THE CATSKILLS: AN ICAN WILDERNESS
A CONSTRUCTED IMAGE OF AMERICA
A CASE STUDY
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THE CATSKILLS: A CONSTRUCTED IMAGE OF AMERICAN WILDERNESS

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All material including photographs and maps, unless otherwise stated, is by the author.
“Midst greens and shades the Catterskill leaps, 
From cliffs where the wood-flower clings
All summer he moistens his verdant steeps
With the sweet light spray of the mountain springs
And he shakes the woods on the mountain side,
When they drip with the rains of autumn-tide.”

Catterskill Falls, William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878)
“What is the nature of human attachment to the landscape? What gives a landscape special emotional meaning, collective or individual? What makes us fond of landscapes, enjoy them, remember them with emotion?”

This research explores the influence of romanticism and the Hudson River School on the way in which Americans view and interact with nature.

The investigation takes form in a case study that examines the manifestation of the romantic ideal through the rise of wilderness tourism in the Catskills during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The establishment of luxurious resort hotels and the resulting landscape architectural operations drastically changed what was viewed as the epitome of American wilderness.

The ambition is to deconstruct these wilderness ideals in order to reveal the artificial spectacularity behind both the Hudson River School paintings, and the “wilderness” experiences of tourists of this time.
CHAPTER TWO

THE CATSKILLS
The Catskills make up a mountainous region of Southeastern New York located 160 km northwest of New York City. The area was originally settled by the Lenape Native Americans who lived on the banks of the Hudson River and hunted in the Highlands.\footnote{1}

The Catskills can perhaps be called America's first wilderness. Dutch explorer, Henry Hudson, first sighted the profile of the blue mountains when he sailed up the river that would later bear his name in 1609.

In 1741, early American naturalist, John Bartram traveled to the Catskills to collect samples of the resin of the “Balm of Gilead” tree (balsam fir) believed to have restorative powers, to send back to England. During this trip he became the first person to record a visit to Kaaterskill Falls. His account, “To ye Cats Kill Mountains with Billy”, was the first scientific report on the Catskills. It listed most of the flora of the area and theorised how the mountains might have been formed.\footnote{2}

In terms of land use, the first Dutch and English settlers established a rich agricultural area growing wheat and other crops. The Victorian romantic period in the 1800’s made the Catskills a famous tourist destination. Simultaneously, heavy industry in the form of tanneries, lumber mills, and bluestone quarries left its mark on the region that is still visible today.
THE CATSKILLS

TOPOGRAPHY

Block diagram of the area around Kingston, New York
2.3a **Cross section of the Catskill front.** Physiographic map and cross-section of the Hudson Valley and Catskill Front, showing bedrock and relation to topography. The Front's limestone bedrock began forming 400 million years ago in the Silurian period when the region was a river delta that the shallow sea drained into. In the second phase during the Acadian orogeny, the sand and clay of the newer mountains formed into shale and sandstone as the sea became the deeper Appalachian Basin. During the third geological phase, the sea floor began to drain and uplift creating a plateau of Devonian sediments. 3

2.3b **Devonian Stratigraphy of the Catskill Front, Eastern New York.**
CHAPTER THREE

THE HUDSON RIVER SCHOOL
The American Romantic movement in art and literature began in the 19th century as there was a cultural shift from 18th century rationalism towards romanticism. The Hudson River School, named so because many of the artists lived in New York and depicted scenes around the Catskill Mountains and the Hudson Valley, was the first uniquely American school of landscape painting.

Thomas Cole, considered to be the founder of the movement, and the other artists following, saw nature as “God's Cathedral”. These wild landscapes were sublime examples of God's power, seen in the mighty peaks and dramatic waterfalls. And by immersing oneself in nature, it was a way of connecting and bringing man closer to God. Painting was also seen as a spiritual act, guiding viewers of the works with an aesthetic lens through which to view wilderness and experience a moral reawakening.¹

While America didn't have the picturesque ancient monuments of Europe, it was a young nation of untouched natural bounties and a fresh, bright future. In Cole's 1836 Essay on American Scenery, he writes “Nature has spread for us a rich and delightful banquet. Shall we turn from it? We are still in Eden; the wall that shuts us out is our own ignorance and folly”.² By associating God with the nation and its nature, romanticism sparked a sense of hopeful nationalism in which nature was not savage and threatening, but full of undiscovered promise and freedom.

