

Dutchess County Landscape Architecture: Nature as a Canvas

Dutchess County is located on the east bank of the Hudson River, halfway between New York City and Albany. It is a unique place in the history and development of landscape architecture, where the evolution of that field can be traced throughout the county's preserved and publicly accessible estates and parks. The gorgeous Hudson River, Shawangunk and Catskill Mountains, and fertile soil have captivated explorers, settlers, farmers, estate owners, artists, and many others over the centuries. Each generation has made its mark on the land, as it developed from wilderness to farmland, and as towns, estates and industry grew. This constantly evolving landscape is a palimpsest; oftentimes, one can see the influence of multiple time periods, with some more prevalent than others, when looking at a location in the present. Jonathan Raban describes this idea in *Driving Home: An American Journey*:

*"Trying to understand the habitat in which we live requires an ability to read it - and not just in a loose metaphorical sense. Every inhabited landscape is a palimpsest... its original parchment nearly blackened with the cross-hatching of successive generations of authors, claiming this place as their own and imposing their designs on it, as if their temporary interpretations would stand forever. Later overwriting has obscured all but a few, incompletely erased fragments of the earliest entries on the land, but one can still pick out a phrase here, a word there, and see how the most recently dried layer is already being partially effaced with fresh ink."*¹

Settled in the early seventeenth century, Dutchess County has over 400 years of this writing and revision to be explored and interpreted with a steady narrative of landscape architecture throughout that time.

¹As quoted in Kelly Research & Outreach Lab, "Landscape as palimpsest," Accessed November 30, 2021, kellylab.berkeley.edu/blog/2012/1/17/landscape-as-palimpsest.html

Many different eras and influences contributed to a building sense of palimpsest. To start, thousands of native peoples inhabited the area up and down the river as early as 11,300 years ago.² The river valley offered many benefits, including a “long growing season for raising the three sisters - corn, beans, and squash,” as well as gardens and hundreds of acres of corn.³ These semi-nomadic natives also had a deep connection with the landscape, as “all of nature was seen as having a soul.”⁴

In 1609, on behalf of the Dutch East India Company, Henry Hudson first sailed on the river that would be named for him. This led to Dutch settlers arriving in the area, although they came in a slow trickle; there were less than 20,000 in the area by 1700.⁵ During the colonial period, settlers influenced the landscape by deforesting much of the land to build homesteads, using the cleared land for farming. The layout of the landscape and buildings in this time was focused on utility and creating efficient agricultural practices. Simple embellishments that might be seen during this period include deliberately placed trees along a simple and straight drive or the development of a kitchen garden.⁶

In the decades after the American Revolution, as the United States was developing a unique system of government and negotiating what life would look like in the nascent nation, a wealthier class was beginning to influence what the physical landscape would look like, especially along the banks of the Hudson River. Many properties turned into estates with gentleman’s farms, where owners farmed for pleasure instead of profit, and also focused on creating pleasure grounds with park-like features that included formal gardens, manicured lawns,

² Frances F. Dunwell, *The Hudson: America's River* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 2.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵ Robert M. Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson, A History: The Romantic Age, the Great Estates & The Birth of American Landscape Architecture* (Hensonville: Black Dome Press Corp., 2010), 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

trails, and more. One frequent modification was the trajectory of the driveway, which often became winding instead of straight as it was in earlier periods; the emphasis was no longer on utility but style. As these transformations were made, some aspects from the land's former use remained, while others drastically changed.

These changes were not just influenced by the ideas of property owners, but by horticulturists and landscape architects as well. Figures like Andrew Jackson Downing, often considered the father of American landscape architecture, were influenced by both European traditions and the unique Hudson River Valley terrain. In Europe, up until the Enlightenment, landscape design for wealthy royalty and aristocrats followed very geometric designs where not a branch or flower could be out of place. With the Enlightenment, landscapes moved away from this rigid design mode and began to focus on enhancing the natural landscape in an artistic and emotional way.⁷ This led to the rise of the Picturesque and Beautiful design modes. Simply put, the Picturesque is “controlled irregularity;”⁸ the landscape one might imagine surrounding a fairytale cottage in the woods. As Robert Toole describes A.J. Downing's interpretation of the Picturesque, “while the Picturesque design was not wilderness, man's presence was benign.”⁹ The Beautiful, on the other hand, is slightly more carefully manicured, with neatly cut grass; it is clearly influenced by man. These two design themes are not mutually exclusive, as more than one theme can be identified across a landscape, and the design can fluctuate with new uses and owners.

While many landscapes were negotiated to please the living, another movement influenced landscapes for those who passed on. From the early days of European settlement,

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸ Myra B. Armstead, *Freedom's Gardener: James F. Brown, Horticulture, and the Hudson Valley in Antebellum America* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 43.

⁹ Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson*, 19.

churchyards were often used as a final resting place for the dead; however, by the mid-1800s, these plots became overcrowded. This issue prompted the creation of rural cemeteries, which were intentionally landscaped and influenced by design themes such as the Beautiful and Picturesque. As visitors to these rural cemeteries enjoyed family outings and recreation in these peacefully designed locations, this movement can be seen as a predecessor to public parks that are prevalent today.

The next period to influence the palimpsest of the land along the Hudson in Dutchess County was the Gilded Age. This was a time of great economic growth between the Civil War and the turn of the century, which resulted in great prosperity for those involved in banking, shipping, and industry. Some of the already established families in the area undertook remodeling of their homes or landscapes to reflect their wealth and those with “new money,” meaning recently acquired fortunes, purchased land along the river and redesigned existing features. These estates, similar to the earlier estates, were often seasonal escapes from the hustle and bustle of New York City.

With the American Revolution well behind them, estate owners felt more comfortable looking across the pond to Europe for inspiration, incorporating their design themes into the American landscape. For some, this meant turning back to more geometric designs in their formal gardens, as had been popular in Europe before the Enlightenment, to demonstrate their wealth and place in society. Sometimes called the Country Place Era, these more rigid designs influenced some Gilded Age homes as well as later examples in the decades after the turn of the century, and added yet another layer to the history of the landscape.

More changes occurred in the landscape of the Hudson River Valley after the Gilded Age. Some properties placed a bit more emphasis on recreation, adding tennis courts, pools, and

other structures to the landscape. There was a diversification of design themes as well; while some focused on recreation or everyday use, others took a nostalgic approach to focus on forgotten pastimes, and still others looked past Europe to Asia for inspiration, representing Americans' constant search for the exotic. Another aspect of this era is the growing emphasis on trails to experience the landscape. Trails were present at some locations throughout the different eras; however, their importance grew and can be seen as a precursor to the advent of hiking and other trails in more recent decades.

Many of these manicured and historic landscapes would not have stood the test of time if it were not for the people and organizations that worked to preserve them. Preservation of the locations in this discussion is varied in time and type. The earliest example of preservation in Dutchess County appears in 1841, and the latest is yet to be seen as preservation efforts for some locations are ongoing. Some properties were given to the National Park Service or the State of New York by members of the families who lived there. In other cases, family members or relatives created organizations to continue the legacy of the landscape and the family that lived there. Concerned citizens who wanted to ensure the public remember the historic significance of different places also came together for preservation efforts. Organizations such as Scenic Hudson have formed to preserve historic and culturally important aspects of the Hudson River Valley, and other organizations have formed to keep up with the needs of specific locations. In addition to preservation, land protection, restoration efforts, and interpretation are important as they allow the home and landscapes to continue to be enjoyed by the public. While Dutchess County retains many great examples of landscape architecture, other historic locations were lost to development or decay, and some are not open to the public.

The Influence and Education of Landscape Architects

Landscape architects had a great influence on the development of many Dutchess County properties. They also gave advice to friends, as well as the general public through writing books and articles. They directly shaped landscapes they owned, as well as those that they were commissioned to design. In addition, just like landscape designs changed over time, landscape architects had their own evolution, especially in the way they learned their craft. Early nurserymen and gardeners learned from their families, later learning from other landscape architects, experiences abroad, and professional training.

Even though not all of the owners of landscaped properties in Dutchess County specifically commissioned a landscape architect to design their property, most were influenced by their ideas and their writing. For instance, at “Mount Gulian,” the Verplanck family owned many volumes of books dedicated to gardening, with some titles relating to A.J. Downing. Other properties belonged to individuals who took great interest in landscape architecture and worked on the property themselves. For example, at “Locust Grove,” inventor and artist Samuel Morse had an early influence on American ideas of landscape gardening through lectures and writing; as president of the National Academy of Design, he had a forum to spread his sensibilities. Morse worked deliberately on his property, executing changes that went along the lines of what A.J. Downing would encourage others to in his writings. Still other properties were a collaboration between the owner and the landscape architect that was commissioned to design the landscape; Robert Donaldson and Matthew Vassar worked closely with A.J. Downing, who they commissioned to design “Blithewood” and “Springside,” respectively.

