

A CASTLE INN HISTORY



This chronology is a composite of numerous magazine and newspaper articles about the Castle Inn and its owners, as well as historical and genealogical records, post cards and photographs. There are a fair number of conflicting stories about the home and its builder. This history tries to clarify some of these stories.

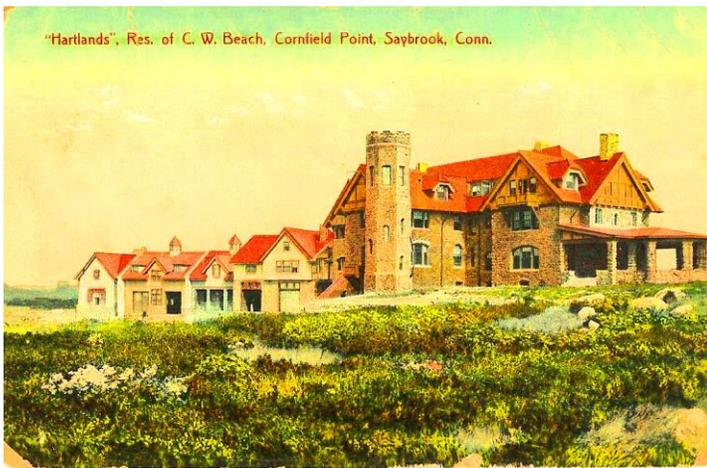
(Lamar LeMonte April 2021)

George and Elizabeth Beach and Hartlands: 1908-1923

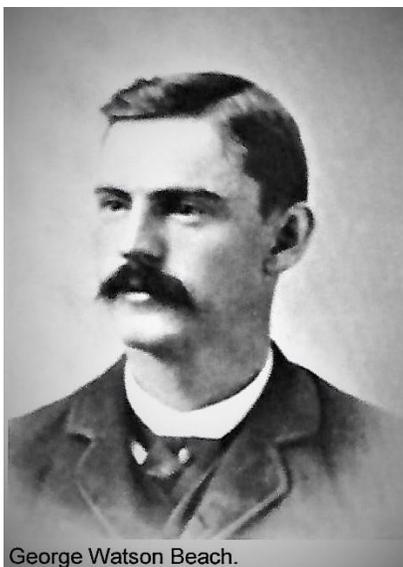
The elegant mansion on Cornfield Point was built overlooking Long Island Sound surrounded by hundreds of acres of open land. It was built sometime between 1903 and 1908 but no building records exist to confirm the exact dates. It is reported to have cost \$350,000. Built for George Watson Beach (1858-1931) and his wife Elizabeth Colt Jarvis Beach (1860-1935) "with aspirations to be the equal of the Newport summer cottages." Designed by Alfredo S.G. Taylor, a renowned New York architect, it was a forty room, 15,000 square foot English Tudor-Revival style mansion. (Alfredo Taylor has 39 private mansions and commercial buildings throughout Connecticut and New York on the National Landmarks Registry.) Its construction took approximately two years to build using local stones from the rocky beach at Cornfield Point.

"Hartlands" Res. of Geo. W. Beach, Cornfield Point, Olde Saybrooke, Conn.





According to state architectural historian Janice Cunningham, “the Hartlands mansion had the appearance of several small Tudor cottages joined together in sophisticated integration. When completed there were German chimes in the clock tower which rang on the hour and half hour, and played the song, *Don't Say Goodbye, Say Au Revoir*.”



Although numerous magazine and newspaper articles claim, “George inherited a Hartford insurance fortune but died bankrupt in 1921,” no evidence has been found to support this. In fact he died in Hartford in 1931 at the age of 73, four years before his wife died but George and his wife were still listed as residents of Old Saybrook at the time of their death. Neither he nor his family had any apparent connection to a Hartford insurance company. George’s father was Joseph Watson Beach (1823-1887) from Hartford. His mother was Josephine Elizabeth Coffing (1834-1913). His father was in the woolen dye business.

