

Gary C Worrell

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To: gcw@igx.net
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When you think of castles, you don't ordinarily think of Connecticut. But along the East Bank of the Connecticut River, stands Gillette Castle.

It was built by actor/playwright William H. Gillette, who is most famous for his theatric portrayal of Sherlock Holmes at the end of the Nineteenth Century. Originally he called the castle "Seventh Sister," after the name of the hills (Seven Sisters) where it is located.

The castle is modeled after a Norman Fortress and is situated 200 feet above the river on about 120 acres that is now a Connecticut State Park. Willy was also a train enthusiast, and he built a 3-mile miniature railroad complete with two locomotives, passenger cars and a tunnel. The railroad is gone and the rail-bed is now a path. He also had a yacht called "The Aunt Polly" on which he lived while Seventh Sister was constructed, but it burned under mysterious circumstances while moored at the river below.

The castle is closed during the off-season but the rest of the park is open. The good news is that there weren't any other people around, except for park staff (it's not that I don't like people, it's just that there are way too many of them). I wandered the grounds and went down to the river front where the skeletal remains of Aunt Polly can still be found (it's actually an official Connecticut Archaeological Preserve).

Adjacent to the park is the Chester – Hadlyme Ferry. It's been in continuous operation since 1769 (not the same ferry of course). I rode it across and headed North along the river. There were some nice homes for sale, but I knew immediately they were out of my price range – the realtor was Sotheby's.

On the way back to the hotel, I went South to Long Island Sound and followed it East along the coast. Right at the mouth of the Thames River on the West Bank is another state park with a modern castle (referred to as a mansion) – Harkness Memorial Park. It has a splendid 270 degree view of the Sound. It was apparently owned by a Standard Oil family. Yet another property I will never afford.

G.









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