Early on, many landscape architects had knowledge passed down from their families. One example of this is André Parmentier, who came from a family of well-known botanists and

horticulturalists, and he followed in their footsteps, practicing horticulture and landscape design in the form of garden planning. He opened Parmentier's Horticultural and Botanical Garden in Brooklyn, New York after moving to the United States from Belgium in 1824, and later began designing landscapes for others, including Dr. Hosack's estate.¹⁰ A.J. Downing has a similar story, although he was born and raised in Newburgh, New York, to a family of nurserymen. He took over the family business in 1838, sometimes known as Downing's Botanic Gardens and Nurseries, and became the leading landscape architect of his time.¹¹ He authored and edited many texts on the subject, aiming to reach a larger audience and bring his sensibilities to the middle class. In addition to impacting design through their writing and commissions, men like Parmentier and Downing gave advice to those who had working relationships with them and purchased from their nurseries. They also had formal and informal networks of landscape architects, horticulturalists and landscape enthusiasts which helped to advance the field. One formal manifestation of this was the Horticultural Society of the Valley of the Hudson, which A.J. Downing founded in 1839.¹²

As the field of landscape architecture evolved, multiple paths of study developed. For some, knowledge was still passed down through family, for others through other landscape architects or friends. For example, Calvert Vaux learned in an apprentice style from A.J. Downing. Still others had some more formal education at schools or colleges in areas of art, design or engineering. James L. Greenleaf received a degree from Columbia and was a civil engineer before shifting his skills toward landscape design, eventually working on the Vanderbilt

¹⁰ National Gallery of Art, "André Parmentier," Accessed November 30, 2021, [heald.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php?title=Andr%C3%A9_Parmentier&oldid=41960](https://www.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php?title=Andr%C3%A9_Parmentier&oldid=41960)

¹¹ National Gallery of Art, "Andrew Jackson Downing," Accessed November 30, 2021, [heald.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php/Andrew_Jackson_Downing](https://www.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php/Andrew_Jackson_Downing)

¹² Armstead, 46.

property.¹³ In addition, many landscape architects traveled to Europe or had recently immigrated to the United States bringing knowledge of different styles. Charles Adams Platt, who created designs for the Vanderbilt property, was influenced by a mix of all of these as he was self-taught, and also attended art classes, studied abroad, and learned from friends in the field.

It is crucial to note the importance of architecture at these properties as well. Even though some argue that “architecture was visually subservient to the landscape composition,” in many eras¹⁴ it was still an important consideration. A.J. Downing, like other landscape architects, believed buildings were a part of the landscape and needed to fit into the design mode. In 1838, Robert Donaldson introduced A.J. Downing to the architect Alexander Jackson Davis, and the two developed a friendship and working relationship that allowed them to collaborate on projects and published works. Calvert Vaux is another example of the partnership of architecture and landscape design. Trained in both practices, Vaux was able to create seamlessly connected landscapes and edifices, as can be seen at the “Hoyt House” and other locations.

It wasn't until the turn of the century that the art of landscape architecture became an academic area of study all its own; in 1900, Harvard established what would become the “oldest and most distinguished academic program in landscape architecture in the world.”¹⁵ The creation of Harvard's Landscape Architecture Department was followed by departments at Cornell University in 1904, the New York State College of Forestry at Syracuse University in 1911 - the year it was established - and many others. Lester Collins, the landscape architect for “Innisfree Garden,” earned his Master's degree in Landscape Architecture at Harvard in 1942, and later became dean of the department. Beatrix Farrand, who designed “Bellefield” and influenced

¹³ National Park Service, “James Greenleaf,” Accessed November 30, 2021, nps.gov/vama/learn/historyculture/james-greenleaf.htm

¹⁴ Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson*, 134.

¹⁵ Harvard University Graduate School of Design, “The Department of Landscape Architecture,” Accessed November 30, 2021, gsd.harvard.edu/landscape-architecture/

Vassar College, had more limited opportunities to learn in an academic setting as a woman; however, she studied with Charles Sprague Sargent, the founder of Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum. Like previous landscape architects, both Collins and Farrand took their studies abroad, Farrand to Europe and Collins to Asia. Today, many of these early landscape architecture programs still exist, and many more have been created.

Dutchess County Landscapes

Following is a discussion of over a dozen publicly accessible landscapes in Dutchess County which demonstrate a variety of principles throughout different time periods. These locations are presented in chronological order based on the date they were first intentionally landscaped.



Figure 1: The allee at Boscobel. Photo by the author

Mount Gulian

In 1683, Francis Rombout and Gulian Verplanck exchanged goods with Wappinger

Native Americans for 85,000 acres of land in Dutchess County in an "Indian Deed of Sale." The Wappinger and their ancestors had been present in the area for thousands of years, moving seasonally.¹⁶ The land purchased was subdivided and various families changed the landscape through logging and farming. The Verplancks were very successful in the colonial period; they had a mansion on Wall Street, and in 1730, they built a colonial-style fieldstone summer home on the Dutchess County property in what is now Beacon. The house was built with the porch facing the Hudson River, giving the family a beautiful view. Later, the house was joined by other structures, including ones for brick production, as well as a working farm. This property, known as Mount Gulian, followed the colonial period's emphasis on utility as structures were added as needed, and not part of a master plan. Part of the unique legacy of Mount Gulian is the contribution of the Verplanck family to the Revolution, which allowed its landscape and the rest of the colonies to become part of a new nation; from 1782 to 1783, Mount Gulian was the Continental Army headquarters, and in 1783, America's first veterans' fraternal organization, the Society of the Cincinnati, was formed there.¹⁷

In 1804, U.S. Congressman, lawyer, banker and judge Daniel Crommelin Verplanck moved his family to Mount Gulian full time. As a part of "a rising national horticultural movement,"¹⁸ he created a six-acre Picturesque garden, also described as an "English Boxwood Garden," with his daughter, Mary Anna. There were areas that were mainly flowers and ornamental plants, but there were also many vegetables, such as corn and beets, fruits, such as peach trees and strawberries, and herbs, such as sage and parsley. The garden was designed with paths between different plants, and there were also magnolia trees and a pond with fish in the

¹⁶ Mount Gulian Historic Site, "Native American History," Accessed November 30, 2021, mountgulian.org/history/the-wappinger-people/

¹⁷ Mount Gulian Historic Site, "The Society of Cincinnati," Accessed November 30, 2021, mountgulian.org/history/the-society-of-the-cincinnati/

¹⁸ Armstead, 43.

area. Many plantings were purchased from landscape architect A.J. Downing. The family was also cognizant of the “New Husbandry” school, which focused on increasing productivity in agriculture, and the species in their garden, of global origins, demonstrate their dedication to the latest trends.¹⁹ Around this time, one of the Verplancks even wrote about their landscape, in *A Treatise on Agriculture and Practical Husbandry*.²⁰

Another important aspect of [Mount Gulian](#) was the influence that James Brown, a former slave, had as the head gardener from 1836 to 1866. While he dealt closely with Mary Anna Verplanck in regards to the gardens, Brown also had some autonomy selecting plants and layouts he anticipated would suit the landscape and be to the family’s liking. Brown also tended to his own garden, which included vegetables, fruit trees, and ornamental aspects such as rose bushes. While he was excluded from certain social activities as a free black man, Brown was very well connected in the community. Some connections and friendships included A.J. Downing, John W. Knevels, Edward Armstrong, and Henry Winthrop Sargent. Brown was “at least informally included in” organizations like the Horticultural Society of the Valley of the Hudson through his association with these horticulturalists.²¹ Brown kept journals for over 40 years which give much insight into how the garden evolved and general happenings in his life.

¹⁹ Armstead, 42.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 46.



Box Border, Peonies and Magnolia, all a century old.

Figure 2: Photo from AA. Virginia Eliza Everett Verplanck's book, *A Year in My Garden: A Manual on the Culture of Flowers, Vegetables and Fruits*, page 42.

The garden and property passed down to various generations, and the next individual who had a significant impact on the gardens was Virginia Eliza Everett Verplanck. She took meticulous care of the gardens, and wrote books about it. In one such book, *A Year in My Garden: A Manual on the Culture of Flowers, Vegetables and Fruits*, published in 1909, she created “a manual telling month by month what work is to be done among the fruits, vegetables and flowers.”²² In the caption of one photograph, she notes the “box border, peonies and Magnolia, all a century old.” That multiple Verplancks as well as James Brown wrote about the landscape and relatives continued to cultivate it for over a century illustrates the importance of the land, agriculture and horticulture to the family.

²² Virginia Eliza Everett Verplanck, *A Year in My Garden: A Manual on the Culture of Flowers, Vegetables and Fruits*. (United States: Williams printing Company, 1909), i.

In 1931, a fire destroyed much of the property and home. In 1966, the Bleeckers, descendants of the Verplancks, created the Mount Gulian Society and reconstruction of the home was completed in 1975.²³ The century of work the Verplancks put into the garden was not completely lost; after the fire, family members took clippings of many of the plants and when a section of the garden was reconstructed starting in 1995, clippings from descendants of those plants were brought back, continuing the original heritage of the garden.²⁴ Today, some species in the Heritage Garden include heritage roses, lamb's-ear, yucca, and boxwood. The pergola is covered with grapevine, wisteria, and trumpet vine, and at the end is a bench dating back to 1740.²⁵ Visitors can tour the house and garden, as well as a Dutch Barn that was added to the property in 1974.

Staatsburgh

["Staatsburgh"](#) is one of nearly sixty Livingston estates on the Hudson. The Livingston family has been prominent in the Hudson River Valley since before the American Revolution, controlling almost one million acres of land at its peak.²⁶ In 1792, Gertrude Livingston Lewis and her husband Morgan Lewis purchased riverfront property south of this land, adding to the family's holdings. By 1797, the couple had built a home "along with other outbuildings, such as a stone barn and stables, a cider mill, and a carpenter's shop" to support their working farm.²⁷ Like the Verplancks, the family first had a home in New York City. After constructing their estate, the family had what was produced at Staatsburgh shipped to them when they were in the city. Also like at Mount Gulian, the family at Staatsburgh has a revolutionary background and

²³ Mount Gulian Historic Site, "The House," Accessed November 30, 2021, mountgulian.org/the-grounds/the-house/

²⁴ Mount Gulian Historic Site, "The Heritage Garden," Accessed November 30, 2021, mountgulian.org/the-grounds/heritage-garden/

²⁵ Author Interview and Tour, Mount Gulian Historic Site, October 24, 2021.