The Beach family name was a well-established Hartford name dating back to the early 1700’s at least. They were merchants, international traders, bankers and state senators. They were an integral part of Hartford’s expanding, wealthy, upper class society and these families frequently intermarried. George’s wife-to-be, Elizabeth Colt Jarvis, had an uncle and niece whose last name was Beach. The Beach families were among the many wealthy Hartford families in the 1800’s taking the train down to Fenwick to relax and vacation.

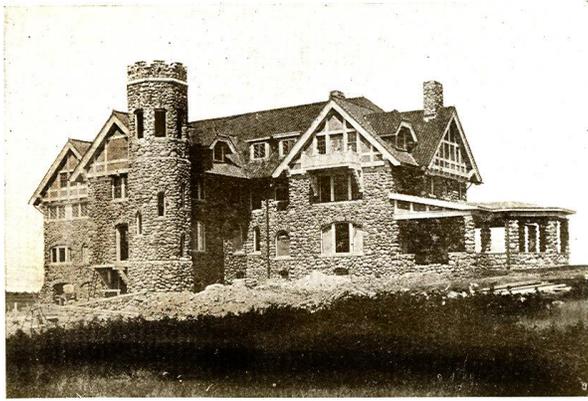
George Beach graduated Trinity College in 1880 and became connected with Beach & Company in Hartford, dealers of chemical dyes, of which his father was a founder. He later went into the woolen business in Beacon Falls, CT where he was head of the Beacon Falls Woolen Mills for several years. Beach later moved to Boston, Massachusetts, where he became president of the Scandinavian Belting Company. He remained in Boston for some time and then went to New York, where he was a member of the firm of Beach and Barnard, manufacturing agents. Beach retired from active business soon after building his residence on Cornfield Point around 1907.

George Beach married wealthy Elizabeth Colt Jarvis, also from Hartford, who in the 1880's reportedly inherited \$200,000 of the Colt Firearms fortune from her aunt, the wife of Colonel Samuel Colt. George's wife was also the great-great-grand daughter of General William Hart, who lived in what is now the Old Saybrook Historical Society's Hart House. It is not too great a stretch to imagine that their lifestyle was well supported by Elizabeth's considerable assets, most of which consisted of valuable, waterfront Cornfield Point land. There is ample evidence that Elizabeth systematically sold off hundreds of acres of valuable waterfront land during the time they lived at Hartlands.

George and Elizabeth named their mansion Hartlands after Elizabeth's ancestor Gen. Hart who owned the original property, then called Neck Farm, and later known as Cornfield Point. Her Jarvis ancestors were also major Cornfield Point landowners. It is reported that Elizabeth Beach owned all or most of Cornfield Point, somewhere between 400 and 600 acres at the time they built their mansion. Today's Hartlands Drive at Cornfield Point is a legacy of that house name.

George and Elizabeth Beach moved into Hartlands in about 1908 when George was 50 and Elizabeth was 48 years old. They had three children at that time, Hart Jarvis Beach 17 years of age, George Beach 16 years old, and John Samuel Beach 9 years old. The home was said to be built as their summer home. But it was also reported that George retired from business shortly after building the mansion so perhaps Hartlands was to be their retirement home. They apparently moved down from Hartford, although George had previously lived and worked in both Boston and New York City. Former addresses could not be found.

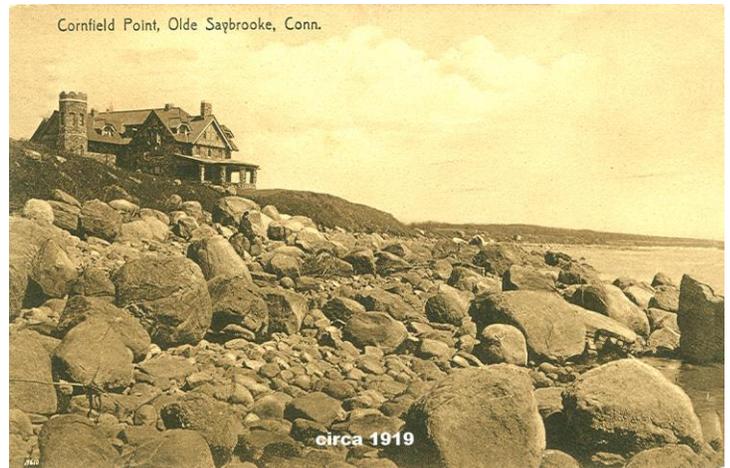




Residence of Geo. W. Beach, Cornfield Point, Saybrook, Conn., in course of construction.

circa 1908

Published by J. A. Ayer.