3.1 Thomas Cole, Lake with Dead Trees, 1825
This painting by Thomas Cole is considered to be the first of the Hudson River School movement. This was one of the initial paintings and sketches done on Cole's first trip by steamboat up to the Catskills, establishing the area and the Hudson Valley as the inspiration point of the artists to follow.
3.2  Asher Brown Durand, *The Catskills*, 1858
Durand and his contemporaries such as Frederic Church were often amateur geologists and gave much importance to highlighting the flora, fauna, and unique geological features of the Catskill landscape.

3.3  Thomas Cole, *Catskill Mountain House, The Four Elements*, 1844. The paintings frequently depicted the power of God through dramatic weather forces such as thunderstorms, strong winds, and lightning-struck trees.
3.4 Thomas Cole, View of the Round-Top in the Catskill Mountains (Sunny Morning on the Hudson), 1827
The Hudson River School

Celestial Light & Colour

3.5 Frederic Edwin Church, Morning, Looking East over the Hudson Valley from Catskill Mountains, 1848. Dramatic vibrant skies at sunrise or sunset, highlight the sublime beauty of the landscape. Here a man is portrayed in the foreground admiring the majestic view.

3.6 Frederic Edwin Church, Above the Clouds at Sunrise, 1849. Church uses the pink, sun-light fog and windbent tree in a sweeping circular composition and the perspective of being high above the clouds to draw the viewer’s eye to the heavenly glow of the rising sun.
3.7 Thomas Cole, View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm — The Oxbow, 1836
CHAPTER FOUR

BEHIND THE IMAGE OF WILDERNESS
The Hudson River School painters promoted a moral vision of the country as pure, untouched land. The artists often created an idealised portrayal of the nature meant to evoke an emotional and awe-inspired response from viewers rather than act as a realistic snapshot of a particular landscape.

This celebration of wilderness and “nature” in 19th century America was happening in parallel to a surge in the exploitation of natural resources and the commodification of the landscape.¹ The nature that the Hudson River School was exhibiting was in reality, rapidly disappearing.

However, these paintings were meant to transport the viewer to another time and place of “sentimental pastoralism” and harmony with nature. The artists used techniques experimenting with large panoramic formats, impossible perspectives, nostalgic figures, and leaving out traces of industry/the man-made in the landscape.

Artists such as Frederic Church created his paintings with a spectacular exhibition experience in mind. His masterpieces such as “Niagara” utilised the drama and performative aspects of theatre such as spotlights and music and soon had paying New Yorkers lined up around the block.²

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1. The nature that the Hudson River School was exhibiting was in reality, rapidly disappearing.
2. Artists such as Frederic Church created his paintings with a spectacular exhibition experience in mind. His masterpieces such as “Niagara” utilised the drama and performative aspects of theatre such as spotlights and music and soon had paying New Yorkers lined up around the block.
Thomas Cole, *Falls of the Kaaterskill*, 1826. Cole paints the Kaaterskill Falls, a scenic landmark of the area, one year after his first visit to the Catskills. He depicts a golden, autumnal scene. A Native American stands on a rocky ledge facing a beam of sunlight.

Kaaterskill Falls 1826. By the time of Cole’s painting, railings and a bridge have already been installed for safety. Cole edits out all evidence of buildings or tourist infrastructure, painting a nostalgic fantasy of the original landscape.
Frederic Church, *Niagara*, 1857. Church curated a dramatic experience for his audience with large-scale panoramic paintings such as *Niagara*. Displayed in a darkened Manhattan gallery with a single spotlight, “the painting would become the surrogate for a visit in person to the site.” The thrilling perspective positions the viewer floating above the rushing water. Tens of thousands of visitors paid 25 cents to view the painting, and it was displayed on tour in Europe as the ultimate example of American nature and art.
4.5 Frederic Church, *Heart of the Andes*, 1859. Church's three-meter-wide painting was based on a trip to Ecuador in an effort to broaden the American landscape further than the United States. Church included several small vignettes to encourage the viewer to experience the painting in several scenes with the use of viewing devices such as binoculars. [1] while music specifically composed for the painting was performed.

