



Foundation Document Overview

Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site

New York



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of VANDERBILT MANSION NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to preserve and interpret the estate of Frederick W. and Louise Vanderbilt as a premier example of an “American country place,” illustrating important economic, social, and cultural developments during America’s Gilded Age.



Significance

Significance statements express why Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The Vanderbilt Mansion is an especially intact example of “American country place” design. The 50-room Beaux-Arts-style mansion, designed by the prominent architectural firm of McKim, Mead, and White, is an architectural masterpiece surrounded by an outstanding designed Hudson River estate landscape.
- Built by Frederick William Vanderbilt (1856–1938), an heir to one of the country’s great industrial fortunes, the country place represents the domestic ideal of the upper class in late 19th-century and early 20th-century America.
- President Franklin D. Roosevelt directed designation of the Vanderbilt Mansion as a national historic site in 1940.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Mansion and Dependencies**
- **Vanderbilt Landscape, including Scenic Views**
- **Museum and Archival Collections**



Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Natural Resources**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Wealth and Society in the Industrial Age.** The Vanderbilt family was at the vanguard of American transportation and real estate development, amassing the first great American fortune that provided them opportunity to live like modern “merchant princes” during the Gilded Age—a period that exacerbated a stratified class system and prompted political responses that ultimately undercut the power of industrial wealth.
- **A Hudson River Great Estate.** The Vanderbilt Mansion and its grounds reflect the rarefied domestic ideal of the elite industrialist class in late 19th-century and early 20th-century America.



Description

Historically known as Hyde Park, Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site is one of the region's oldest Hudson River estates. For nearly two centuries, it has been home to socially prominent New Yorkers. A superb example of its type, Hyde Park represents the domestic ideal of the elite class in late 19th-century America. It provides a glimpse of estate life, the social stratification of the period, and the world of the American millionaire during the era historians refer to as the Gilded Age. The National Park Service preserves over 200 acres of the original property, including historic buildings, original furnishings, manicured landscapes, natural woodlands, formal gardens, and associated documents.

The centerpiece of the estate is the mansion, designed for Frederick and Louise Vanderbilt by the preeminent architectural firm of McKim, Mead, and White.

Frederick Vanderbilt was a grandson of transportation tycoon Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt and a railroad magnate in his own right, and his tremendous wealth enabled him to build this grand estate. The fully furnished 50-room house rivals the most stately North American homes of the period in the quality of its design, interiors, and decoration. More than 7,000 historic objects connected with the estate, featuring European fine art, American and European decorative arts and furnishings, and carriages and automobiles, are vital in portraying the lifestyle of the Vanderbilts.

The park's designed grounds reflect the evolution of Hudson River landscape design over some 200 years. The Vanderbilts retained much of the landscape as it was planned after 1828 by the Belgian landscape designer Andre Parmentier. President Franklin Roosevelt directed designation of the Vanderbilt Mansion as a national historic site in 1940.