Cornfield Point, Olde Saybrooke, Conn.

circa 1919

According to Town Historian Elaine F. Staplins in a 2000 interview, “George Beach was a hail-fellow-well-met among Old Saybrookers. He threw extravagant summer parties in May and August to which the entire town was invited.” Unfortunately the family only lived in the mansion for about ten years and some mystery surrounds their departure during World War I and where exactly they lived thereafter.

Sometime between 1916 and 1919 it is reported the Beachs leased their house and land to the Army for \$1 year. It’s not clear if the Army occupied the mansion. Nor is it clear how long the Army was stationed there. Reports suggest they occupied a portion of the surrounding land with about 40 troops who lived in temporary barracks. It is possible George and Elizabeth still resided in the mansion while the Army fired artillery shells into Long Island Sound from their backyard. But it is perhaps more likely they found another residence during this time. The Army was using the property as an artillery training site, building gun mounts, barracks and a water tower on the land. The water tower remained until the late 1940’s. The Army must have fired numerous artillery shells into Long Island Sound because records show the Army regularly delivered trainloads of munitions to Cornfield Point. They used the existing tracks of the then defunct Connecticut Valley Railroad which at that time still had tracks that terminated near Guard House Point in Fenwick.

After the war the Army departed and the story is that George and his wife were forced to sell the house and all the land to pay off a \$35,000 tax debt. Old Saybrook Town Land Records show that in 1920 Elizabeth Colt Jarvis Beach sold a parcel of Cornfield Point land to Herbert Wallace Headle, describing the parcel as “the proving grounds,” along with the, “the office,” adjacent to Town Beach Road. This was probably the Army’s former occupation grounds. Then in 1921, Town Land Records show that she paid off a \$35,000 mortgage on a parcel of land called, “the Jarvis farm property.” The property was bordered by Plumb Bank Creek and Beeman Creek on Cornfield Point. In 1920 she also sold land on Sheffield Street to Horatio C. Chapman.

*The former proving grounds
circa 1920*



Whether George and Elizabeth were suffering financial difficulties or just “downsizing” is not known. By 1920 George was 62 and would live another 11 years. Elizabeth was 60 and would live another 15 years. Their youngest son was 21 and living independently, as were his two older now married brothers. Some stories report that the cost of servants and maintenance were exorbitant; that the mansion’s 40 rooms required a ton of coal a day to heat. It is assumed that the maintenance costs, servant salaries, and the extravagant parties for wealthy friends, politicians and socialites began to take a toll on the Beachs’ finances.

When they actually moved out of the mansion and where exactly they lived after moving is not known. George and Elizabeth both had well-established extended families in and around Hartford and West Hartford as well as New York City but there is no indication they ever left Old Saybrook. The New York Social Register (summer edition) of 1919 still listed the family’s address as “Cornfield Point, Connecticut.” 1920 Town Hall records list Elizabeth Jarvis Beach as a resident of Old Saybrook, and one of the first suffragettes to vote in 1920 after the passage of the 19th amendment allowing women to vote. Even though both George and Elizabeth died in Hartford (hospital), the census records for 1910, 1920 and 1930 continued to list their residence as Old Saybrook.

The Good Times Begin: 1921-1950

In 1921 Elizabeth Beach sold the final 25 acres of land, including the Hartlands mansion, to Gilbert Pratt of New York City who in 1922 then sold most of the land, but not the mansion, to the James Jay Smith Co., a developer of the soon-to-be-built Cornfield Point Beach Club. The builder advertised they were building “a veritable city by the sea,” The Colony will be “a restricted cottage colony available only to genuine Americans.”