²⁶ Pamela Malcolm and Andrea Monteleone, *Staatsburgh: Gilded Splendor on the Hudson* (Hensonville: Black Dome Press Corp, 2021), 15.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

influence on the young nation; for example, Lewis' father, Francis Lewis, was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and Morgan Lewis was Quartermaster General for General Horatio Gates and served in the new government in a variety of ways including as the third governor of New York.²⁸

In 1832, the home burned down, but was quickly reconstructed in the Greek Revival Style. After inheriting the property in 1890, Ruth Livingston Mills and Ogden Mills had the prominent architectural firm McKim, Mead and White transform the home into a Gilded Age Beaux Arts mansion. Known as Mills Mansion, it retained many aspects of the old design with new additions including an impressive portico; Ruth Livingston Mills' desire to maintain some of the home's history created a palimpsest or layering of history in the architecture. Visitors, received mainly in the autumn months when the family stayed in the Hudson River Valley, would be led to the home by way of a curving driveway that revealed portions of the home between the falling leaves. The entire facade and river were not revealed until the final curve. Such winding driveways were a quintessential aspect of the Picturesque design theme at many estates along the river.

In addition to the driveway, the landscape in this period at Staatsburgh was deliberately laid out, including an "enormous, gently-sloping lawn" to the west of the house down to the Hudson River.²⁹ Unwanted aspects were removed and trees were arranged to screen certain buildings from view. This differed from earlier agricultural use of the land and contributed to the "pleasure grounds" of the property. The grounds were based on English garden design, which emphasized natural appearances over strictly geometric designs. The Mills had an expansive

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

greenhouse complex with paths for strolls along the way, and a “hybrid”³⁰ garden that combined kitchen garden and flower garden aspects. They often won awards at the Dutchess County Fair for what they grew.³¹

While a farm was still maintained in this period, it had been relocated to the eastern portion of the property, on the other side of Albany Post Road across from the main estate. This was called Endekill Farms, a cutting edge gentleman’s farm with dairy cows, sheep, poultry, horses, crop fields, orchards and more. The Mills were well-known for their farm and award winning livestock, gaining a considerable amount of media coverage.

The family was very proud of their lineage and accomplishments, and in 1938, Ruth Livingston Mills' daughter, Gladys Mills Phipp, gave the State of New York the home with most artifacts intact, along with 192 acres of the property.³² Today, Staatsburgh State Historic Site is open for tours and the grounds are open to the public year-round. Much of the landscape’s splendor has been lost to time, as the farm complex across the road has been closed to the public, and the greenhouses and plantings are gone. The public enjoys activities on the lawn, where there are often concerts and car shows in the summer, as well as hiking on nearby trails.

These trails pass by the Hoyt House, also called “The Point,” on part of the Staatsburgh estate; Morgan and Gertrude’s daughter gave their granddaughter Geraldine Livingston Hoyt and her husband Lydig Hoyt this land in 1854.³³ Calvert Vaux was commissioned to design the home and landscape on this 100-acre property. Vaux planned a “Hudson River vernacular style” home and five Picturesque view corridors revealing miles of the river.³⁴ The ornamental garden

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

³² Dunwell, 192.

³³ Malcolm and Monteleone, *Staatsburgh*, 18.

³⁴ Interpretive Signs at the Point, September 26, 2021.

included an orchard with a variety of fruit trees, fields of wheat, oats, and potatoes, as well as many dairy cows, pigs, poultry, and cattle. Like the entrance at Mills Mansion, the driveway to the Hoyt House follows a winding route, passing over the railroad, and showcasing meadows, woods, a pond, marsh, farmstead, and spring before coming to the house and its views.³⁵

After four generations of the family had lived in the home for over 100 years, New York State took the property in 1963, planning to demolish the house and use the land for an olympic-sized swimming pool; however, the pool was never constructed and the unoccupied house fell into disrepair. The Calvert Vaux Preservation Alliance was formed to fight for the preservation of the property, with recent successes including clearing one of the five view corridors, making some repairs to the building, installing a New York State Historical Marker installed in 2021, and raising funds to ensure the future of the site.

³⁵ Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson*, 147.



Figure 3 The alley at The Point in Mills Norrie State Park

The Vanderbilt Estate at Hyde Park

Bard Era

Historically known as the riverfront estate of “Hyde Park,” from which the town gets its name, today’s Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site had a variety of owners whose sensibilities represent a range of landscape patterns and ideals throughout American history. Similar to other properties in the colonial period, early owner John Bard used the property for milling and agriculture along the Crum Elbow Creek. He created a farm which included an

orchard with hundreds of trees, largely on the east side of the Albany Post Road.³⁶ This reflects later design themes that separated farm and estate, as seen at Mills Mansion. Although John Bard, like some others in this period, lacked the capital to ornamentally plan his landscape, and was instead focused on utility, his son, Samuel Bard, wrote to him with ideas and suggestions he read about from influential English designers; Samuel implemented many of these ideas when he moved to the property in 1795.³⁷ Samuel built a federal-style house with a great view of the Hudson River, and subsequent houses of other owners were built in this same scenic location. Originally, aspects of the design were consistent with colonial design, such as the straight drive with evenly placed trees leading to the house. Other elements represented a departure from the colonial emphasis on utility, such as the placement of buildings and kitchen gardens farther from his home to screen them from view instead of clustering them together. Samuel Bard's interest in landscape and his development of the landscape represent the awakening of colonists recently turned citizens to the beauty of their surroundings and their ability to influence it for more than just sustenance and profit.

Hosack Era

In 1828, the property was sold to Dr. David Hosack, who had plenty of money to spend on the property, making it the "most famous Hudson River property of the romantic period."³⁸ The landscape during Hosack's ownership was also split between the Picturesque style of the pleasure grounds on the west side of the public road and the farm on the east. Some changes included modifying the path of the driveway, dramatizing the creek along the path to a landing, and adding shrubbery as well as greek revival structures and seats. The driveway was designed to

³⁶ Robert Toole, "Wilderness to Landscape Garden: The Early Development of Hyde Park," *The Hudson Valley Regional Review* 8, no. 2 (1991): 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁸ Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson*, 52.

exhibit some of the best aspects of the property to visitors as they entered. They would pass over the creek, wind through some more forested areas, pass by the ornamental garden - previously the Bard's kitchen garden - and finally the house would come into view. Another landing, earlier used to access the property, was instead used for enjoyment and was the site of a summerhouse: a covered structure used for relaxation often in a scenic location. Walking paths were also made to exhibit some of the site's best views and features. Tree type and placement were also planned, with more imposing trees providing shade near the house and smaller trees placed farther from the house; a vast amount of shrubs, placed in the Beautiful style, led people from the house to the gardens. André Parmentier was commissioned to work with Hosack on many of these projects. In addition, New York City architects Town and Thompson worked on adding symmetrical wings to the house, although both the Bard and Hosack residences were in the classical style.³⁹

Vanderbilt Era

In 1895, Frederick and Louise Vanderbilt purchased the property based on the recommendation of their friends Ruth Livingston Mills and Ogden Mills.⁴⁰ The Vanderbilts changed nearly all of the structures, including their Beaux-Arts mansion, with the help of McKim, Mead & White. Four gardeners had a hand in changing the garden: Charles A. Platt, James L. Greenleaf, Thomas Meehan and Sons, and Robert B. Cridland. Their landscape represents some typical Gilded Age sensibilities, with increased travel abroad leading to a stronger European influence mixed with Hudson River Valley style. After Frederick Vanderbilt died in 1938, FDR had a hand in getting the property purchased by the federal government, and it is now a National Historic Site.⁴¹

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁰ Dunwell, 193.

⁴¹ Dunwell, 269.



Figure 4 Vanderbilt Mansion as it appears today



Figure 5 The formal gardens at Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site

Today, the Vanderbilts' home and the grounds are open to the public. The garden is maintained by the Frederick W. Vanderbilt Garden Association. It is formed over a hill, spread

over tiers. Entering from the north, after descending from an arbor and stairs, visitors can stroll along gravel paths and enjoy the scent of annuals followed by perennials closer to the reflecting pool. Down more stairs is another fountain and arbor surrounded by roses. A few statues are present in the garden, including one by the reflecting pool, called Barefoot Kate.⁴² In addition to the gardens, visitors can enjoy picnics on the grounds with great views or walk along a paved road next to the Crum Elbow creek, through trails in the woods, and down to Bard Rock on the Hudson River. The landscape has had many layers added, removed or remolded throughout its history, and today the influence of each era can be discerned, creating a unique experience for the inquisitive visitor.



Figure 6 The lower lawn at Vanderbilt today, looking northwest from the upper lawn near the house

⁴² F. W. Vanderbilt Garden Association, "A Garden from the Gilded Age," Accessed November 30, 2021, www.vanderbiltgarden.org/

Montgomery Place

About seventeen miles north of Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site is another riverfront estate, called “Montgomery Place.” In 1802, John Van Benthuyssen sold his farm to Janet Livingston Montgomery, a revolutionary war widow. She had a federal-style home constructed, and called it “Chateau de Montgomery.”⁴³ During her time, the land was used mainly for agriculture; she maintained an apple orchard and commercial nursery on the property, and much of her land was used by tenant farmers. Livingston Montgomery also added stylistic elements such as the entrance drive which was intentionally dramaticized; the “road bed was raised on a high causeway that carried the drive across a ravine.”⁴⁴ Combined with the formal and evenly spaced trees lining the drive, the drive had an “elegant and impressive appearance.”⁴⁵ After Janet Livingston Montgomery died in 1828, the property was passed on to her brother Edward Livingston, who held a variety of local, state and national government positions, including serving as Andrew Jackson’s Secretary of State from 1831 to 1833.

