

**Figure 6.** The hill behind the house provided the perspective for this view of the west elevation. The village of Milford and the mists over the Delaware River in the distance can be seen clearly in this old photograph. Note the small ice house, one of the estate's first outbuildings, to the north of the house. From the Hunt Collection, A.I.A. Library, Washington, D.C.

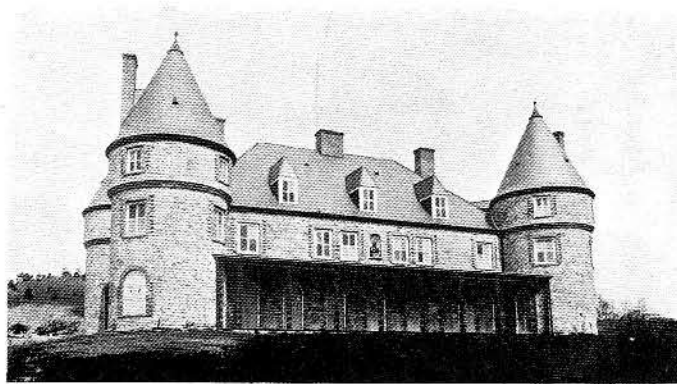
## GREY TOWERS' PLACE IN GIFFORD PINCHOT'S LIFE<sup>27</sup>

Letters from Gifford Pinchot to his mother during the early part of 1886 reveal the great interest he had in the construction of Grey Towers. At that time, he was in his first year of college at Yale, and Mrs. Pinchot was on an extended tour of Europe with her daughter, Nettie. When his mother inquired as to whether he would like to spend the summer abroad, he declined the offer, explaining that "it would take away all my chance to have a hand in fitting up the house."<sup>28</sup> Gifford apparently expressed much the same sentiments to his sister, since she informed her father that "he could scarcely wait to see it finished and is awfully anxious to begin arranging his part of it."<sup>29</sup> Gifford's eagerness to participate in this endeavor undoubtedly stemmed from the fact that most of his childhood had been spent in his grandfather's house in New York City. Because Grey Towers was the only house expressly built for the James Pinchot family, its construction elicited considerable enthusiasm from the children. During the Easter holidays in Spring, 1886, Gifford met his father and his younger brother Amos (affectionately known as "Toots") at Grey Towers, so that together they could review the construction progress on the house. The following extracts are from a letter that Gifford wrote to his mother about the visit.

I have just returned from a very pleasant trip to Milford with Papa & Toots, & I want to tell you how delighted I was with the house and the general appearance of things there . . . I cannot tell you how entirely it met my expectations & how I want to get into it. From the village it looks as if it had been where it stands before the memory of the oldest inhabitant began to operate, and it is certainly built in a way

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF GIFFORD PINCHOT

This article may be found in the "Residents of Grey Towers" section of the website.



**Figure 7.** Grey Towers from the east shortly after construction, circa 1886. Note the long porch with the decorative cast-iron supports. A fragment of this cast iron survives in the collection of the Pinchot Institute.

calculated to make it outlast the memories of all the inhabitants for the next half-dozen generations . . . It seems to me the most attractive situation I know anything about. It is with great difficulty that I can talk of anything else.<sup>30</sup>

It must have pleased Gifford greatly that the special occasion of his twenty-first birthday on August 11, 1886, marked the Pinchot family's first meal in their newly completed home. Mrs. Pinchot noted in her diary that the party drank a toast to her son's health as they had tea in the billiard room.<sup>31</sup> While at Yale the following fall, Gifford was most anxious that the next holiday, Thanksgiving, be spent with the family at Grey Towers. In a letter to his father that November, the sophomore asked:

Have you yet decided where you will spend Thanksgiving? If Milford is to be the place, as I hope it will, please send me an Erie timetable . . . Would you like me to bring some fellows up with me and if so, how many?<sup>32</sup>

Gifford apparently enjoyed bringing his college classmates to his Pennsylvania home during vacations, and the following summer he again asked his parents about inviting friends to Milford for the summer.<sup>33</sup>

In January 1887, James Pinchot purchased a house on the west side of Gramercy Park in New York City.<sup>34</sup> Similar to the private, residential parks in urban London, Gramercy Park was designed in 1831 and has remained since that date one of Manhattan's most fashionable addresses. Because of their club memberships, charitable interests, art collecting and fondness for cultural events, Mary and James Pinchot led a very active social life. The year-round occupancy of a home in a comparatively isolated, rural corner of Pennsylvania was therefore not part of their life style. Although the pattern varied from year to year, during the first decade of Grey Towers' history, the Pinchots usually would leave New York in May and return in November. It had long been their habit to seek relief from urban summers at such places as Simsbury, Connecticut, and Far Rockaway, Long Island.