4.6 *The Heart of the Andes* on exhibition at the Metropolitan Fair in aid of the Sanitary Commission in New York, April, 1964. An ornately framed stage complete with curtains were designed for the one-painting exhibitions as a window to another paradise.
4.7 An advertisement for John Banvard’s moving panorama of the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio Rivers, 1852. A seated exhibition for a moving landscape scene. The description reads “The painting occupies about two hours in passing before the audience, during which time so varies and beautiful is the Scenery, it is with difficulty that the Spectators can convince themselves that they are not actually sailing along these mighty rivers.”
CHAPTER FIVE

THE WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE
The town of Catskill is not visible at landing. It is built beyond the ridge which rises from Hudson, upon the declivity to a small creek whose banks are western boundary of the village. The principal street is about half a mile in length, nearly parallel to the river. The buildings are neat, and the town wears an appearance of cleanliness, far beyond most towns upon Hudson. The banks of the creek opposite the town are very picturesque, rising at the entrance abruptly, and farther in with every variety of slope, studded with clumps of trees, and in a high state of cultivation. They afford fine sites for building, and will probably with the growth of the place become its chief beauty.

We started for the mountain at 4 o'clock. The distance to the House is 12 miles, and the ascent occupies about 5 hours. The road for the first 8 miles is highly interesting -- passing over elevations, mountains in themselves, and crossing a broad valley whose fine cultivation, graceful outline and woodland, combine to make a picture like a creation of poetry.

What is called the ascent commences about 3 miles from the summit. There is a good carriage Road but it is uncomfortably steep for a ride, we got out to pursue our way on foot.

This you know is classic ground; and you are very gravely assured by the inhabitants of the valley, who have been questioned about Rip Van Winkle till they believed it to be a veritable tradition from their ancestors, that it is the identical path up which Rip toiled with the contents of the oblivious flagon.

RIP VAN WINKLE'S HOUSE
Two miles from the summit is a small hut, or shantey as they are called here, whose occupant by universal consent bears the name of the immortal sleeper. Whether a genuine descendant or not is the point upon which I will not state my veracity. His hut is in a singularly romantic situation built in a deep angle of the rock with a perpendicular ascent fifty feet directly above him. He keeps refreshment for travelers, and is supplied with water by spout which is laid from his window to the spring in a rock behind him. It was just dark when we arrived there, and probably the deep shadows of the woods and rocks added to the effect - but I have seldom been so struck as by the sudden turn which brought me upon the wild eyrie of this modern Rip Van Winkle.

We toiled on at the rate of a mile and a half an hour, keeping at that pace far in advance of the carriage, and growing more vigorous as we came into the bracing atmosphere of the summit.

Perspiration became very free, as the tenuity of the air increased, and I felt as if every trace of bodily infirmity oozed with it from my pores. I could have shouted with the exhilaration and elasticity which grew upon me. Command me to mountain air and free limbs, if ever I am hyp-ridden.

I forgot to speak of the sun-set, and perhaps it was better. But I will merely assert that the local advantages of a bold horizon, high atmosphere and interposed water combine to render the “gloomings” of Catskill valleys beyond conception beautiful.

CATSKILL MOUNTAIN HOUSE
We reached the house about 9 o'clock buttoned to the throat, and breasting a chill November blast. Fifty feet below we had stood at a turning in the road, peering through the darkness to get a glimpse of the House, which we at last discovered perched on a perpendicular rock, rising almost from our feet. The road which pursues a zig zag course all the way up the mountain, here made several abrupt turns and brought us very suddenly to the broad tabular rock upon which the House is set. We could hardly realize it.