Edward, his wife Louise Livingston, daughter Coralie Livingston Barton, and son-in-law Thomas Barton were all very active in the further development of the landscape of the estate, which they called Montgomery Place. They lived at the estate seasonally; however, they worked on various projects during their stay, and had the estate's produce shipped to them wherever they were throughout the year. Beginning in 1829, the family laid out what would become five miles of trails and footpaths throughout the property. These trails capitalized on the unique aspects of the landscape, such as cascades along the Sawkill Creek, the lake - a former mill pond - and

⁴³ National Gallery of Art, “Montgomery Place,” Accessed November 30, 2021, [heald.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php/Montgomery_Place](https://www.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php/Montgomery_Place) nga

⁴⁴ Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson*, 42

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

views of the Hudson.⁴⁶ Benches, pavilions and other structures were strategically placed for rest and enjoyment.

Work on the landscape continued after Edward's death in 1836. The orchards were maintained, which could be seen from the long straight driveway, and they developed formal gardens, kitchen gardens and more. The gardens had been established by 1840, with Alexander Gilson as the head gardener until 1860. Gilson, the son of two of Janet Montgomery's African American workers, "cultivated a new plant in the amaranth family, *Achyranthes Verschaffeltii*, var. *Gilsoni*, that was named in his honor and made known to the larger horticultural community by a notice published in the *American Horticultural Annual* of 1869."⁴⁷ A.J. Downing, who became a friend of the family and often offered advice and sold them materials for their landscape and gardens wrote, "if there is any prettier flower-garden scene than this ensemble in the country, we have not yet had the good fortune to behold it."⁴⁸ He discussed the property in various writings, including *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* and the *Horticulturist*. In 1842, A.J. Davis began re-designing the original home into the Classical Revival style by adding wings, porches and other aspects.⁴⁹ He also designed many other structures including a Coach House, Swiss Cottage, and farmhouse, as well as structures that enhanced the paths and gardens.⁵⁰ In addition, around 1846, Thomas Barton took a special interest in developing an arboretum on the property with the help of landscape architect Hans Jacob Ehlers.

⁴⁶ Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson*, 66.

⁴⁷ National Gallery of Art, "Montgomery Place," Accessed November 30, 2021, [heald.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php/Montgomery_Place](https://www.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php/Montgomery_Place) nga

⁴⁸ Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson*, 68.

⁴⁹ National Gallery of Art, "Montgomery Place," Accessed November 30, 2021, [heald.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php/Montgomery_Place](https://www.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php/Montgomery_Place) nga

⁵⁰ Bard, "The Architecture And Grounds," Accessed November 30, 2021, [bard.edu/montgomeryplace/architecture/](https://www.bard.edu/montgomeryplace/architecture/)

A distant family member, Violetta Delafield, later owned the property and changed the landscaping to her own liking, in the Arts and Crafts style. She added the current formal and rough gardens in the 20th century. While she and relatives valued the outdoors, the continuous upkeep of the property in the previous era by enthusiastic horticulturists had come to an end. A squash court and a tennis court were added to the property in the 1920s.⁵¹ Violetta Delafield also created a roadside farmstand in the 1930s, called the “wayside stand” which still exists today, to sell produce and other goods.⁵² As of 2016, 380 acres of the estate are part of Bard College, and are open to the public. The property is now used for educational purposes in the sciences, arts, and history.

Blithewood

On the northern side of the Sawkill Creek lies the estate of Blithewood. In 1680, Pieter Schuyler, the first mayor of Albany, acquired the land from native peoples.⁵³ The property was sold to John Armstrong and Alina Livingston in 1795, and was called “Mill Hill.” In 1836, Robert Donaldson and Susan Gaston moved from New York City to the Hudson River Valley property, restyling it and renaming it Blithewood.

After being introduced by Donaldson, A.J. Downing and A.J. Davis both had strong influences on the landscape and architecture of this property and developed a friendship and working relationship. They collaborated on a variety of published pieces, including Downing’s 1841 book, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, where Downing

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Historic Hudson Valley, “Montgomery Place An American Arcadia,” Accessed November 30, 2021 apps.hudsonvalley.org/american-arcadia/content/promoter-1.html

⁵³ Bard, “Blithewood Garden: Remember the Past,” Accessed November 30, 2021, omekalib.bard.edu/exhibits/show/blithewoodgarden/past

wrote about architecture and landscape design, and Davis provided the drawings; this helped launch their careers and ensure their legacy.

At Blithewood, Davis remodeled the existing federal-style house to reflect Picturesque design themes. Davis also designed a greenhouse, rustic arbors for the garden, an ornamental tool house, water tower, and other garden shelters, pavilions, and gatehouses. According to Robert Toole, Blithewood is “considered the first of America’s earliest Picturesque houses, a prototype widely copied into the Victorian period. Donaldson and Davis pioneered the style at Blithewood.”⁵⁴ The property’s design by Downing and Davis demonstrates their dedication to create a connection between the architecture of the buildings on a property and the landscape.

The gentleman farm on the property included “fields, pastures, barns, and livestock.”⁵⁵ There were wooded as well as open areas, which were less trimmed than other properties, to Donaldson’s liking. The property had a rustic and wild feeling, with vines tangled on tall trees, lawns that looked more like meadows, and challenging footpaths to reach scenic views. This style represented the Picturesque in that the presence of man in nature was noticeable here and there, but did not represent the dominance of man over nature as can be seen at other riverfront estates. Another unique aspect of Blithewood and Montgomery Place’s combined history is that in 1841, Donaldson and the owners of Montgomery Place ensured the Sawkill Creek would not be developed; this is considered one of the first acts of preservation in the area.⁵⁶

In 1853, Donaldson moved to Barrytown to retire from extensive landscape gardening, and John Bard, the grandson of Samuel Bard, and his wife, Margaret, purchased the property. In 1860, the Bards gave eighteen acres to create St. Stephen’s College, which is now Bard

⁵⁴ Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson*, 74.

⁵⁵ Bard, “Blithewood Garden,” Accessed November 30, 2021, bard.edu/arboretum/gardens/blithewood/

⁵⁶ National Gallery of Art, “Montgomery Place,” Accessed November 30, 2021, heald.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php/Montgomery_Place nga

College.⁵⁷ At the turn of the 20th century, Captain Andrew C. Zabriskie and his wife, Frances Hunter Zabriskie, became owners of the remaining estate. Reflecting the tastes of the Gilded Age, they commissioned Francis L. V. Hoppin of Hoppin & Koen to design a Georgian manor house and Italianate walled garden. The garden, created in 1903, includes two terraces bisected by steps descending towards a pavilion facing the river.⁵⁸ On either side of the pavilion are pergolas covered in wisteria. The terraces are divided into geometric beds, containing specimens such as clipped evergreens, lavender, and forget-me-nots.⁵⁹ The landscape today reflects the property during the Zabriskies' time, as most aspects of the previous periods no longer exist. A part of Bard College since 1951, the Blithewood estate is home to the Levy Economics Institute, and in addition, visitors can enjoy the grounds and garden.



Figure 7 Locust Grove

⁵⁷ Bard, "Blithewood Garden: Remember the Past," Accessed November 30, 2021, omekalib.bard.edu/exhibits/show/blithewoodgarden/past

⁵⁸ Bard College, "Blithewood Garden," Accessed November 30, 2021, bard.edu/arboretum/pdfs/Blithewood%20Brochure-Web.pdf

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Locust Grove

In colonial times, Locust Grove was owned by Henry Livingston Sr., Henry Livingston Jr. and various relatives. The originally forested land was cleared by a sawmill, and a farm took its place, featuring a barn complex, many fields for crops, an orchard, kitchen garden, and dock. The landscape at Locust Grove features a plateau that drops off at a one 100-foot bluff and extends to the river; there was farmland both by the river and on the plateau. In addition, during the colonial era, the “straight entrance driveway was lined with rows of black locust trees” from which Locust Grove got its name.⁶⁰ In 1830, Irish immigrant John Montgomery bought 700 acres of the farm and built a federal-style house.

Samuel Morse, known for developing an electric telegraph and Morse code, bought a large section of this property in 1847. In addition to his role as an inventor, Morse was a portrait painter and had an early influence on American ideas of landscape gardening. In 1826 he was influential in founding the National Academy of Design, and he served as the first president of the organization.⁶¹ He presented his *Lectures on the Affinity of Painting and the Other Fine Arts* to New York City audiences at locations such as the New York Athenaeum and wrote about art, describing landscape gardening as one of “three perfect fine arts.”⁶² It was at his Poughkeepsie property that he put his ideas of landscape gardening into practice.

⁶⁰ Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson*, 114.

⁶¹ National Gallery of Art, “Samuel F. B. Morse,” Accessed on November 30, 2021, [nga.gov/collection/artist-info.1737.html](https://www.nga.gov/collection/artist-info.1737.html)

⁶² Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson*, 109.



Figure 8 The allee at Locust Grove

Morse initially intended the property to be a working farm with one of his sons, but in the end, the property became a gentleman's farm with deliberate improvements by Morse. A kitchen garden, flower garden, orchard, small brook with a waterfall, and a larger stream were part of the grounds. Morse spent time evaluating the property, including marking trees to be kept or removed. In addition, he created a pond below the waterfall of one stream, redesigned existing fieldstone walls to travel along the stream, and added paths and rustic features on the property. At points, Morse deliberately bought or sold sections of land to fit his landscape design plans. Some of the land that was farmland was designed into meadows or mowed lawn, and other areas were allowed to return to their previously forested state; by the end of Morse's ownership, "only

about 30 percent of the riverfront remained open.”⁶³ Some of these trees screened the new farm complex below the bluff. Overall, these efforts created an artistically designed view or ‘picture;’ in Morse’s words, “a picture then is not merely a copy of any work of Nature, it is constructed on the principles of Nature. While its parts are copies of natural objects, the whole work is an artificial arrangement of them similar to the construction of a poem or a piece of music.”⁶⁴

In 1850, the home was redesigned in the Italianate style by A.J. Davis, who also gave Morse advice on other aspects of the grounds, which were in the Picturesque style. For example, he advised that the home be surrounded by a raised turf bank. He also gave recommendations on how to landscape near the house. Morse laid out garden elements such as “curvilinear flower beds” that “were very typical of taste in the post-Civil War, Victorian period.”⁶⁵

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.



