

Introduction: Boscobel

“The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens.”

Alexis de Tocqueville

Our country has been blessed with individuals who are passionate about historic preservation. From Ann Pamela Cunningham who was provoked by a disintegrating Mount Vernon to form the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association to New York Governor Hamilton Fish who signed the legislation creating nation's first publicly funded historic site, individuals and groups remain staunch advocates of historic preservation.

More significantly, there are many historically significant sites and structures that still languish in relative anonymity because the site lacks the historical cache of a figure like George Washington. Locally, the St. Simeon Foundation, in possession of one the valley's last mid-nineteenth century manors Maple Grove, has been actively seeking supporters. Nearby, the Springside Landscape Restoration received National Historic Landmark status in 1969, barely escaping efforts to develop the property. Since then, dedicated individuals have sought to preserve a rare Andrew Jackson Downing designed landscape.

The home and grounds at the Boscobel Home and Gardens in Montrose were also slated for demolition and development. The site's proximity to New York City made the property valuable. The structure had remained in the family until 1920, but lacking historic importance, the land remained the focus of political leaders. Westchester County wanted to build a park there in the 1920s, and the Veteran's Administration considered constructing a hospital there in the 1940s.

In 1955, Benjamin West Frazier, leading the group "Friends of Boscobel," managed to get the house taken apart just before the construction of a Veterans Administration Hospital. Its pieces were stored in various barns until a suitable location fifteen miles north in Cold Spring could be purchased. It was then rebuilt in 1956. Lila Bell Wallace, a co-founder of *Reader's Digest* later assumed leadership of what became the "Boscobel Restoration," and in the late 50s supervised the mansion's restoration. On May 21st, 1961, Boscobel was opened to widespread praise. Later, the mansion's interior was restored and furnished according to the tastes of the original owners. It was re-opened in 1977 to critical acclaim. Today, the mansion and grounds host lectures, concerts, and a Shakespeare festival.

Primary Sources

-Boscobel's furnishings, although not original to the home, are original to the home's time period. This site includes the various period paintings and furnishings at the site:

<http://www.boscobel.org/explore/the-collection/>

-Article from *The Magazine Antiques* (online):

<http://www.themagazineantiques.com/articles/furniture-at-boscobel/>

Print/Web Resources

-History of the Mount Vernon Women's Society:

<http://www.mountvernon.org/visit-his-estate/general-information/about-mount-vernon/mvla/history>

-Website for Maple Grove (Saint Simeon Foundation):

<http://maplegroverestoration.org/>

-Boscobel's official site:

<http://www.boscobel.org/>

-A biography of States Dyckman:

<http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/bios/d/stdyckman.html>

Teaching about Boscobel

Lesson Plan Introduction

The restoration of the Boscobel mansion was a result of several individuals who devoted their time to historic preservation. The monies for its restoration and current upkeep have been provided by private sources and the visiting fees of people who come to the site for a tour or the various events held there.

Suggested Grade Level: 8+

ACTIVITIES MENU

Activity 1: Compare Modern and 19th Century “Cribs”:

- Visit the Boscobel page (<http://www.boscobel.org/>) to learn more about States Dyckman and the individuals who owned Boscobel.
- Using the Internet, **research** the home of a prominent person.
 - The individual can be:
 - Athlete
 - Entertainer
 - Political leader
 - Influential political person
- In a **brief essay**:
 - **Compare** Boscobel and the prominent person’s home/property.
 - What similarities and differences do you see?

Activity 2: 19th Century Architecture

- **Research and choose** two other mansions in the Hudson River Valley that were constructed at the same time as Boscobel.
- Chose a modern building in your area
- Create a **PowerPoint or poster** in which you include images the buildings and estates and
 - Create a **timeline** illustrating key dates in the history of the structure.
 - **Identify** individuals or groups associated with preserving the home and estate
 - **Compare** the architecture of Boscobel and the other modern historical building you found.

Activity 3: Appeal to Local Officials to Restore an Historic Building or Property

- Use the internet to research important historical preserve monuments or buildings that should be restored.
- Write a **persuasive letter** to a county or state legislator urging him or her to support a bill advocating for funds to restore the historical building or site you researched.
- Create a **brochure** that you could use in advertising the historical monument and raise awareness regarding its condition and need for preservation.

Activity 4: Interior design and historical monuments

- Using the Internet, **research** American furniture from the time period that Boscobel was originally constructed.
- Make a **collage** that includes images of various pieces of furniture along with descriptions for each image.
- **Explain** what has changed in furniture styles over time and how the home owners could have an impact on the choice of furniture in their home or building.