After threading in the dark for two or three hours a perfect wilderness, without a trace save our narrow road, to burst thus suddenly upon a splendid hotel and, glittering with lights, and noisy with the sound of the
piano and the hum of gaiety
- it was like enchantment.

I seated myself in the drawing room, and was for a moment bewildered. It was in keeping with the place; for so was Rip Van Winkle when he woke upon that very spot. But to find myself in an elegant room, fashionably furnished, and thronged with people promenading to the sound the piano - in such a place! - a long beard and a rusty gun were trifles to it. To return to tangible impressions, however - my supper convinced me that it was not fairy land, and a view of the promises satisfied me of their substantiality. The house is a large wooden building, capable of accommodating two or three hundred people. It makes a fine appearance, is well-painted, and has a noble piazza running the whole length of the front. The host is uncommonly polite and gentlemanly, and his table and rooms afford all the comforts and most of the luxuries of the city. I went to bed, and having added my cloak to a winter provision of covering, I was sensible of the single impression of comfort as I heard the wind whistling at the window, and slept as a well man sleeps.

I rose the next morning at day break to see the prospect. It was a clear cold morning, and the minute points of a view with a radius of 50 miles were distinctly visible. The magnificent prospect from this mountain has been often described, and is too familiar to be repeated.

*It is indeed magnificent - and he who could look upon such a scene and not turn from it a better man, must truly have forgotten his better elements.*

An area wide enough for the territory of a nation lies beneath you like a picture, with the Hudson winding through like an inlaid vein of silver. The steamboats were just visible, and I cannot give you a better idea of them than is given in the ludicrous remark of someone, that “they looked like shoes with cigar’s stuck in them”. The sun rose, and excuse me if I say much to my comfort; for although wrapped in my cloak, I was chilled through. The first beams which streamed across the landscape, looked like sprinklings of white; for at my elevation the hills all sunk to a level, and I puzzled myself to account for the long shadows. They soon diminished however, as the sun rose higher, and the beauty of the scene became transcendent. The rich colours of the “garniture of the earth” stole out and the hundred towns within the range of the eye glittered like studded gems over the scene.

*It looked like a distant Eden flooded with light.*

The Cauterskill Falls, (I do not know the etymology) are a mile and half from the hotel, by the foot path; by the carriage road it is farther. We pursued the gradual descent through woods which seem to have suffered only from the hand of ages. The way was exceedingly rough, and the huge trees were knit together in every position as decay or storm had left them. Is really a noble forest; fit for the company it keeps, of glen and waterfall; and if I were disposed to moralize as I sometimes do over the pros-tration of these kings of inanimate nature, I know of no place where the text would be more forcible. We pursued our way for about an hour, till without being aware of its neighborhood, we stood nearly upon the brow of the precipice; I cannot describe the effect.

*It makes a man feel like the poor worm, or elevates him to sublimity in keeping with its own, as his humility or his pride is uppermost. I felt both, for my temperament is chameleon.*

**UNDER THE FALLS**

The glen of Cauterskill is probably half a stone’s throw in width, and two or three hundred feet in depth. It looks like, I scarce know what - a huge well - a fearful chasm - a sinking of the earth to its center - any thing that will give you an idea of depth made by violence.

There is no slope - but abrupt ragged perpendicular of sides, appearing as if they had been rent asunder by an earthquake. The rock over which the water pours projects far out of from its base, somewhat in the shape of an umbrella; leaving a very considerable area between it and the sheet of the fall. There is a ledge about halfway up from the base, of the width of a mantelpiece around which you can get, for it is neither walking nor creeping, but a very ugly kind of hitch, not all comfortable, when coupled of the danger of mingling with the “mighty waters” at the bottom.
Here, however, we perched ourselves, and clung long enough to get our four shillings worth of the sublime for this is the price the Miller received for opening his sluice, that supplies the water for the fall, though I must do myself justice to say that I forgot my four shillings till the roar subsided.

