

Guidebook: Great Houses

MID HUDSON

Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site

<http://www.nps.gov/vama/facilities.html>

519 Albany Post Road
Hyde Park, NY 12538

Hours: Open from 9:00-5:00. Closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Admission is \$8 for adults and free for children 16 & under.

Notes: Group tours available by reservation only. Call ahead for special events.

Phone: (845) 229-9115

Historical Description:

Between 1763 and 1835, three generations of owners made improvements on the grounds. The most significant contribution was the landscape design work of Andre Parmentier, employed by David Hosack in the 1820s, which enticed visitors from Europe. In 1895, Frederick William Vanderbilt, the grandson of Cornelius "Commodore" Vanderbilt and the son of William Henry Vanderbilt, both the richest men in America in their time, bought Hyde Park, as the property was known at the time. Completed in 1898, the residence was designed by the firm of McKim, Mead, and White with steel frame construction and Indiana limestone, making it virtually fireproof. It remained in the Vanderbilt family for over four decades as their center for entertaining in the spring and fall. The cost of construction and furnishings was nearly two million dollars. Under Frederick's guidance, the Pavilion, Mansion, Gate Houses, Coach House, and Powerhouse were built, and the Gardens were redesigned several times. The 50-room dwelling was designed to resemble an ancestral home of a noble European line. Everything was up-to-date, including the central heating, the plumbing, and the power supplied by the estate's hydroelectric plant. The furnishings and decoration were more than double the cost of the house itself. Margaret Van Alen, Frederick's niece, inherited the estate upon Frederick's death in 1938 and since 1940, the 211 acres donated to the federal government has been open to the public. Except for some of the owners' belongings, the mansion and its contents remain unchanged from the time of the Vanderbilts.

The Site:

The furnished home of Frederick Vanderbilt; Visitor Center with exhibits, and bookstore. The grounds feature magnificent views of the Hudson River and distant Catskill Mountains. The Formal Gardens, once abandoned, have been restored thanks to the help of the Frederick W. Vanderbilt Garden Association. Regularly scheduled tours of the Mansion are presented by park rangers. Programs vary, and include themes dealing with the lifestyle of the Vanderbilts and their contemporaries, industrial expansion, turn-of-the-century technology, and landscape architecture.

Directions:

Take the New York State Thruway (I-87) to Exit 18 (New Paltz), take 299 east to 9W south, follow signs to Mid-Hudson Bridge (also known as the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Bridge). After bridge crossing follow overhead signs to Route 9 north. The park entrance will be about 7 miles on the left.



Vanderbilt Mansion, from the South Lawn