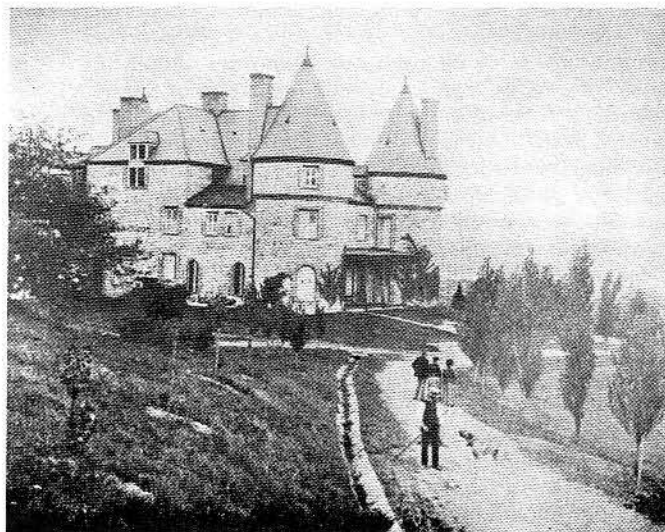
During the summer of 1891, following his return from his education in Europe, his employment with Phelps-Dodge, and his disillusionment with Chief Fernow of the Division of Forestry, Gifford spent a few months at Grey Towers playing tennis and trying to write a primer on forestry. The opportunity to pursue these two activities, recreation and writing, was to attract him to Grey Towers for many years to come.

Around 1900, Mr. and Mrs. James Pinchot established a home in Washington, D.C. at 1615 Rhode Island Avenue on Scott Circle. (They had sold their Gramercy Park house when they decided to reside in the capital.) This move was motivated by their desire to be closer to their son, who was beginning to gain prominence for his work in the Division of Forestry. While Gifford lived with his parents at this address (which was six blocks north of the White House), the home was the scene of many social events that served to broaden his acquaint-

tanceships in government circles. Once President Roosevelt disregarded precedent and addressed a meeting of the Society of American Foresters in the Pinchot home. Until Gifford's dismissal from the Forest Service in January 1910, visits to Grey Towers, even during the summer, were limited by the demands of these extremely active years. The death of his father in February 1908 also had an influence on discouraging trips to Milford.

The situation changed in 1910 when political motivation led Pinchot to establish official residency in the State of Pennsylvania. Until this time, he had been a legal resident of New York, and this factor was regarded as a detriment to his future in politics. At one point during the Roosevelt administration, Pinchot was rumored to have been considered for the position of Secretary of the Interior; however, the President explained to the forester that the appointment was prevented by his New York association. With an eye toward political opportunity in Pennsylvania, Grey Towers became his newly adopted legal residence. In the Fall of 1910, when he was at the point of physical exhaustion from strenuous campaign activities, Pinchot retreated to his family estate. Favorite outdoor sports, such as fishing and hunting, and the rest offered by a quiet life brought about a renewal, as they would again many times. The estate was also a summer retreat for his brother Amos, which added to Gifford's attraction to the home.

