

HOMES OF HISTORIC DISTINCTION

Former Mohegan dairy creamery becomes comfortable home

In the 19th and early 20th century, before Mohegan Lake gained popularity as a summer resort and getaway from the city, the area, nestled in the lower Hudson Valley, became known as one of the most productive agricultural regions in the country. Probably the largest and most distinctive establishment of the time was Mohegan Farm, the home of Charles Hinckley Baker, a Chicago-born industrialist who lived there and worked the land from about 1911 until his death in 1924.

Located on the southeast side of the lake, Mohegan Farm included more than 150 acres. Masons who had worked on the Croton Dam constructed lavish stone barns for the farm's famous Holstein Friesian dairy cows, which Baker referred to as "Moheganites." Prime examples of these special animals sold for as much as \$10,000 at the time.

Obviously run by a successful businessman who happened to love agriculture and animal husbandry, the farm was made up of four "departments": Holstein Friesian Cattle and Dairy; Leghorn Poultry; the Chester

White Swine industry, and soils and crops.

As part of the dairy, a fieldstone creamery was constructed directly adjacent to the big dairy barn. Baker delighted in coming up with novel methods to market his special Holstein Friesian cream and other dairy products both to consumers in the city and to the newly arrived resort hotels around Mohegan Lake. The creamery provided a facility to process and bottle the milk from the farm.

After Baker's death in 1924, land around Mohegan Lake sold at a premium to create more and more bungalow colonies. His beloved farm was sold off in parcels, and today, Charlie Baker's beautiful stone dairy barns are in ruins. His Italianate mansion is long gone, replaced by raised ranches and restaurants, but the creamery lives on, as a 21st century home that has been carefully remodeled yet preserves its original bones. Ironically, it is sited on property with beautiful yet ghostly views of the stone ruins of the original barns. Owner John O'Donnell purchased the place specifically for its history and beautiful setting.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TERRY K. NAUMANN

He is surrounded on three sides by one-time pasture land—now seemingly endless woods. O'Donnell has preservation in mind, both for his own home and for the Mohegan Dairy barn ruins, and appropriately, his lovely stone home, built in the late 19th century, is Yorktown Landmarks Preservation Commission's newest Home of Historic Distinction.

The Yorktown Landmarks Preservation Commission (YLPC) is always seeking applicants for the Homes of Historic Distinction Program. To qualify, homes must have historical significance based on age, architectural style, past ownership, or association with a person or event important to Yorktown's history. Through the

program, plaques designating the basic facts about each house's history are fabricated and installed on or around the home. YLPC will work with each homeowner on appropriate wording for the plaque and will assist in research. The cost for the application and the plaque is \$100. Applications are available online at yorktownny.org/planning or by emailing nmilanese@yorktownny.org

The Yorktown Landmarks Preservation Commission would like to acknowledge the valuable assistance of Tim Beachak and Esteban Baquero of Signs Ink of Yorktown in the design, preparation and production of Homes of Historic Distinction signage.

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