

Roosevelt–Vanderbilt National Historic Sites  
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“There is nothing so American as our National Parks.”

— Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1936

Terrace, FDR Home.



Photographs by Matthew Garrett unless otherwise noted.

Roosevelt – Vanderbilt  
National Historic Sites

Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site  
Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site  
Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



General Management Plan  
Newsletter #1  
2006



TOP COTTAGE



HOME OF FDR



VANDERBILT MANSION



VAL-KILL



Our Parks, Our Future  
An Invitation to Join the  
Planning Effort





A Message from the Superintendent

Once in a generation, every park and historic site in the national park system revises its long-range plan, called a general management plan. In Hyde Park, New York, three national historic sites—the Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt’s Val-Kill, and the Vanderbilt Mansion—are managed together as the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites. The National Park Service is undertaking one planning effort for all three sites, which will consider how best to preserve these properties, and how to improve the experience for visitors over the long term (15–20 years).

The National Park Service’s core mission of preserving America’s treasures unimpaired for future generations is as challenging as it is compelling. Each generation inherits only what the previous generation chose to protect, yet each also leaves its own mark, adding a new layer of history. The historic resources of the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites will always be significant. As each new generation embraces these special places and their stories, new perspectives will emerge, changing the way we interpret and treat the resources.

The types of issues that the plan will consider include:

- How can we address development pressures and protect the Roosevelt and Vanderbilt lands in keeping with the purposes for establishing the sites?
- As the Roosevelt era becomes more distant in time, there are fewer visitors with a connection to that time who come to the national historic sites. How can the park resources and stories be made relevant to new generations of visitors?
- How can the managers address a range of operational issues, from use of historic buildings for maintenance equipment, to the efficient assignment of staff members among three sites?

Your involvement is vital to this multi-year planning effort. Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites have a large constituency, locally, nationally, even internationally. We value your input and encourage you to express your views.

Sincerely,  
Sarah Olson, *Superintendent*

Long-range Plan Underway

Typically, general management plans take about three years to complete. They look at the big picture and give broad guidance for park managers. Specific plans come later, when actions are needed or when funding becomes available. The products of the planning effort are a draft plan and a final plan with an official record of decision at the end.

You are invited to participate throughout the process, and especially during the formal public review period when the draft plan is circulated.

The planning schedule for the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt general management plan is as follows:

- Preliminary research and background preparation: through Winter 2005–06
- Public outreach: Winter–Fall 2006
- Draft management alternatives: Winter 2006–07
- Draft plan and draft environmental impact statement: Summer 2007
- Final plan and final environmental impact statement: Summer 2008
- Record of decision: Fall–Winter 2008

This is the first in a series of newsletters that will be produced for the plan. For future newsletters, we would like to rely on electronic communications as much as possible. Please sign up for our email list at: [www.Roosevelt-VanderbiltPlan.org](http://www.Roosevelt-VanderbiltPlan.org). Thank you!



Above: Original desk and artifacts are displayed in FDR’s study on the first floor of the Home. Below left and right: Seasonal change along the Home Road, the original tree-lined entrance to the FDR Home.





The Importance of These Historic Sites

The town of Hyde Park is the home for this wealth of nationally and internationally recognized historic sites. **The Home of FDR National Historic Site**, together with the adjacent Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, is the single best place to understand the influences that shaped the personality and worldview of the longest-serving U.S. president, who, during his four terms in office, led the nation through two great crises of the 20th century: the Great Depression and World War II. The lifelong home of FDR contains his furnishings and memorabilia, outbuildings, his cherished river views, historic trails, forests, and farmlands, along with Top Cottage, FDR’s hilltop retreat. FDR's values and his responses to challenges, both public and personal, were shaped by the sense of identity and strength he gained here in Hyde Park. FDR was the first sitting president to preserve his legacy by creating a presidential library and by establishing his home as a national historic site. He established the site in 1939. The National Park Service opened the Home to the public in 1946, a year after his death. This year marks the 60th anniversary of welcoming the public “Home.”