Figure 9 The ribbon gardens at Locust Grove

In 1901, William and Martha Young purchased the estate and brought a new vision with them. They expanded the formal and kitchen gardens and purchased adjoining lands. Martha was passionate about horticulture, and was a part of the Millbrook Garden Club.⁶⁶ Today, the property is a not-for-profit foundation, thanks to Annette Innis Young, the last member of the family who lived there. The house is open for tours, furnished as it was during the Young's time. The pieces in the house do not all match a specific style or theme, like in some other estates during this period; instead, Martha and the family purchased what they liked, often from estate sales, and furnished the house with their unique style. This is similar to how the gardens were designed and are laid out today. Rather than following the Italianate style of Vanderbilt's Hyde

⁶⁶ Locust Grove Estate, "Martha Innis Young," Accessed November 30, 2021, lgn.org/archives

Park or Blithewood, Locust Grove has a “ribbon garden” arranged in rows, almost like crops, with specific species or flowers that Martha enjoyed and could cut to have in her home.⁶⁷ Near the house, there are some plantings as well, in triangular patterns. Benches overlook the bluff to the Hudson, partially obscured by mature trees. Visitors can also enjoy five miles of trails through the woods, which were developed over time, especially during the Young’s ownership. Along the trails are views of the river, a small waterfall and bridge, and other water features, along with benches to enjoy the wilderness.



Figure 10 View of the Hudson River from Poets' Walk

Poets' Walk

“Poets’ Walk” is a designed landscape garden in Red Hook right along the Hudson, named in honor of Washington Irving and other writers of the area. The land was part of the Astor and Delano estates, and according to the National Park Service, the two families

⁶⁷ Author Interview and Tour, Locust Grove Estate, October 16, 2021.

“commissioned Germanborn landscape architect Hans Jacob Ehlers to make improvements on these grounds” in 1849.⁶⁸ There is some debate over how much influence Ehlers had on the landscape, however.⁶⁹

This is an early example of Dutchess County residents taking considerable amounts of land and dedicating them to recreation, as the landscape was designed to bring those strolling the grounds through a series of outdoor “rooms,” inspiring creativity and awe of the local environment. The current park, opened in 1996, includes two miles of trails on the 120-acre park with wooded areas, open meadows, and views of the Hudson River, with scenic structures and benches to rest and enjoy the views along the way. This property gives one example of how owners of the land cannot always control the palimpsest of the landscape, or in this case, the views that are enjoyed from it. Today, the view that showcases a wide view of the river also includes the Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge. In the 1850s, when this landscape was first designed, this feature was not present; it was not completed until over a century later, in 1957.

Springside

Springside is unique from other Dutchess County estates in many ways. To start, it is the only surviving landscape design of Andrew Jackson Downing. Starting in 1850, Matthew Vassar, a Poughkeepsie businessman and the future founder of Vassar College, worked with Downing to design both the buildings and landscape of the twenty-acre property. The property eventually became Vassar’s home; however, it was intended to be, and landscaped as, a rural

⁶⁸ Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area, “Poets’ Walk Park,” Accessed November 30, 2021, hudsonrivervalley.com/sites/Poets-Walk-Park-/details

⁶⁹ Scenic Hudson, “Poets’ Walk Park at 25: Getting the Story Right,” Accessed November 30, 2021, scenichudson.org/viewfinder/poets-walk-park-at-25-getting-the-story-right

cemetery. Vassar was the chairman of the cemetery committee that aimed to create a rural cemetery in Poughkeepsie.

Another way Springside differs from other estates is that instead of focusing on vistas and views outside the property, such as the Hudson River, Springside was described as an “enclosure,” with an “inward orientation;” a road, stone wall, picket fence, and stream enclosed the property.⁷⁰ The unique landscape included hillocks, exposed bedrock, and groves of trees, which lent itself well to a mixture of the Picturesque and Beautiful design modes. Paths which were planned around these land features as well as some trimmed lawns could be considered to represent the Beautiful style, well maintained and clearly altered by man. There were also embellishments such as fountains and sundials throughout the landscape. The raised areas of land with gnarled trees and other vegetation were in the Picturesque style, influenced by man but highlighting the natural layout of the land. Vassar allowed the public to enjoy this landscape either on foot or in their carriages. This is another aspect where Vassar’s homestead is separate from other properties; while some estates were designed to get away from the common folk and were enjoyed only by the family and their chosen guests, Springside was enjoyed by all. Because of this, Springside can be viewed as an early public park.

Although the landscape was the main focus of Downing, architecture played an important supporting role, which he designed mainly in the Gothic Revival style. Buildings included the Porter’s Lodge, the Cottage - which was Vassar’s residence - as well as structures for Vassar’s gentleman’s farm, including a stable, dairy and ice house, and conservatory.⁷¹ The gentleman’s farm included a kitchen garden, apple, peach, plum, and cherry orchards, livestock, and more.

⁷⁰ Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson*, 131.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

This section of the property, to the east, was separate from the landscape garden, although visible at points to visitors.⁷²

As the result of a historic preservation battle against commercial development, Springside became a National Historic Landmark in 1969. In the 1980s, after a period of neglect, Springside Landscape Restoration was created to protect the property. Today, a large area that used to be part of the estate, mainly orchard and farmland, is condominiums. The Porter's Lodge is one of the only remaining structures, although it is a private residence; many of the other structures were lost to vandalism. The pleasure grounds are open to the public, although they are in ruins. An audio tour leads visitors around the designed landscape to help them imagine what it was like during Vassar's day.

~~ Add photos ~~

Rural Cemeteries

As colonists created community centers and churches, they also created church graveyards to bury the dead. As time went on, these churchyards began to fill up and town and city centers became more congested. By the mid-1800s, new spaces were needed to bury the dead, as well as to move those previously buried and repurpose the land they once occupied. This prompted the creation of many rural cemeteries, which were carefully landscaped; in an era before there were many parks, such cemeteries were intended for visiting the deceased on family outings or even picnics.

In December of 1852, a committee including Matthew Vassar formed to search for land for the Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery. Vassar purchased Springside for this purpose, although the committee passed on his land in favor of a fifty-four-acre riverfront property just to the west.

⁷² Springside Landscape Restoration, "Walking Tour And Map," Accessed November 30, 2021, springsidelandmark.org/walking-tour-and-map/

Sixty local residents paid \$300 dollars each to finance the project, and were either paid back later or used the money for a family plot. The landscape architect Howard Daniels designed the cemetery, including flowing trails. The cemetery opened in 1853, and added 106 acres to the south in 1883. In 1877, a pond was constructed with ducks and geese waiting to be fed by visitors.⁷³

Similar to the Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery, the Fishkill Rural Cemetery was created to solve the issue of overcrowded church graveyards. It was organized in 1866 through a community effort led by Isaac Cotheal and James E. Van Steenbergh. The grounds were laid out on twenty-seven acres that were previously farmland, designed by G.E. Harney, who also designed the gateway and gardener's cottage. The layout includes pathways for family visits and two ponds among other features. B.F. Hathaway, a landscape engineer, worked on the land itself. Changes include the addition of the gothic style Dubois Chapel in 1889, as well as the addition of more land, now totaling 142 acres.⁷⁴

Wilderstein

Like Mills Mansion, the Hoyt House, and others, "Wilderstein" is a riverfront Livingston estate. In 1852, Thomas Suckley, a Livingston, and his wife Catharine, purchased about thirty-two acres of land from his cousin. They built an Italianate-style home and called it "The Cedars," which was changed to Wilderstein, meaning Wild Man's Stone, when they found a petroglyph on the property.⁷⁵ At this time, the drive leading to the home was straight with a circular path once it reached the house. The property was a gentleman's farm, growing to over 100 acres with orchards, a kitchen garden, and many farm buildings.

⁷³ Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery, "Our History," Accessed on November 30, 2021, poughkeepsieruralcemetery.com/our-history/

⁷⁴ Fishkill Rural Cemetery, "The Founding of Fishkill Rural Cemetery," Accessed November 30, 2021, fishkillruralcemetery.com/history/

⁷⁵ Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson*, 148.

When the house became Robert and Elizabeth Suckley's, along with their large family, many changes were made. The house was redesigned in the Queen Anne style around 1890 by local architect Arnout Canno. Calvert Vaux and his son Downing Vaux, named for his mentor, were commissioned to work on the grounds.⁷⁶ By the 1890s, the Picturesque sensibility had begun to wane, although it still influenced the layout, including the way the driveway was changed from straight to curved. In addition, Vaux designed a three mile trail system "adorned with specimen trees and ornamental shrubs" with rustic gazebos and seats placed strategically to highlight beautiful views.⁷⁷ An important departure from the Picturesque style can be seen through some of the plantings on the property in "Victorian taste" or the "gardenesque style."⁷⁸ Instead of creating a seemingly natural or rugged mixture, like might be seen in the Picturesque style, shrubs and flowers were planted with one species in a specific area.

