OHEKA (1914) 135 West Gate Drive, Cold Spring Hills

The second largest residence in the United States sits atop a man-made hill overlooking Cold Spring Harbor. Otto Hermann Kahn, a financier and patron of the arts, built the mansion as weekend retreat.

Kahn had wanted to buy Jayne's Hill in West Hills, the highest point on Long Island, but was unable to. So beginning in 1914 he had a hill of his own built on a 443-acre estate with an 18-hole golf course, an airstrip and a racetrack. The name OHEKA is derived from Mr. Kahn's initials.



The house, designed by William Adams Delano in the classic French style, is 109,000 square feet – almost three acres. The staff numbered as high as 125. Kahn hosted extravagant parties, which often included famous actors and singers. Enrico Caruso sang and Arturo Toscanini conducted in the library.

Kahn died in 1934. In 1939, the estate was purchased by the New York City Sanitation Department for use as an employee retreat. The neighbors were aghast and complained that the use by the Sanitation department violated the Town's zoning code and should be shut down. They succeeded. During World War II, the mansion was used by the government as a radio operator training center.

In 1948, the Eastern Military Academy purchased the 23 acres of the estate, including the mansion. The Cold Spring Hills Country Club had been established on the 70-acre golf course and the rest of the land had been developed into 300 homes. The military academy converted the Grand Ball Room into a gymnasium. Barracks were created out of the upstairs bedrooms and the gardens were used for military maneuvers. After the school closed in 1978, the mansion fell victim to vandals.

In 1984, developer Gary Melius purchased the abandoned estate and began restoring it. In 1996, the Huntington Town Board created a special Historic Overlay District to allow Mr. Melius to cater parties and hold special events in the castle to provide sufficient income to continue the restoration of the estate. Eventually, Mr. Melius plans to operate a spa at OHEKA. In the meantime, the Friends of OHEKA, a not-for-profit group established to help preserve the castle, conducts tours for the public and school groups.

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