Top left: The FDR Home, where FDR was born in 1882. Originally purchased by FDR’s father, James, in 1867, the Home was altered over the years, most notably in 1915–1916 when FDR and his mother transformed it from an Italianate country villa to its present appearance. The Home figured prominently in FDR's political career, as a summer White House, as a setting for meetings, and as accommodation for important guests.

Lower left: The graves of Franklin D. and Eleanor Roosevelt are marked by a plain white marble monument designed by FDR and located at a site of his choosing in the Roosevelt Rose Garden.

Lower right: Set on a wooded hilltop looking out onto the Shawangunk Ridge and Catskill Mountains and located over two miles from the FDR Home is FDR's retreat, Top Cottage. With its secluded location and wooded landscape, Top Cottage provided an intimate setting where FDR could meet with important allies and close friends to discuss the state of the world or simply relax.

Top right: A panoramic view of the Hudson Valley looking southwest from the FDR Home.



**Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site** (also known as Val-Kill) is the place most closely associated with Eleanor Roosevelt, who served as First Lady from 1932 until 1945. Val-Kill, established as a national historic site in 1977, contains Val-Kill and Stone Cottages, along with the Playhouse and other outbuildings, Val-Kill Pond, and woods, fields, and gardens. Here, from 1924 until her death in 1962, Eleanor Roosevelt formulated and carried out her social and political beliefs, and emerged as a champion of democracy and human rights. After FDR's death, Val-Kill became Eleanor Roosevelt's home and was a center not only for family gatherings, but for informal meetings with national and world leaders. While living here, Eleanor Roosevelt served as the first U.S. delegate to the United Nations and chaired the committee that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today, Val-Kill is a site of “pilgrimage” for many who honor Eleanor Roosevelt’s legacy.

Top left: In 1924, FDR and Eleanor Roosevelt, along with her two close friends Marion Dickerman and Nancy Cook, planned a retreat along the banks of the Fall Kill Creek, named Val-Kill. The first component of the retreat was Stone Cottage, which was completed in 1926.

Lower left: Eleanor Roosevelt's sleeping porch, Val-Kill Cottage.

Lower right: Eleanor Roosevelt, along with Dickerman and Cook, established Val-Kill Industries with the aim of reviving traditional crafts as a means to train and assist unemployed rural residents. Operating out of this structure, the business produced

furniture, metal ware, and fabrics until the 1930s. Following the termination of Val-Kill Industries, Eleanor Roosevelt converted the factory into her own retreat and home and began referring to it as “Val-Kill Cottage.”

Top right: The picturesque Val-Kill Pond was created by damming a section of the Fall Kill. The lower, smaller section dates to the original construction of Val-Kill in 1926, and the upper, larger section (now much reduced in extent due to siltation) dates to 1937.





**Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site** preserves a premier example of an “American country place” and illustrates important economic, social, and cultural developments that occurred as America industrialized in the decades following the Civil War. The 50-room Beaux Arts-designed mansion is, today, the centerpiece of what was originally a 700-acre estate. The mansion, designed by McKim, Mead and White, has fully furnished interiors and an extensive collection of decorative and fine arts. The property’s legacy as a celebrated landscape—some of the specimen trees are more than 200 years old—was among the factors that prompted FDR to designate the Vanderbilt Mansion a national historic site in 1940.

Top left: The Vanderbilt grounds reflect the general organization of the picturesque landscape as designed by Andre Parmentier in 1829–1830 in the idealized rural style of English landscape gardening then coming into fashion in America. This style is most notable in the naturalistic alignment of the main drive, the position of the Vanderbilt Mansion set amid expansive lawns framed by woods and specimen trees, and the river views.

Lower left: The Vanderbilt lands trace their settlement and development back to John Bard, who purchased a 3,600-acre tract in 1764. Bard Rock, a large rock outcropping,

was one of three original Bard river landings and is, today, a popular visitor destination, as it is one of the few park areas that extends beyond the railroad to the riverfront.

Lower right: Supported by steel girders and faced with Indiana limestone, the Vanderbilt Mansion contains more than 50 rooms including servants’ quarters.