Due to financial struggles, the family moved to Europe, and when they returned in 1907, the landscape had greatly changed and had been reduced in upkeep to save time and money. The focus turned from landscape gardening to things like recreation; for example, similar to Montgomery Place in the early 20th century, a tennis court was constructed on the front lawn. Daisy Suckley, a member of the third and last generation of the family to occupy Wilderstein, ensured the preservation of the property after her death, as it became a privately operated museum. Today, visitors can enjoy the grounds, including Vaux's trails, and tours of the home.

⁷⁶ Wilderstein Historic Site, "History," Accessed November 30, 2021, wilderstein.org/history/

⁷⁷ Wilderstein Historic Site, "Grounds and Trails," Accessed November 30, 2021, wilderstein.org/grounds-trails/

⁷⁸ Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson*, 150.



Figure 11 View behind Springwood

Roosevelt Estate

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who led the nation through two of its toughest challenges, the Great Depression and World War II, was greatly influenced by the landscape of the Hudson River Valley, and had a turn in shaping it as well. James Roosevelt, Franklin's father, purchased 110 acres of farm land from Josiah Wheeler and moved into the Italianate-style home in 1867, calling it "Springwood."⁷⁹ Over time, he acquired more land and the estate eventually totaled 623 acres.⁸⁰ The home is elevated on a bluff overlooking the Hudson River. Leading to the home is a simple straight driveway, with evenly placed trees shading the path. Other buildings near the home include a coach house and stables as well as the gardener's cottage. FDR was born at Springwood in 1882, and it was at the estate that he "developed his

⁷⁹ Shannon Butler, *Roosevelt Homes of the Hudson Valley: Hyde Park and Beyond* (Charleston: The History Press, 2020), 55.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

passion for the outdoors, spending his leisure time riding, ice boating, fishing, and walking the woods and fields.”⁸¹

There was a gentleman’s farm on the east side of the road, called the Home Farm, including “cows, horses, pigs and chickens.”⁸² On the west side of the road, in addition to the house, were fields and a two-acre Home Garden, which produced potatoes, raspberries, beets, watermelon and more.⁸³ FDR and his children and grandchildren grew up working in this garden, contributing to their love of nature and the area. The property continues to be a working farm today, with local farmers taking cuts of hay on the property. There is also a rose garden, surrounded by a hemlock hedge, first created by Sara Roosevelt in 1912 when she transformed a previous kitchen garden into a flower garden. It is now the burial site of FDR and his wife, Eleanor.

As an adult, FDR purchased surrounding lands and created tree farms; he once said that “forests are the country’s most precious heritage.”⁸⁴ He created a forestry plan for his properties; more than 42,000 trees were planted on around sixteen plantations FDR had created by 1928. He also worked with the New York State College of Forestry at Syracuse University to continue his project as he entered public life. To access these plantations he even constructed a network of roads across the property. These deliberate changes to the landscape reflect FDR’s deep connection to nature; in total, he planted half a million trees on the property as part of his conservation efforts.⁸⁵

⁸¹ McKelden Smith, ed. *The Great Estates Region of the Hudson River Valley* (Tarrytown: Historic Hudson Valley Press, 1998), 51.

⁸² Butler, 65.

⁸³ National Park Service, “The Home Farm,” Accessed November 30, 2021, nps.gov/hofr/learn/historyculture/the-home-farm.htm

⁸⁴ National Park Service, Home of Franklin D Roosevelt, “Top Cottage Trail,” Accessed on November 30, 2021, nps.gov/hofr/learn/photosmultimedia/top-cottage-trail.htm

⁸⁵ National Park Service, “A Land History of the Roosevelt Estate,” Accessed November 30, 2021, nps.gov/articles/springwood-timeline.htm

As FDR's career took off, renovations were made on the home to make it more appropriate for a presidential hopeful. These 1915 renovations were led by Francis L. V. Hoppin, who also designed Zabriskie's home and garden at Blithewood. The Georgian-style stucco and native fieldstone facade spoke to FDR's love of vernacular Hudson River Valley architecture, specifically the Dutch colonial style, which he used to influence the design of later buildings on Roosevelt property. For example, the Presidential Library, which FDR designed with architect Henry Toombs starting in 1937, was influenced by this style. The construction of the library impacted the landscape, as the home garden was removed to create a parking lot. The home garden has since been rebuilt in its original location. The continuous additions, modifications, and destruction of varying aspects of the Springwood property reflect the idea of palimpsest, as one can see a layering of history in both the landscape and architecture.



Figure 12 The House at Val-Kill

“Val-Kill,” Eleanor Roosevelt's retreat, was built a few miles from Springwood. It is the only National Historic Site dedicated to a First Lady. The land was part of FDR's own property,

purchased in 1911 and used by a tenant farmer. In the mid-1920s, Stone Cottage, a Dutch colonial cottage designed by FDR and Henry Toombs, was built for Eleanor Roosevelt and her friends Marion Dickerson and Nancy Cook.⁸⁶ Right on the Fall Kill Creek, the land was often used to get away from the hustle and bustle of daily life even before construction began. Other buildings were constructed on the property including Val-Kill Cottage, once home to Val-Kill industries, as well as the playhouse and a stable.⁸⁷ Nancy Cook paid close attention to the landscape and created a cutting garden and vegetable garden. Other changes to the landscape were made over time, including an artificial seven-acre pond in the 1920s and a rose garden in the 1960s. Recreational additions were made as well, including an outdoor fireplace, swimming pool and tennis court, similar to changes being made at other estates in the early 20th century. These were used for relaxation and entertaining important dignitaries. Dignitaries were also entertained nearby at FDR's "Top Cottage."

⁸⁶ Butler, 86.

⁸⁷ National Park Service, "Val-Kill," Accessed November 30, 2021, nps.gov/places/val-kill.htm



Figure 13 Top Cottage

Completed in 1939 and designed yet again by FDR and Henry Toombs in the Dutch-colonial style, Top Cottage served as a quiet retreat where President Roosevelt could connect with his surroundings. The landscape at Top Cottage, located on Dutchess Hill, was kept “natural and informal.” There were azaleas near the house, and FDR especially enjoyed visiting Top Cottage to see the dogwood trees in bloom. One simple change was how FDR had the trees purposely thinned in what he called “windows” to enjoy river views. This retreat was influenced by FDR’s close friendship with his cousin and Wilderstein resident, Daisy Suckley.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ National Park Service, Home of Franklin D Roosevelt, “Top Cottage Trail,” Accessed on November 30, 2021, nps.gov/hofr/learn/photosmultimedia/top-cottage-trail.htm



Figure 14 The Fallkill Creek at Va-Kill

There are many trails throughout the Roosevelt property, including between various sites such as Springwood, Val-Kill and Top Cottage, many of which the family enjoyed and others that have been added since. These many pathways are both functional and reflect the family's connection with the landscape and nature. The trails, historic sites, and Presidential Library can be visited and enjoyed by the public today.

Bellefield

In 1795, Judge John Johnston bought 175 acres of land, subsequently building a barn and garage, a stone wall along Albany Post Road, and a federal-style farmhouse. He named his estate Bellefield. After a handful of owners, state senator Thomas Newbold and his wife Sarah Coolidge bought the property in 1885. The property neighbored Springwood; in fact, Thomas

Newbold was “a close family friend and early adviser” to FDR.⁸⁹ The Newbolds were also friends with Charles McKim, and his firm McKim, Mead & White updated the house soon after the turn of the century, though they kept the core of the house from 1795 intact. Other structures were built on the property such as a stone house, water tower and more.⁹⁰ Landscaped elements include the curved driveway, trees which shade the drive as well as other locations, and a walled garden.

The garden was designed in 1912 by Thomas Newbold’s cousin, Beatrix Farrand. At a time when it was difficult for women to have an autonomous career, Farrand found ways to pursue her passion and became a leading landscape architect. Her early experiences were shaped by landscapes and gardens at her family homes. She later studied with Charles Sprague Sargent, the founder of Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum, and went abroad to further her studies.⁹¹ In the late 1890s, Farrand set up her own practice in New York City, building her reputation with family and friends, and branching out to clients across the country and even in England. Farrand was the only female of 11 founders of the American Society of Landscape Architects created in 1899.⁹² The Newbold’s garden was one of her early residential works, developed while she also worked on projects for Princeton and the White House.⁹³

Farrand created a walled garden with hemlock hedges and three distinct garden “rooms” at Bellefield. The rooms featured gravel walks, beds of flowers, and open space, and got progressively narrower to create an illusion that the garden was longer than it was. The first room aligned with the Newbold’s living room, and each room moved from being obviously

⁸⁹ Beatrix Farrand Garden Association, “Audio Tour,” Accessed November 30, 2021, beatrixfarrandgardenhydepark.org/audio-tour

⁹⁰ National Park Service, “Bellefield Cultural Landscape,” Accessed november 30, 2021, nps.gov/articles/650075.htm#6/40.714/-118.630

⁹¹ Diana Balmori, Diane Kostial-Maguire, and Eleanor M. McPeck, *Beatrix Farrand’s American Landscapes: Her Gardens and Campuses* (Sagaponack: Sagapress, 1985), 17.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹³ Beatrix Farrand Garden Association, “Audio Tour,” Accessed November 30, 2021, beatrixfarrandgardenhydepark.org/audio-tour

planned to more organic, to create a seamless “transition from garden to nature” and effectively “shift the emotional temperature” of the garden.⁹⁴ Farrand also took into consideration the natural aspects of the location when designing the garden, such as mature trees; this reflected her belief that landscape design should work with natural features and not alter them unnecessarily. The garden was full of plants that bloomed in the spring and fall since that is when the family stayed in the home. It also features a stone wall and rustic gate.