KAATERSKILL FALLS
The quantity of water is very small, and in falling a hundred feet it divides: into drops, and has a beautiful effect when seen from behind. It pours immediately from the basin which receives it, over a second fall about 80 ft., where, breaking repeatedly upon projecting rocks before it reaches the bottom it assumes an appearance of most wonderful sublimity and beauty. We went to the bottom, and looked up both the falls. This is the perfection of the scene. You gaze up from such depth along two sheets of water -

one just above you, pouring down its fearful path with the noise of a thunder peal, and another beyond leaping from a projecting shelf which seems to you more like an outlet of the clouds than an earthly level, -

to look up and see only a piece of the blue sky, and be walled in apparently by rocks reaching up to it, it is awful. It is a place for man to fall down and confess himself a worm.

5.1 William Guy Wall, Cauterskill Falls on the Catskill Mountains, Taken from under the Cavern, 1827.
CHAPTER SIX

WILDERNESS TOURISM
On September 18, 1822, a group of wealthy Catskill merchants and their wives gathered for an evening ball held at the top of the Catskill Escarpment, a location perched 2250 feet high with an unrivaled view over the Valley. The incentive of the ball was to gain investors for a construction of a hotel on the site. The Catskill Mountain was built over the winter of 1823, and opened in the summer of 1824.

As the fame and popularity of the Hudson River School landscapes and stories of James Fenimore Cooper’s Pioneer and Washington Irving’s Rip van Winkle drew romantic tourists to the Hudson Valley and the Catskills, the luxurious Catskill Mountain House and its later competitors were built to provide a comfortable experience for these “wilderness” travelers.

The Catskill Mountain House was the first resort or “house of entertainment” of its kind, shining as a white-columned beacon of the original American nature retreat. It initiated the onset of extreme changes to the surrounding landscape, leading to one of the biggest landscape efforts in romantic tourism the country had ever seen.

"Come, and trip it, as you go,
On the light fantastic toe,
An in thy right hand bring with thee
The Mountain nymph, sweet Liberty."

-Milton ‘L’Allegro’.

On Wednesday evening, the 18th, inst. the first annual ball was opened at the Pine Orchard, on the Catskill Mountains. Besides the ordinary incidents of an Assembly, there was a novelty and pleasure attached to this, which were altogether peculiar.
6.2 *View from the Mountain House, Catskills.* The Catskill Mountain House was the first of its kind, offering a "complete view of the Hudson." It was called the "Yankee palace" and represented the perfect Arcadian fusion of civilisation with its neo-classical columns and piazza, and savagery seen in the wild surrounding landscape.

6.3 *Postcard of the Laurel House, Catskills.* The Laurel House was constructed by Peter Schutt, a wealthy local tavern owner who purchased a large tract of land that included Kaaterskill Falls. It was located close to the edge of the Falls. Considered a middle-class hotel, it could house up to 300 visitors.
6.4 Postcard of the Hotel Kaaterskill. Hotel Kaaterskill was constructed by Philadelphia lawyer, George Harding, in 1881 on South Mountain between the Laurel House and the Catskill Mountain House. At the time of construction, this 7 story, 1000 room hotel was claimed to be the largest framed building in the world.

6.5 Postcard of the Grand Hotel. The Grand Hotel was opened by the Ulster and Delaware Railroad with 418 rooms and view down the Big Indian Valley and Slide Mountain. The building was a replica of the Oriental Hotel on Coney Island in Brooklyn.
6.6 Thomas Nast, Sketches Among the Catskill Mountains, Published in Harper’s Weekly, 1866. These 28 sketches by political cartoonist, Thomas Nast, were created during a two-week stay at the Catskill Mountain House.
6.7 Thomas Nast, [Details of] Sketches Among the Catskill Mountains, Published in Harper's Weekly, 1866. With the Mountain House in the center, the vignettes depict the natural attractions, the wealthy guests' orchestrated “nature” experiences in the surrounding landscape, and the luxurious atmosphere of the hotels.
As wilderness tourism surged in 19th and early 20th century America, the Catskills with its glittering promise of luxurious accommodation and spectacular vistas, soon became the most popular destination of the wealthy elite of New York City and internationally.