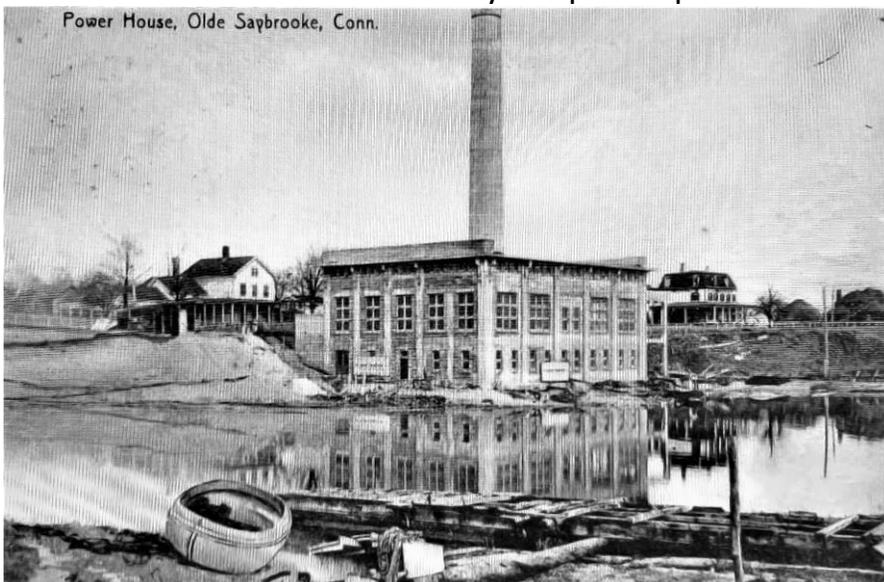


This mansion will be sold with 3 acres of land, preferably for a hotel, around which the life of the Colony will center.



In 1923 Otto and Margaret (Maggie May) Lindbergh, restaurateurs and innkeepers from Red Bank, NJ bought Hartlands and about 3.5 surrounding acres for \$75,000 and turned the house into a hotel they named, Ye Castle Inn. (Four years later, Otto's young nephew would fly the Atlantic solo.)

Otto and Margaret were not strangers to Saybrook, having owned the Fair View Inn on Ferry Road, which overlooked the Connecticut River just north of the railroad bridge, diagonally across the street from the trolley-car power plant. It burned down in 1926.



The Fair View Inn can be seen beyond the upper right corner of the trolley-car power plant on Ferry Road.

This photo was taken standing on part of the docks where Augie Strusholm kept the boats he used to visit “Rum Row” off Montauk Point, Long Island.

Their daughter Jenny (cousin to Charles Lindbergh) married A. ("Augie"/August) Campbell Strusholm, a decorated World War I hero and former car dealer from New Jersey. But the Lindbergh's son-in-law's main claim to local fame was his rum-running and bootlegging operation, using Ye Castle Inn as his base. His docks at the old trolley-car power plant on the River was the main landing area for his numerous high-powered boats. He successfully supplied the shoreline and River towns with liquor and cigarettes from Nova Scotia, Bermuda, the Bahamas and Cuba, until the end of Prohibition in 1933.



Throughout the era of Prohibition, the Lindbergh's Ye Castle Inn benefited greatly from their son-in-law's successful bootlegging operations. The Inn thrived as "an elegant retreat for select and wealthy clientele, renowned for its fine liquor, cigarettes, big-band music and gambling." Maggie May was arrested and convicted in 1933, just before the end of Prohibition, for "housing a large quantity of liquor." But she simply paid a fine and continued serving her "imported" spirits to her famous and infamous clientele.