Top right: An overlook along the far side of the main park drive provides a dramatic view north up the Hudson Valley, with the Catskill Mountains in the distance.



## Planners Tackle Large Issues

The Roosevelt-Vanderbilt general management plan will cover a range of issues confronting the sites now and in the future.

### Preserving Park Resources

- How can we address development pressures and protect the Roosevelt and Vanderbilt lands in keeping with the purposes for establishing the sites?
- Are there ways to continue to invite large numbers of visitors into fragile historic buildings while protecting the structures and their contents for future generations?
- What treatments are appropriate and possible for the vast cultural landscapes at all three sites?

### Providing for Public Enjoyment

- With four separate destinations at the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites and limited space for parking, how can we assure access that meets the needs of the public while protecting vulnerable resources?

- What changes in visitor programs, patterns of circulation, and site operations will be needed if a new regional tourism center is built along Route 9 across from the Home and Library?
- As the Roosevelt era becomes more distant in time, there are fewer visitors with a connection to that time who come to the Roosevelt sites. How can the Roosevelts’ ideas expressed in the Hyde Park homes be made relevant to new generations of visitors?

### Ensuring Organizational Effectiveness

- How can the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites play an expected leadership role in the Hudson Valley region that will maximize cooperation among the region’s sites and organizations, while meeting demands associated with park operations?
- How can the managers address a range of issues, from use of historic buildings for maintenance equipment, to the efficient assignment of staff members among four separate destinations?



From top left: Visitors touring the FDR Home and viewing the mosaic floor map of historic Hyde Park in the Henry A. Wallace Visitor and Education Center.



Public Forum Produces Lively Discussion

Like all national park sites, the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt historic sites need the benefit of ideas, suggestions, and views from the public. To that end, the General Management Plan team held a community forum at the Wallace Center on December 14, 2005, to which more than 80 people came together to share their thoughts about the present and the future of these sites. Seven break-out groups addressed a series of questions that elicited viewpoints about the things people value at the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt historic sites, and produced suggestions about managing the sites in the future.

Some visitors value the place (its buildings and landscapes) for its inherent meaning or symbolism. Others, equally supportive, value what they can do or accomplish there. People representing both points of view came to the public forum to share their thoughts with the planning team, and here are some highlights of what the team heard.

Among the dozens of topics people brought up, three figured most prominently. The first concerned the grounds, the views, the trails, and the landscapes. Many people commented on the stunning landscapes, the pleasing expanses of fields, the forests, trails, and above all, the views of the Hudson River. People value these and want to be assured that they will be protected and maintained in the future.

Second, many people talked of the importance of education at the historic sites. They spoke both of what is happening today and what should be emphasized in the future.

And, third, there was substantial comment on the dual topics of local community involvement with the park, and the tourism potential for these sites.

Prized Landscapes, Views, and Trails

The Hudson River vistas, accessible at both the Home of FDR and the Vanderbilt Mansion, are treasured by those who attended the forum. Some referred to the historic views available before trees grew too high and obscured the river, and they would like to have the views restored. Likewise, the Route 9 landscape should be improved or even restored, some said. Many spoke of respect for the

historic setting, which includes trees, walls, farm fields, and more. “Don’t overdevelop” was the injunction from some. “Prevent overuse and preserve the rural and historic landscape character,” they said.

A great deal of discussion concerned the many Roosevelt-Vanderbilt trails—those at the Home of FDR and the Vanderbilt Mansion, along the river, behind Val-Kill, from Val-Kill to Top Cottage, and between the Home and Val-Kill.

It was apparent that the outdoor spaces are a popular venue and that people use the landscape year round. Other suggested uses of the outdoors are concerts at Vanderbilt, demonstration farming on former farm fields, seasonal events, a therapeutic horseback riding program, and art instruction.

Education

Many people spoke to the idea that the historic sites are rich in opportunities for education, and they called for an increased focus on education in the future. People saw the wealth of material at the sites that could be used for educational experiences—ranging from forestry management, interpretation of local river heritage, understanding the “Great Depression,” and understanding agricultural practices, to research into the unprecedented years of the Roosevelt presidency. And, they pointed out, educational programs should be for all ages.

