

THE OLANA PARTNERSHIP
Comments prepared by Margaret Davidson
Army Corps of Engineers Public Hearing
March 18, 2003

RE: Application of St. Lawrence Cement Company

The Olana Partnership is very concerned about the significant visual impacts of the St. Lawrence Cement plant on the historic viewshed, and about acid deposition from the plant's air emissions damaging the historic structures.

The Olana Partnership (TOP) is a private not-for-profit educational corporation with about 800 members whose mission is to "advocate for and support the conservation, preservation, development and improvement of Olana and its integral viewshed; and otherwise to promote, conserve, preserve, develop and interpret Olana State Historic Site for the benefit of the public for this and future generations." Olana was the home of the renowned 19th century painter Frederic Church, whose passion for creating a house and a 250-acre landscape "at the center of the world" equaled his interest in putting paint to canvas.

- In 1965 Olana was declared a National Historic Landmark
- Olana is designated as a Scenic Area of Statewide Significance
- Olana is within the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area (HRVNHA)
- The Preservation League of New York designated Olana as one of the seven most endangered sites in New York State
- The National Trust for Historic Preservation designated the Hudson Valley and in particular Olana one of the eleven most endangered areas/sites in the country
- Olana recently became an official project of the Save America's Treasures program
- Olana is part of the Greenway Trail System under the Greenway Conservancy for the Hudson River Valley

In 1966 the State of New York purchased Olana, which is now a State Historic Site, open to the public, within the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The Olana Partnership and OPRHP have worked together for the past several years on a Comprehensive Plan, which has now been approved by the State, to guide the long-term development, restoration, conservation and operation of the house and landscape. We are also in the planning stages for a new museum/visitors center.

Within the last two years both the State and the Federal Government have acknowledged Olana as an important part of our American heritage by designating funds for its restoration and expansion.

Scenic Hudson, a not-for-profit environmental organization which advocates for the protection and preservation of the Hudson River Valley, has so far spent \$2.24 million to protect Olana's viewshed.

With approximately 150,000 visitors a year, Olana is the fourth most visited site in the Hudson Valley.

- A market analysis done for The Olana Partnership in October 2001 contains the following: with the restoration of the house and grounds, and the new museum/visitors center, we expect:
 - In Columbia County: a total (direct, indirect and induced) annual impact estimated at \$12.2 million dollars in expenditures
 - In the state: a total annual impact estimated at \$24.7 million dollars in expenditures

The views offered from the house, which sits on a hilltop, from Cozy Cottage, which was the Church's original home, and from the five miles of carriage trails, are panoramic. Olana is treasured for the panoramic views it provides, views which are protected resources. To quote from "Conserving Open Spaces in New York State, 1998, Final Plan."

"The conservation of the exceptional views of the Hudson River and surrounding areas from this State Historic Site (Olana) will preserve a significant cultural and scenic resource."

Restoration of Olana's viewsheds to their appearance during Church's time will expand the viewshed and increase public enjoyment; it will augment Olana's historic significance as a National Historic Landmark and respond to the National Park Service concern over threats to its setting; the Parks Service has placed Olana on the Landmarks Watch list because of threats to its viewshed.

Despite Mr. Lochbrunner's assertion, the plant would dominate the views from nine important points on the Olana property. The Olana Partnership is concerned that the St. Lawrence Cement Plant and its plume would be a focal point in the viewshed from both the Ridge Road,

the carriage trail closest to the house and therefore likely to get the most foot traffic once the restoration is implemented from Cozy Cottage, Church's original family house, and from the Crown Hill next to the lake, and the Bell Tower of the house.

St. Lawrence Cement, in treating Olana's viewshed like any other viewshed, ignores its historical significance

We are very concerned about the effects of air emissions on the fabric of the house and the landscape. The highly decorated exterior of Olana is constructed of stone, brick, terra cotta, stucco, wood, metals such as lead-coated copper roofing, gold leaf, tin-plated steel roofing, glass and painted canvas. Substantial emissions are projected even with the closing of the Catskill plant. Acid deposition modeling was applied to 18 sensitive receptors supplied by the DEC. These receptors do not include Olana, a National Historic Landmark.

In conclusion, we are concerned that the siting of this plant so close to Olana will adversely affect the historic viewshed, the fabric of the house, the public's enjoyment of the site due to the visual impacts and damage to the structures, and deny the importance of its place in the history of the Hudson Valley.