest in all aspects of his country estate, particularly the horses, sheep, and Guernsey cattle, and he actively supervised the management of the extensive property. He expended large sums caring for his prize Guernseys, whose hooves were polished until they "gleamed like black gold," and he was said to ask his guests if they preferred champagne or milk from the estate, pointing out that the two beverages cost the same.

Pyne was respected and beloved in the community. He supported the Bernardsville school and was often seen giving local children rides in his roadster. Pyne was said to be the first estate owner in the area to give his employees pensions. He served on the first board of trustees of both the Somerset Hills Country Club and the Somerset Lake and Game Club, and on the Road and Improvement Society of Mine Mount, a residents' organization that financed the upkeep of local roads. Pyne died in 1929 at the age of seventy-two, having been in failing health since the sudden death of his son Meredith less than two years earlier.

Over the years, *Upton Pyne* was generously offered for the benefit of the community. In 1905 Pyne donated the use of his expansive lawns for a sport that was catching on in the United States—cricket—and soon two teams were organized, the Upton Pynes and the Bernardsville Eleven. During World War II, the mansion served the greater good of the nation in its role as Bernardsville's first aircraft-spotting station, with a purpose-built viewing platform affixed to the roof. The spotters—locals from all walks of life, from high school students to businessmen—were trained in aircraft identification and manned the sta-

tion round-the-clock. Later, the station was moved to the Bernardsville High School.

Mrs. Pyne's death, in 1952, marked the beginning of the end for the imposing stone mansion, which was expensive to heat and maintain. *Upton Pyne* won its first reprieve in 1956, when the Bernardsville public school system grew overcrowded and in need of new facilities. The Pynes' only daughter, Mary Pyne Filley Cutting, who had inherited the house, offered it for elementary school classes until a permanent school could be built. The school board accepted the offer, and children filled its rooms for four years in the late 1950s, while the Marion T. Bedwell Elementary School was being built. The house stood vacant for several years after that until a rose-grower from Madison, New Jersey, proposed to move his family there and maintain it in exchange for a nominal rent. That arrangement continued for almost five years, but the mansion once again stood empty after the family moved out.

*Upton Pyne's* last hurrah came in 1974 when Mrs. Cutting offered it as the site of the first Mansion in May, a designer showcase for the benefit of Morristown Memorial Hospital. Peapack-Gladstone landscape architect, John Charles Smith, who was selected to carry out the landscape design for the fund-raiser, spent six months and organized thirty-five subcontracting firms to execute the \$250,000 job. The event was a success, but Mrs. Cutting realized afterward that there was no future for her childhood home, which had become a target for vandals. In what she described as "the most difficult decision of my life," Mrs. Cutting had *Upton Pyne* demolished in 1982.