After the property was donated to the National Park Service by the Newbolds’ grandson, restoration of the garden began. There were limited surviving documents showing Farrand’s designs, so the current layout is not exactly as she planned it; however it is true to another of her designs. In addition, one direct connection to Farrand’s garden is through the pink peonies. These were returned to the garden by a local minister who received them from the Newbolds’ daughter years earlier.⁹⁵ Today, visitors can enjoy the garden thanks to the efforts of the Beatrix Farrand Garden Association.

Bellefield is not the only location in Dutchess County influenced by Farrand. She also influenced the landscape of Vassar College, founded by Matthew Vassar. The landscape underwent a drastic transformation; before Vassar bought the property in the early 1860s, it was a racetrack, so there were not many trees on the property. In contrast, now there are over 2200 trees on campus, and Arbnet classifies the campus as a Level II Accredited Arboretum.⁹⁶ In 1865, the first plantings were made on the property, and in 1868, a yearly tradition of the class tree was created. In 1925, Farrand became the Consulting Landscape Gardener for just a few years, but her ideas had a continued influence with the next gardener Percival Gallagher, partner

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ ArbNet, “Vassar College Arboretum,” Accessed November 30, 2021, arbnet.org/morton-register/vassar-college-arboretum

in Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects.⁹⁷ In addition to the arboretum, Vassar takes pride in its Shakespeare Garden, just up the hill from Sunset Lake. This garden was created starting in 1916, when students from a botany class and Shakespeare classes created the second Shakespeare Garden in the Americas, consisting of many plants and flowers mentioned in the writer's works.⁹⁸

Innisfree Garden

Innisfree Garden was designed as a country residence for Walter Beck and Marion Burt Beck in Millbrook. The couple began working on the landscape in the late 1920s, on Marion's 950-acre property. Walter Beck, a student of the fine arts, was inspired by Wang Wei, an "8th century Chinese poet, painter and garden maker."⁹⁹ Especially of interest to Beck was what he termed "cup gardens," which became central to Innisfree's design. This Asian inspired garden has separate rooms that are each considered individually rather than uniting together in a complete composition like English or European inspired gardens. This aspect makes Innisfree unique from other gardens in Dutchess County.

Beck developed the initial composition not on paper but through modeling with various materials. He was very involved with the construction of the garden, instructing about twenty laborers as they "slowly built terraces, grottoes, walls, stairs, and 'cup gardens' ranging in size from single stones to a one-acre lotus pond."¹⁰⁰ Although Beck worked on designs before

⁹⁷ Vassar Campus History, "Beatrix Farrand, Consulting Landscape Gardener," Accessed November 30, 2021, vassarcampushistory.vassarspaces.net/category/landscape/

⁹⁸ Vassar Encyclopedia, "Shakespeare Garden," Accessed November 30, 2021, vassar.edu/vcencyclopedia/buildings-grounds/grounds/shakespeare-garden.html

⁹⁹ Innisfree Garden, "Innisfree Brochure," Accessed November 30, 2021, innisfreegarden.org/media/pages/more/555780684b-1583558982/2016_innisfree_brochure_lg.pdf

¹⁰⁰ Jory Johnson, "Review of Innisfree: An American Garden by Lester Collins," *Landscape Journal* 15 no. 2 (1996), 175. Accessed on JSTOR, jstor.org/stable/43323407?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

executing them, he did not hesitate to adjust things as they unfolded in nature, and believed change was important as the seasons and other factors affected the composition of his work.¹⁰¹

Also involved in the development of the garden was Lester Collins, a Harvard graduate with a master's degree in Landscape Architecture, who went on to be the Dean of Harvard's Department of Landscape Architecture and open his own practice. Collins also traveled to Japan as a Fullbright Scholar in 1954, which was just one of his trips to Asia to study landscape architecture. He worked with the Becks even as an undergraduate, was commissioned to further develop the garden after Beck passed in 1955, and continued to work on Innisfree until his own death in 1993. The garden doubled in size under Collins, and he created innovative solutions to ensure the sustainability of the garden and each specimen on the property. More emphasis was placed on the lake near the original gardens than before, and Collins even created a process to reduce algae on the lake. Like Beck, Collins believed frequent change was necessary, in his words, "constant editing of the cup gardens is essential."¹⁰² Other changes included removing the English mansion on the property because it interfered with the essence of the garden. Collins was president of Innisfree Foundation, which was created as Innisfree became a public garden in 1960. Today, the 185-acre design includes a "sublime composition of rock, water, wood, and sky" with a trail and picnic area for visitors to enjoy.¹⁰³

Wethersfield

"Wethersfield" got its start much later than most previous examples of landscape architecture in Dutchess County. Chauncey Devereux Stillman purchased hundreds of acres of

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁰³ Innisfree Garden, "Innisfree Brochure," Accessed November 30, 2021, innisfreegarden.org/media/pages/more/555780684b-1583558982/2016_innisfree_brochure_lg.pdf

past farmland and began cultivating his estate starting in 1937. From this elevated land in Amenia, the Taconic Hills, Berkshires, and Catskills are all visible, creating beautiful vistas.¹⁰⁴ Stillman was director of the Freeport Minerals Company, served in World War II, and was passionate about horses, art, gardening and conservation; the beauty of Dutchess Country drew him in to bring these passions together. The property was developed over a fifty-year period, including a Georgian-style colonial brick residence, stables, a farm focused on soil and water conservation, and extensive gardens. Stillman was also enthusiastic about the “declining art of carriage driving,” and made sure to entertain guests with daily rides.¹⁰⁵

Guests enjoyed strolling through the gardens, which grew to include a three-acre formal garden in the Classical Italian style, in addition to a seven-acre Wilderness Garden with trails. One landscape architect, Bryan J. Lynch, created plans for the Inner Garden, and another, Evelyn N. Poehler, worked with Stillman over time to complete the garden. A unique aspect of the garden is the various hedges dividing different areas and paths of the garden. Created around the house, various alleys align with windows and other aspects of the house beckoning people into the garden. The scents of the garden also entice connection with nature; for example, the scent of orange trees on the south terrace of the house travels inside. Paths in the garden lead to various statues and other structures, such as the reflecting pool created by Evelyn N. Poehler. This pool was painted black to create a mirror like effect for the shrubs and other vegetation around it. Another unique aspect of the landscape is the Cutting Garden, which has “evolved into a cottage garden that matures into a butterfly and hummingbird sanctuary.”¹⁰⁶ The property also has

¹⁰⁴ Wethersfield Foundation, “Garden Visits,” Accessed on November 30, 2021, wethersfield.org/garden-visits

¹⁰⁵ Wethersfield Foundation, “Carriage House Museum,” Accessed on November 30, 2021, wethersfield.org/carriage-house

¹⁰⁶ Wethersfield Foundation, “Garden Visits,” Accessed on November 30, 2021, wethersfield.org/garden-visits

extensive hiking and riding trails throughout the property. Since Stillman's death in 1989, the Wethersfield Foundation carried on with the grounds and created a museum to honor his legacy.

~~ Add Photos ~~

Preservation

As previously discussed, in 1841, Robert Donaldson at Blithewood and Louise Livingston at Montgomery Place ensured the Sawkill Creek would not be developed by purchasing the land between their two properties. Historians suggest "that the legal agreement between them could be considered among the first scenic preservation covenants in the United States,"¹⁰⁷ demonstrating how far back there was a dedication to maintaining the beauty of the Hudson River Valley. Dutchess County residents continued to value preservation throughout the years, and many historic landscapes would not have stood the test of time if it were not for the people and organizations that worked to preserve them.

Some properties were given to the National Park Service (NPS) or the State of New York by families or descendants of those who lived there. For example, in 1938, Gladys Mills Phipps, daughter of Ruth Livingston Mills and Ogden Mills, gave her family's home and 192 acres to the State of New York. Eleanor and the Roosevelt family waived their lifetime rights to Springwood and transferred it to NPS, recognizing the historic value of their family seat. The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, also on the property, is controlled by the National Archives and Records Administration. Gerald Morgan Jr., the grandson of Thomas Newbold and Sarah Coolidge, donated a portion of the property of the Bellefield estate to NPS, and it became a part of the Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site.

¹⁰⁷ National Gallery of Art, "Montgomery Place," Accessed November 30, 2021, [heald.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php/Montgomery_Place](https://www.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php/Montgomery_Place) nga

In other instances, family members or others involved created organizations to share their lives and property with the public outside of government organizations. Some examples include Innisfree Garden, where the Innisfree Foundation was created in 1960, Mount Gulian, where the Bleeckers, descendants of the Verplancks, created the Mount Gulian Society in 1966, and Locust Grove, where Annette Innis Young created a non-profit organization in 1975. Ten years later, when Chauncey Devereux Stillman passed away, the Wethersfield Foundation set out to carry out his wishes. Similarly, Daisy Suckley left Wilderstein to be a museum after her death in 1991. Christian Zabriskie, son of Captain Andrew C. Zabriskie and Frances Hunter Zabriskie, donated Blithewood to Bard College in 1951. In 2016, transferred from the regional non-profit preservation organization Historic Hudson Valley, Montgomery Place also became a part of Bard College.

Concerned citizens also impacted and continue to influence preservation efforts. FDR was one of them; in 1940, he ensured that Vanderbilt's Hyde Park became a National Historic Site as an example of a Gilded Age estate. A group of citizens pushed for Val-Kill to become a National Historic Site to save it from development, and they succeeded in 1977. Similar to Val-Kill, citizens came together to avoid development at Springside, which became a National Historic Landmark in 1969, and later, the Springside Landscape Restoration was created to protect the property. While none of the principal buildings remain publicly accessible today, this organization's aim is to interpret the remaining grounds and landscape. A comparable organization, the Calvert Vaux Preservation Alliance, founded in 2008, is presently working to preserve The Point, where the house and landscape lay in shambles and are in need of much repair.