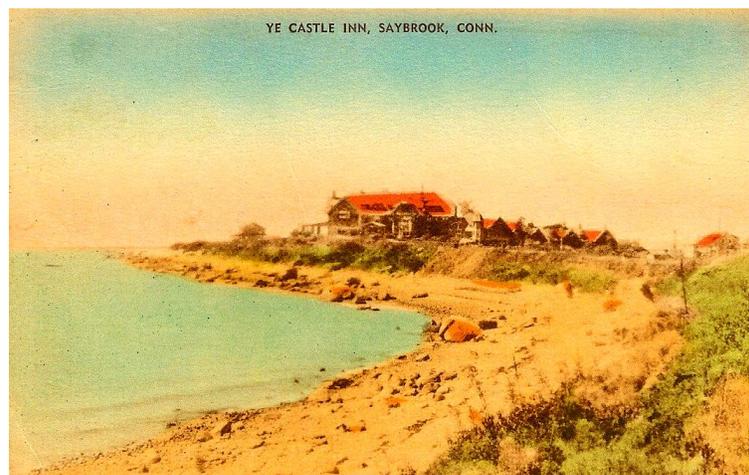
The Ivoryton Playhouse regularly attracted numerous actors. Stories about Tallulah Bankhead, Helen Hayes, Charlie Chaplin, Ethyl Barrymore and other notables including Howard Hughes (romantically involved with Katharine Hepburn at the time), the Rockefellers, and later stars like Frank Sinatra, Ann Sheridan, Don Ameche, and Doris Day kept the upscale and infamous reputation of Ye Castle Inn intact.

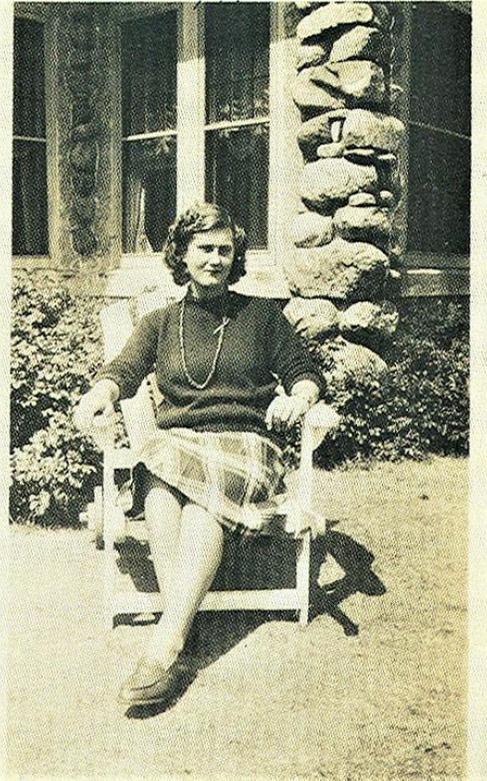
The Lindberghs owned and lived in the mansion for 27 years, the longest ownership tenure in the mansion's history, spanning the roaring 20's, the great depression 30's, the second world war, and up until 1950.



Above left: Cornfield Point circa 1930's Above right: Otto & Margaret Lindbergh next to their daughter Jenny & her husband Campbell "Augie" Strusholm

Maggie May Lindbergh survived her husband, and her son-in-law A. Campbell Strusholm and her daughter Jenny. Jenny's daughter Margaret "Peggy" Lindbergh was born and raised in the Castle and continued to live in Old Saybrook, where she attended high school. Interviewed in 2003, Peggy Lindbergh King recalls her grandmother Maggie May as the hostess of the Castle, making everyone feel at home. Peggy remembers many of the notable actors who stayed there. She remembered that each spring a staff of about 25 regulars, some from Europe, would appear in April to ready the hotel and vegetable gardens for the season.





Far left: Maggie May Lindbergh (lower step center) with some of Ye Castle Inn staff. On the bottom step sits daughter "Peggy"

Left: Margaret "Peggy" Lindbergh King 1946

Eight More Owners: 1950-1999

In 1950 Maggie May sold the property to "Red" Kelly, a native of Wethersfield, for \$86,000. He changed the name from Ye Castle Inn to The Inn at Cornfield Point. He also added the "Lido Deck" (see below) and a swimming pool. And he went bankrupt.