The industrial age brought about the invention of the first American steamboat by Robert Fulton and the development of the railroad enabled faster travel options for city folk to escape the heat and rush of the city for a few week nature retreat.

The excursion began with a steamboat journey headed north 160km. The travelers could embark in the morning and arrive at in the Catskills by noon. In the early days of the Catskill Mountain House, the travelers would take a stagecoach up the steep mountain roads, but as technology and the number of tourists developed, train tracks began to crisscross the landscape.

The hotel owners also controlled the transportation in the area and there was established partnership with the railway companies for beneficial promotion and economic profit.

The competition between the resort hotels came to a head especially in this regard. Tourists wanted to be transported directly and conveniently to their destination, no matter the destruction to the landscape they came to admire.
Passenger steamboat headed to the Catskills. By the early 20th century, these ships which went up and down the Hudson throughout the day, were over 120 meters long and could carry 5000 passengers.

Interior of passenger steamboat. Known as “Palace steamers”, the ships were as opulent as the hotel destinations.
6.10 Postcard showing the steamboat landing in Kingston’s Point. After disembarking, passengers could directly board a train to their hotel destination.

6.11 Illustration of the stagecoach journey to the Catskill Mountain House. Before the railway was established, visitors would take a stagecoach for the final leg of the journey. Due to the steep terrain and positioning of the hotel at the top of a high cliff, it would take five hours to travel 12 miles and the passengers would often have to walk on foot for the final stretch.
The railroad companies and the hotels were dependent on each other for profit. For many years up till the popularity of the automobile, trains were the most common mode of transport.

Big Indian Station, the Catskills
Two train lines, one built by the owner of the Catskill Mountain House, and the other the Ulster & Delaware Railroad, ran parallel to each other.
6.15 The Otis Elevating Railway, 1892. Due to competition with the Hotel Kaaterskill which had a trainstop right at its doorstep, Charles Beach of the Catskill Mountain House hired the Otis Elevator Company to build a cable funicular railroad straight up the face of the Catskill Escarpment. The line was 2,134 meters long, rose 497 meters with a maximum grade of 34% in ten minutes.\footnote{5}

6.16 Postcard of the Otis Elevating Railway. Though popular, the funicular was also seen as a “scar on the mountain” \cite{2}.
The elevated tracks of the Otis Elevating Railway. The train was made up of four cars; two for passengers (75-90 people) and two baggage cars.
The Hudson River School and Romantic poets and writers of the era depicted the Catskills as an area of picturesque landscapes. The artists brought attention to particular rocky overlooks and natural scenes around the Catskills and the Hudson Valley.

The wealthy tourists traveling to the area and staying in the resorts wanted not only the creature comforts of rest and relaxation in the hotels, but outdoor experiences in the famed surrounding "wilderness".

The hotels were strategically built on ledges or mountaintops with a stunning sublime view. Tourist infrastructure such as trails, walking paths and stairs led the guests to the exact spots that inspired paintings and other curious natural attractions in the area, while ensuring their comfort and safety in the landscape.

In the romantic outlook, man was a spectator, standing at a safe distance to the savage and thrilling power of nature.

ALL ABOUT THE VIEW

WILDERNESS TOURISM

Hotel Kaaterskill on the top of South Mountain.
The Catskill Mountain House was famed for the 50-mile vista over the Hudson Valley. A bell would be rung before sunrise to wake the guests.

The Laurel House and Kaaterskill Falls. The Laurel House was built just 30 meters from the edge of the Falls, the tallest double-tiered waterfall in New York. It provided an extraordinary view of the Katterskill Falls Clove.
Romantic names given to the famous viewpoints and rock formations in the area by the guests of the Mountain House. Walking trails were established to lead the tourists to the famous viewpoints depicted in the Hudson River School paintings,
Walking paths of wooden planks built by the Laurel House under and around the Falls for the safety of their visitors.

An observation deck above the Falls and a zigzagging series of staircases were built going down to the first water basin.
CONSTRUCTIONS FOR DRAMATIC DISPLAYS OF NATURE

6.28 Dam built at the top of the Falls. Peter Schutt, owner of the Laurel House and the surrounding property, placed a dam on Lake Creek above the Falls. This gave Schutt control over the amount of water going over the falls and for a fee of 25 cents, the tourists below could experience a mighty rush of water as if seen during a hurricane.