In addition to individuals and groups operating at the grassroots level to save landscapes, larger organizations have been created to continue preservation work in the Hudson River Valley, including Scenic Hudson, the largest and most diverse environmental group in the region, which was founded in 1963.¹⁰⁸ Scenic Hudson's vision is "to make the region a model of vibrant riverfront cities and towns linked by inviting parks and trails, beautiful and resilient landscapes, and productive farms."¹⁰⁹ Scenic Hudson influences over 45 parks, four of which are included in this discussion of Dutchess County: Poets' Walk, Mills Mansion, the Roosevelt property and Locust Grove. Scenic Hudson maintains Poets' Walk, which has been open to the public since 1996, keeping the landscape and vistas as they were in 1850.¹¹⁰ At Mills Mansion, Scenic Hudson is involved with the Hyde Park Trail River Overlook, a 1.85 mile trail that begins at Mills-Norrie State Park.¹¹¹ In 2007, Scenic Hudson enabled the "restoration of the historic road linking FDR's home to Eleanor Roosevelt's Val-Kill [by protecting] the 335 acres between them and [transferring] the land" to NPS.¹¹² Similarly, the continued access to the five miles of trails at Locust Grove was made possible by Scenic Hudson in 2018 when they gained a conservation easement on the property.¹¹³ These examples demonstrate how preservation requires continuous efforts, and also how many recent preservation efforts focus on trails which allow residents and visitors to enjoy the historical and artistic landscapes of the Hudson River Valley.

¹⁰⁸ Scenic Hudson, "About Us," Accessed November 30, 2021, scenichudson.org/about-us/

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Scenic Hudson, "Poets' Walk Park," Accessed November 30, 2021, scenichudson.org/explore-the-valley/scenic-hudson-parks/poets-walk-park/

¹¹¹ Scenic Hudson, "Hyde Park Trail River Overlook," Accessed November 30, 2021, scenichudson.org/explore-the-valley/scenic-hudson-parks/hyde-park-trail-overlook/

¹¹² Scenic Hudson, "Parks Creation," Accessed November 30, 2021, scenichudson.org/our-work/conservation/parks-creation/

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

In addition to these initial preservation efforts, restoration is often needed to maintain the site. This could be restoration of architectural elements as well as landscape elements. At many of these sites, gardens and other intentional landscape features have been lost to time, whether through removal, slow decay or otherwise. After successful preservation efforts have secured the future of a site, individuals involved at the site often devote some attention to restoring and maintaining landscape features. For example, at Mount Gulian, the volunteers searched the overgrown area where the garden used to be to discover garden elements and reconstruct portions of it based on maps of the garden. In addition, at Top Cottage in the early 2000s, workers thinned the trees to restore the view FDR enjoyed. At other locations, groups have been created to restore and maintain these features; the Beatrix Farrand Garden Association at Bellefield and the Frederick W. Vanderbilt Garden Association at Vanderbilt ensure that the public will be able to enjoy these exquisite gardens for years to come.

Connecting Dutchess County Estates to Modern Trails

In these often expansive landscapes, paths were necessary to get from one location to another. Initially, paths at many estates were made in a way that was most efficient; the driveways, for example, were straight and simple to get people where they were headed. The paths from the docks to the home at Bard's Hyde Park were also laid out in an efficient design. Carriage trails and other pathways were created to get to important locations on various properties directly.

As time went on, these pathways were strategically changed. Numerous examples can be identified with the trajectory of driveways alone, many of which were modified to show off certain aspects of the landscape. These driveways still got people where they needed to be, however, they took a different and longer route to get there. Another form of trail developed as

well; one that was solely focused on the experience and enjoyment of the journey. For instance, family members at Montgomery Place began laying out such trails in 1829, Poet's Walk was developed on Astor and Delano land around 1850, and Vaux planned miles of trails at Wilderstein in the early 1890s. Trails were developed over time at the Roosevelt estate, Locust Grove, Wethersfield, and Innisfree Garden. In addition, some landscapes were planned where the trails were central features of the overall design, as at Springside and the Poughkeepsie and Fishkill Rural Cemeteries; these landscapes were different in that they allowed the public to enjoy them from the beginning, where most others were for private enjoyment. These sites can be seen as precursors to the proliferation of many parks and trails in the area in recent decades.

One example of the recent trail movement can be seen through the development of rail trails, specifically the Dutchess Rail Trail, which began construction in the early 2000s. Just as many driveways and other pathways at estates changed from being used for efficient movement around the property to emphasizing the journey, the train tracks that used to transport people and goods are now paved trails for recreation, exercise and enjoyment. Just like the driveways and trails at estates, the rail trails emphasize important landscape features, such as the Hudson River, through the creation of the Walkway over the Hudson, completed in 2009. There are benches along the way to rest and take in nature, another similarity to previously established trails. The Dutchess Rail Trail is just one example of many recently developed trails that carry forth the ideas and intentions behind old estate trails.

The Creation of Palimpsests

Dutchess County is a breathtaking and special place. Going back to before colonization and continuing to today, inhabitants of this area have had a deep connection to the land. The county provided many with their livelihoods and sustenance, as well as opportunities for

enjoyment and recreation. The unique geography of Dutchess County also provided inspiration to many; some wrote about the beauty of the area, painted on canvas, or used the land as their canvas to create a painting with nature.

Over time, various people and developments influenced the land, creating layers, each with its own story to tell. These layers offer a window into the past, and with close attention, can reveal a lot about what mattered to the people who influenced it, and what they valued.

Early on, colonists were focused on establishing themselves and their families in a new place, including clearing the land to use it for farming, building homes, towns, and more. The landscapes discussed demonstrate that efficiency and utility were valued, and the land was a resource for daily needs. This does not mean colonists were uninterested in designing their landscapes, but it was not their highest priority. Some landscapes did, in fact, feature some intentional ornamental design, including tree-lined drives and more. One specific example that reflects these ideas, and can be viewed today as part of the palimpsest of the landscape, is the stone walls at Locust Grove, initially placed “to delineate the original fields” and property lines; they were created because they were useful.¹¹⁴ This layer was later modified by Morse as he moved and rearranged the walls to be more aesthetically pleasing, adding his layer to the palimpsest.

In the early decades of the nation, now established families began or continued to influence the landscape around them. Those able to afford expansive riverfront estates, as those discussed, valued the enjoyment and pleasure landscaped grounds could provide. They enjoyed producing food just for themselves and ornamentally planning their landscapes in ways that capitalized on the natural beauty of the area, often in the Picturesque and Beautiful design

¹¹⁴ Toole, *Landscape Gardens on the Hudson*, 115.

modes, and were influenced by the writings of influential landscape architects such as A.J. Downing. Montgomery Place offers insight into how this era and the values often held influenced the palimpsest of the landscape. The family laid out trails and footpaths to enjoy particularly unique aspects of their property, taming the wilderness to allow for their passage and creating various structures to rest and enjoy the landscape. Some aspects, such as the lake, changed in use from a mill pond to a place of relaxation. This layer in the history of Montgomery Place was also influenced by ideas asserted by A.J. Downing and others, who wrote extensively about this location as well as the aesthetics of its trails.

During the Gilded Age, the focus on the landscape for enjoyment and gentleman farming continued, although it became more ornate. Owners valued the ability to display their wealth and style; houses were expanded and redesigned and formal gardens imported the latest designs from abroad in a combination with local style. As seen at many Dutchess County landscapes, these gardens were more geometric and strayed from the Beautiful and Picturesque.

The changes during the Vanderbilts' ownership of Hyde Park highlight these values. New structures were constructed to reflect their status, including their classical mansion with stately columns, which was the fourth home to be constructed in that scenic location. In addition, the formal garden had a strong European influence. This location on the property, like the location of the home, represents the layering and palimpsest of the land; during Bard's time, it was the kitchen garden, then an ornamental garden for Hosack, and remains the Vanderbilt's Italianate garden today.

In later examples of landscapes in Dutchess County, properties, purposes and design ideas do not as easily fit one trend; uses and values diversified. One similarity on many estates, however, was a focus on recreation instead of simply using the landscape for gentlemen farming

and vistas. Montgomery Place, Wilderstein, and Val-Kill are some examples of properties with tennis courts, and at Wilderstein it was valued over the previous planned landscape and was placed right on the front lawn. Interestingly, at Val-Kill, a court was later removed in the 1960s for Eleanor Roosevelt to create a garden, adding another layer to the palimpsest of the landscape.¹¹⁵

Over the centuries, the landscapes have evolved, with various additions, modifications, removal, and restorations taking place. By identifying different aspects and their intentions, the values of the owners and those around them can be discerned. From these and other examples, it is evident that today at these Dutchess County landscapes, a blend of these layers can be identified, with some more evident than others, creating a complex and intriguing palimpsest.

The identification of this concept does not mean that the landscapes are complete or finished evolving. The story is still being written at these sites. Some landscapes are in ruins and are in danger of being lost completely without intervention. Even with organizations to fight for the sites, there are often overwhelming challenges that need to be overcome for success. This fight can be seen currently with the Calvert Vaux Preservation Alliance, which has been fighting for years to save and restore the architecture and landscape of the Hoyt House, and will likely continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Similarly, a portion of Springside is open to the public, however, it lacks interpretation, making it hard for even an informed visitor to imagine what it once was. Other properties, such as National Historic Sites, State Historic Sites and those cared for by non-profits are on more stable footing. Still, these sites are still being influenced by restoration of architecture, landscape, and other new developments such as visitors centers being

¹¹⁵ National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form, Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site, National Park Service History ELibrary, March 20, 1980, nps.history.com/publications/elro/nr-val-kill.pdf

constructed to welcome visitors, which with success will be present for decades and centuries to come.