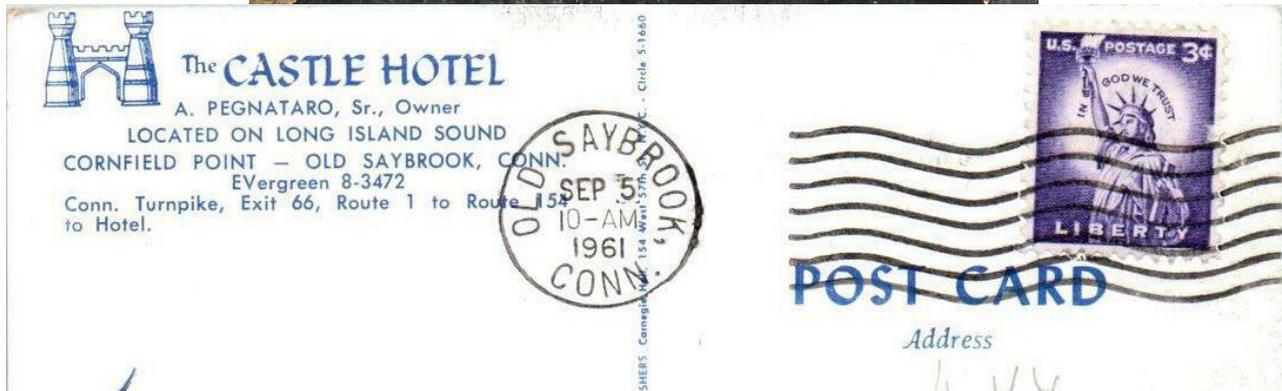


The Inn at Cornfield Point

HARTLANDS DRIVE ● OLD SAYBROOK, CONNECTICUT ● (203) 388-4681

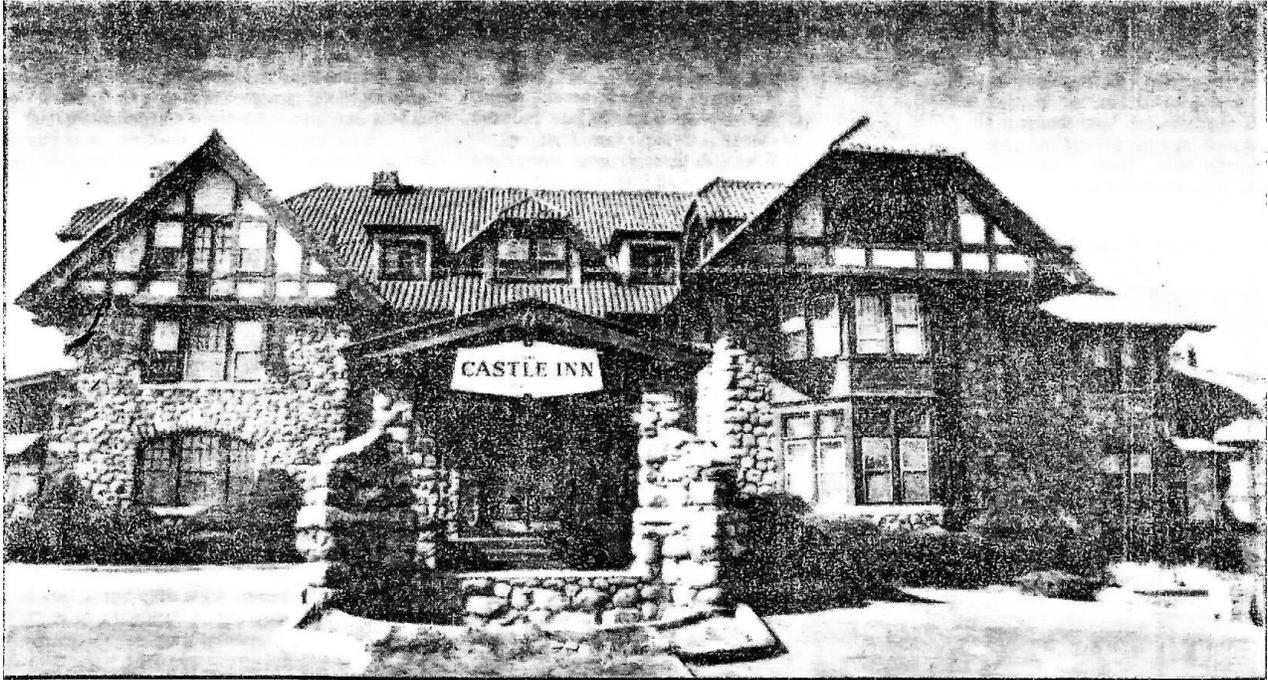


In 1955 the property was sold at bankruptcy auction to the Anthony Pagnataro grocery-chain family of New Haven, for \$69,000. (Anthony Pagnataro's daughter Mary later married Louis Tagliatela, and they subsequently built the current Saybrook Point Inn & Spa.) Anthony Pagnataro named the inn The Castle Hotel and ran the resort for eight years. Complaining to the town of over-taxation for a tax assessment of \$224,820 he sold the property in 1963.



In 1963 the property was sold to Leon and Henry Kowalski for \$250,000. Three years later in 1966 it was sold to Daniel DeAngelis, a New Haven restaurant owner for \$150,000. He owned the property for ten years, selling in 1977 for \$550,000 to David Garfield of Old Lyme and Ronald MacDaniel of Stratford. They ran the resort for eleven years. By this time the inn was called The Castle Inn, (At Cornfield Point).





The stone Castle Inn has a fine view of the sea from the bluff at Cornfield Point.

In 1988 they sold to Anthony R. Venetucci Jr. of Old Lyme and his parents, Anthony F. and Mary R. Venetucci of Stamford. They established Seapoint Partners as owners. Unfortunately the new owners ultimately defaulted on the \$2.6 million mortgage and after three years of litigation and bankruptcy proceedings, MacDaniel bought back the Castle Inn in 1994. By this time the inn had ceased accommodating visiting vacationers. The only tenants were renters living in what was called the Annex, originally described as “two six-room-&-bath apartments (probably former servant’s quarters), plus several stables and garages.” Locally this was often referred to as “divorce row.” A caretaker administered this real estate. No one is certain who this caretaker was.