6.29 The Laurel House would set rafts on fire at night and send them over the Falls in a cascade of flames.
Guided tours up Slide Mountain. In 1972 Swiss geologist, Arnold Henry Gujot, identified Slide Mountain as the highest peak in the Catskills. Guests of the Grand Hotel would descend from the hotel area by train, take a stagecoach to the base of Slide Mountain, and a mountain guide would take them up to the summit.
Though the guests were retreating from the heat and pollution of the city, they still expected cosmopolitan comforts. The resorts offered the most modern and civilised conveniences such as an in-house orchestra, French chefs, modern plumbing and entertainment activities such as casinos and bowling alleys.

The hotels were furnished with expensive and fashionable decor, creating a cultured and pleasurable indoor environment while being able to gaze at the breathtaking views through the windows.\textsuperscript{5}
Some of the amenities offered by the grand hotels such as the Catskill Mountain House and Hotel Kaaterskill.

6.31
6.32 Basket and pulley above Kaaterskill Falls. Tourists could enjoy lunch at a cafe at the top of the Falls serving brandy, ice cream, and lemonade. The installed pulley system would lower champagne and other refreshments down to the picnickers below.
LA VISH FURNISHINGS

"Parlor, Kaaterskill Hotel, Catskill Mountains, New York." Detroit Publishing Company, 1905. Interior of sitting room at Hotel Kaaterskill
Dining room of Hotel Kaaterskill where French chefs would serve high-end cuisine.
MEANWHILE, IN THE BACKGROUND
The celebration of wilderness and "nature" in 19th century America occurred at the same time that the exploitation of natural resources and the transformation of the landscape into real estate was moving at full force.¹

Even at the time of Thomas Cole’s first steamboat trip up to the Catskills in 1825, the Hudson River was already one of the busiest commercial shipping routes in the nation due to its connection to the Erie Canal.

The tanning industry was rapidly clear-cutting the hemlock forests of the Catskills, and there were numerous lumbering and mining activities.

In order to avoid the man-made eyesores on the landscape that would ruin the picturesque nature experience, tourists were given guidebooks that coordinated the exact times of day and locations in which to best enjoy untainted views.

7.1 Rondout Creek with sloop at dock in foreground, coal pocket, Newark Lime & Cement Company plant opposite circa 1880.
MEANWHILE, IN THE BACKGROUND

DEFORESTATION OF HEMLOCK FOR THE TANNING INDUSTRY

7.2 Stripped hemlock logs in Herkimer County. The thick eastern hemlock forests of the Catskills were being chopped down by the tanning industry. The bark from the hemlock trees provide the tannins needed for the hide-tanning process.

7.3 Preparing hides for drying

7.4 Wheelerville, New York tannery.
MEANWHILE, IN THE BACKGROUND

QUARRIES & MINING ACTIVITIES

7.5 Bluestone Sawing and Planing Mills at Kingston, N. Y.
7.6 Quarryman’s Home with Rubbish Banks in Rear, West Hurley, N. Y.
Bluestone refers to the feldspathic sandstones found predominantly in the eastern North America such as the Catskills. Bluestone tends to split along planes parallel to the bedding, resulting in smooth, thin slabs. It was widely used in New York city for sidewalks and flagstones.²

² An Ulster County Monolith Size slab. Six by seven meters wide.
CHAPTER EIGHT

THE DECLINE
The Catskills was a fashionable must-see tourist destination, established as part of the Grand American Tour, for over seventy years till the 1890’s.

However, with the popularity and rise of automobiles, the wealthy now had the freedom to go further and to fresher destinations or to build their own summer villas. The Catskills were no longer exclusive to the elite as easy railroad connections were bringing the middle-class crowds to the areas as well.

By the time of the Great Depression in the 1930’s, people were no longer interested in listening to the birds sing in the trees. The grand hotels became obsolete.