Part of bachelor Pinchot's courting of Cornelia Bryce apparently took place at Grey Towers while the two enjoyed a day's fishing together in the Sawkill in June 1913. The following summer, the couple was married, ten days before the death of Gifford's mother. Although the newlyweds maintained a Washington address, they regularly spent their summers at the inherited estate. Gifford's longstanding fondness for Grey Towers was complemented by his wife's interest in making improvements and modernizations to the house's interior and in landscaping and developing the grounds. Grey Towers soon became the scene of frequent entertaining, and once again, a place to broaden political contacts. In September 1919, a unique reception was held on the estate grounds for all the recently returned soldiers of Pike County.<sup>35</sup> This post-war celebration, in which a borrowed airplane and tank were used as props, served as an occasion for the Pinchots to practice some politicking while establishing rapport with the locals. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, a summer picnic for neighboring county residents became an annual event at Grey Towers; it included such activities as dancing, baseball, and swimming, in addition to cake and ice cream eating. Sometimes as many as 4000 guests were attracted by the Pinchot's open invitation.



**Figure 8.** Grey Towers from the southwest. Photographed by Theodore Perrot in August 1890. From the collection of the Pinchot Institute.



**Figure 9.** The main entrance facade of Grey Towers was not obscured by trees in this early view, taken from the southwest. Although the stereopticon card from which this photograph is taken was not dated, it was probably made circa 1900. From the Gifford Pinchot Papers.

Cornelia Pinchot was particularly interested in fostering her public relations in the Milford area, since it was her home district in her repeated bids for a Congressional seat. She was an active member of the local school board for many years and established an experimental school for children at Grey Towers.<sup>36</sup> Both Pinchots took an interest in community welfare. Gifford, Amos and Nettie donated their paternal grandfather's house on Broad and Harford Streets to Pike County to house the library and historical society, a purpose it had already been serving courtesy of James Pinchot. The couple's participation in Milford's August 1945 celebration of Japan's surrender, when they were among those riding the village firetruck, is remembered as an example of their friendliness with the townspeople.

During the years 1923-1927 and 1931-1935 when Pinchot was governor, the couple's primary residence was necessarily at the state capital, Harrisburg. For certain years, such as 1918-1919, 1922, and 1936, the Pinchots also resided in Philadelphia for political reasons. Because of Pinchot's involvement in national conservation efforts and for social reasons, he retained the home in Washington, D.C., although it was rented for certain periods, such as the Governor's second term. It has long since been demolished. During all these years, Grey Towers was still important to Pinchot as a frequent retreat. However, it was during the later years of his life that the family estate became more of a year-round home. During the 1940s, Pinchot wrote much of his book *Breaking New Ground* at his quiet study in Grey Towers. The years of active public service had not allowed him the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of his Milford home for extended periods of time until his seventies and early eighties. Following his death in a New York City hospital, his funeral took place on the lawn at Grey Towers according to his wishes, and he was buried in the Pinchot family cemetery plot in Milford.

## NOTES

27. *Introductory Note:* Because of the limited time for research in this preliminary report, the evaluation of Grey Towers role in Pinchot's career which follows was based primarily on biographical material presented in McGeary's book. In order to more accurately determine the estate's importance to Pinchot, it would be necessary to review the many volumes of diaries and personal letters in the Pinchot Collection in a more comprehensive manner. The first step in this work would be to document how much time Pinchot actually spent here as compared with his other homes in New York, Washington, Philadelphia, and Harrisburg. McGeary includes very little personal information on GP, and consequently this account may not reflect a true conception of Grey Towers' significance.
28. Letter from GP to Mrs. James W. Pinchot, New Haven, February 17, 1886, GP Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Series III, container 53, folder 6. (The first few paragraphs on young Gifford's interest in his family's new house was based on a review of family correspondence during the years of Grey Towers' construction.)
29. Letter from Antoinette (Polly) Pinchot to J. W. Pinchot, Florence, February 21, 1886, Series III, cont. 53, folder 6.
30. Letter from GP to Mrs. JWP, New York, April 27, 1886, GP Papers, Series III, cont. 53, folder 6.
31. See entry of August 11 in the 1886 diary of Mary Jane Eno Pinchot, GP Papers, Series III, cont. 40.
32. Letter from GP to JWP, New Haven, November 14, 1886, GP Papers, Series III, cont. 53.
33. Letter from GP to Mr. and Mrs. JWP, June 5, 1887, GP Papers, Series III, cont. 53.
34. Letter from JWP to GP, New York, January 13, 1887, GP Papers, Series III, cont. 53.
35. Furlow, "Cornelia Bryce Pinchot," p. 342.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 334.