Tourism and the Local Community

Many people had suggestions for both attracting tourists and connecting with Hyde Park. While different strategies might be applied, some people saw links. For example, they said, it was important for visitors to stay overnight, both because there is so much to see, and also to help the local economy. Hyde Park should be valued as a destination and should draw from the huge New York metropolitan area. Various suggestions were made for connecting with Hyde Park residents, such as offering annual passes, holding more activities for residents, and offering changing exhibits.

To read the full report, visit [www.Roosevelt-VanderbiltPlan.org](http://www.Roosevelt-VanderbiltPlan.org)

The Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt NHS is among the earliest national parks set aside to commemorate a president's legacy. The adjacent Franklin D. Roosevelt

Presidential Library and Museum is the country's first presidential library. By donating his family lands to the National Park Service and the National Archives and establishing the Vanderbilt estate as

a national historic site, FDR actively sought to preserve these resources for future generations.

Top left: Statue of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt in the courtyard of the Henry A. Wallace Visitor and Education Center. The Wallace Center is administered by the National Archives and Records Administration.

Top right: Visitors begin their guided tour at the Wallace Center.

Lower: On the lawns of the Vanderbilt Mansion overlooking the Hudson River.





A Map of the Sites

This map shows the location of the sites:

- The 212-acre Vanderbilt Mansion site (in blue) was historically 700 acres and included a working farm across Route 9.
- The 385-acre Home of FDR site (in yellow) includes, in addition to the Home and its surrounds, Top Cottage, FDR’s hilltop retreat, and the wetland near Val-Kill.
- The 180-acre Val-Kill site (in brown) is located east of Route 9G and was part of the historic Roosevelt Family Estate.
- The red line shows the extent of the historic Roosevelt Family Estate, some 1,500 acres. By law, land within the historic estate can be acquired by the National Park Service.
- The 400 acres shown in green between Routes 9 and 9G are owned by The Scenic Hudson Land Trust. They include a drive-in theater and, potentially, a regional tourism information center now in the planning stage. (For more information on the Regional Center project, visit, [www.HydeParkRegionalCenter.org](http://www.HydeParkRegionalCenter.org).)

Some Park Stats

- 3 stately historic mansions
- more than 50 historic structures
- 12 miles of roads and trails
- 4 historic gardens
- 777 acres of historic landscapes
- 35 acres of forest plantations set out by FDR
- thousands of objects and artifacts
- 50–60 staff
- \$4,500,000 budget
- hundreds of volunteers
- over 500,000 visitors each year

Our Partners in Stewardship

We are very fortunate to have a number of partners in our stewardship of the Roosevelt and Vanderbilt sites. Without partners, the sites would not be able to carry out their mandates. We very much appreciate the work of our partners, which include:

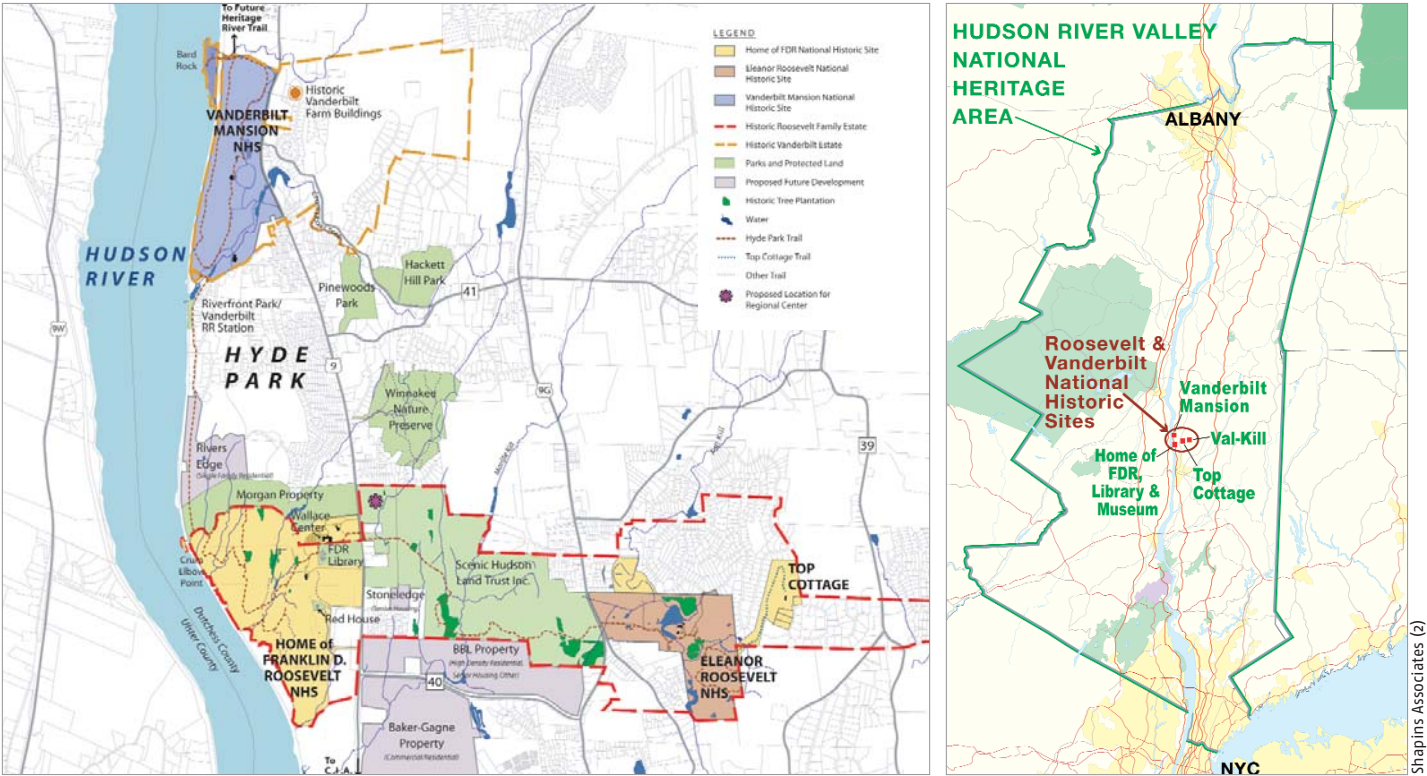
- Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill
- FDR Presidential Library and Museum
- Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute
- Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt—Preserving Her Val-Kill Home (Save America’s Treasures)
- Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area
- Roosevelt-Vanderbilt Historical Association
- Beatrix Farrand Garden Association
- Frederick W. Vanderbilt Garden Association

Upcoming Events

**Taking a Fresh Look at Hyde Park’s National Parks**

Community members are invited to participate in a series of “photographic expeditions” in Hyde Park’s national parks, led by volunteer photographers drawn from local art institutions, schools, and the community. Volunteer staff members from the park sites will join the photographers to provide behind-the-scenes insight into the history and beauty of the locations. The expeditions (or workshops) will be open to people of all levels, and no prior experience is necessary. Come, bring your camera (any type will do—film, digital, cellphone, or disposable), see these national treasures through a new lens, and show us what you think is most important about your national parks.

For schedule and other information, please contact: Kathi Behnke, Roosevelt-Vanderbilt Historical Association, at 845-229-9300.



Eleanor Roosevelt and President Lyndon Baines Johnson, with Reverend Gordon Kidd, a Boy Scout, and other members of the Roosevelt family at a Memorial Day ceremony, 1959.

**We would like to hear what you think. Please share your thoughts:**  
[www.Roosevelt-VanderbiltPlan.org](http://www.Roosevelt-VanderbiltPlan.org)  
[rova\\_info@nps.gov](mailto:rova_info@nps.gov)  
phone: 845-229-9116 X31  
fax: 845-229-0739  
or fill in the mail-back card and mail it or fax it to the park

If you have already shared your thoughts with us at the Community Forum or via the website, we thank you. Unless you wish to offer additional input, there is no need to respond a second time.