In 1940, Milo Claude Moseman took over the property at Catskill Mountain House and built a theme park based on the fantasy of Rip van Winkle. The state was not pleased as they felt that the theme park was seen as too “glitzy” for the “pristine” location where visitors were now camping.

With a shift from the Romantic view of nature to a more preservationist mentality, the government took over the properties of the Catskill Mountain House, the Laurel House, and Hotel Kaaterskill, eventually demolishing the buildings.
SKELETON OF ANOTHER ERA

The Catskill Mountain House in the 1960's. One of the first American ruins.
The Catskill Mountain House and The Laurel House were eventually sold to New York State and torched as by the Forest Service in a preservation effort to keep the land “forever wild”. Hotel Kaaterskill burned down by a fire in 1924 caused by soap making.
The remains of Hotel Kaaterskill after the fire. It burned down completely in two hours and could be seen for kilometers around.
CHAPTER NINE

THE LEGACY
THE LEGACY

AN EMBRACED SYMBOL
OF THE ROMANTIC

9.1 Sarah Cole, A View of the Catskill Mountain House, 1848
9.2 Jasper Francis Cropsey, Catskill Mountain House, 1855

9.3 Thomas Cole, A View of the Two Lakes and Mountain House, Catskill Mountains, Morning, 1844
“From the beginning, there has been a link between how Americans have acted toward the natural world and how they have imagined it... Imagination is less precise, less worked-out, more inclusive than ideas, and it belongs to people in their lives, not to philosophers working out doctrines. Imagination is a way of seeing, a pattern of supposing how things must be.

...Law is a circuit between imagination and the material world. Such legal strictures channel our lives, providing the implicit blueprints of the landscape architecture that we impose on the world.”

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**THE LEGACY**

**Providential**
Nature has the purpose of serving human needs richly, but only if people do their part by filling it up with labor and development

**Romantic**
Nature as place of aesthetic and spiritual inspiration, a “secular cathedral.” as seen in mountain peaks, sheer canyon walls, and deep forests

**Utilitarian**
Nature as storehouse of resources, requiring expert management especially by scientists and public officials

**Ecological**
Nature as the totality of many interdependent systems. A world in which both sustenance and poison can travel through air, water, soil, and in and out of flesh
Picturesque Visions for Tourists Long Gone

On a Forgotten Slope of the Catskills, the Landscape Remains Just as Grand

But even those who don’t know Cole have heard of his most famous works — the landscapes that he painted. He was one of the first to capture the beauty of America’s natural landscape. Today, his paintings are displayed in museums around the world.

In hotel days, wooden steps led down to the main amphitheater under the falls, which was connected to the lower platform by a tunnel. But the tunnel was closed after a fatal accident in 1993.

Preserving the Character

But the free-range rambling of the hikers and day-trippers who come now — often in ones or twos, but adding up to a steady stream some days in the summer — is helping to keep the landscape intact. For decades, the Catskills were seen as a wilderness. Foresters worry how to protect both the trail and their admirers without taming the land all over again.

CHAPTER TEN

THE SITES
PRISTINE STATE

BACK TO A MORE

10.1 View from Catskill Mountain House site 2019
10.2 View of Catskill Escarpment at Catskill Mountain House site 2019
10.3 View from top of Kaaterskill Falls 2019
10.4 View from bottom of Kaaterskill Falls 2019
NOTES
1. Introduction

2. The Catskills
2 https://www.catskillmountainkeeper.org/fun_facts_about_the_catskills

3. The Hudson River School

4. Behind the Image of Wilderness

6. Wilderness Tourism
2 www.catskillarchive.com
3 Carey, Tobe (Director). The Catskill Mountain House and The World Around (2017)
4 https://www.revolvy.com/page/Otis-Elevating-Railway
5 www.catskillarchive.com
6 http://www.hvmag.com/Hudson-Valley-Magazine/March-2010/Haute-Hotels/

7. Meanwhile, in the Background

8. The Decline
1 Carey, Tobe (Director). The Catskill Mountain House and The World Around (2017)

9. The Legacy