From 1994 to 1999 Ronald MacDaniel and Adele Griffin MacDaniel ran the property only as a restaurant and banquet facility. In 1999 they sold to Richard Vicino, a Rocky Hill developer with Beach Investments LLC (no relation to the Beach family) for \$2.3 million.

Modern Times: 2000-2008

Richard Vicino's original plan was to build Saltaire, a group of 24 seaside condominiums on the property, including the main house. In April of 2002 demolition of both the Lido Deck and the Annex began. Over 8,500 square feet of the mansion disappeared and the rubble cleared. But Vicino's seaside condominium plans never reached fruition. Five years of local and state preservation efforts, lawsuits, zoning struggles with the Town and the Cornfield Point Association resulted in new beach homes encircling the old mansion. But the mansion remained empty and the Castle Inn was listed for sale at \$2.9 million. By then the mansion had been empty and abandoned for about eight years.



Only about an acre of waterfront land remained from the original 600 acre Cornfield Point estate. Wayne Rand and Maria Foss-Rand discovered it in 2007. They purchased the former Castle Inn for approximately \$2 million. Finally, 100 years later, the mansion was ultimately restored to its original glory as a private home.





One has to wonder if Otto and Maggie Lindbergh, who in 1923 bought the Beach's mansion and turned it into Ye Castle Inn, ever invited their Old Saybrook neighbors George and Elizabeth over for dinner and prohibition drinks and talk about the old days on Cornfield Point. And what would George and Elizabeth and Maggie and Otto think about their mansion now?

