

The following timeline represents significant dates in the history of Bard's three existing mansions and corresponding estates. This chronology makes no attempt to include other events in the history of Bard College and may be edited or augmented to reflect evolving interpretations of Bard's past.

*Helene Tieger, College Archivist
September 2020*

Color Key

Blithewood Ward Manor Montgomery Place

First people

Land Acknowledgement

In the spirit of truth and equity, it is with gratitude and humility that we acknowledge that we are gathered on the sacred homelands of the Munsee and Muhheaconneok people, who are the original stewards of the land. Today, due to forced removal, the community resides in Northeast Wisconsin and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We honor and pay respect to their ancestors past and present, as well as to future generations, and we recognize their continuing presence in their homelands. We understand that our acknowledgment requires those of us who are settlers to recognize our own place in and responsibilities toward addressing inequity, and that this ongoing and challenging work requires that we commit to real engagement with the Munsee and Mohican communities to build an inclusive and equitable space for all.

1688

Pieter Schuyler, first mayor of Albany, is granted a patent from Governor Dongan and negotiates with Native people to assume control of thousands of acres that would eventually represent the town of Red Hook.

1725

Schuyler sells this land in “Great Lots” to multiple investors. Barent Van Benthuyzen purchases the lot that includes what is now Ward Manor, Blithewood, and Montgomery Place.

1790

Four hundred acres of this land is sold to John Armstrong, Jr., and his wife Alida Livingston. They build a home and name the estate The Meadows, known today as Ward Manor.

Alida was the youngest sister of Janet Montgomery, who built Montgomery Place. John Armstrong held many government positions, including U.S. senator, and U.S. minister to France under Thomas Jefferson. He was later commissioned as a brigadier general under President Madison during the War of 1812. In this role, he refused to believe the British would attack Washington, D.C., and did nothing to fortify the city, and was thus responsible when they burned the capital, including the White House. Armstrong resigned in disgrace and returned to live at Rokeby, a nearby estate.

1795

The Armstrongs buy land between Cruger’s Island and the Saw Kill Creek and build a Federal style house they name Mill Hill near the present-day site of Blithewood. The Meadows (today’s Ward Manor) is purchased by Colonel Andrew Deveaux.

Deveaux was the son of a plantation owner and a Loyalist during the Revolution. He renamed the estate Deveaux Park and was known in the neighborhood for keeping exotic animals (including kangaroos). At Deveaux’s death in 1812 the property reverted to a Livingston and was renamed Almont.

1801

John Allen and his wife Mary Johnston purchase Mill Hill (today’s Blithewood).

Mary Johnston was a relative of Margaret Johnston Bard, one of the founders of Bard College. The Johnston family was from Annandale, Scotland, and Mary was the first to name the house and estate Annandale.

1802–1805

Janet Livingston Montgomery purchases land from the Van Benthuyzens on the south of the Sawkill Creek and builds a Federal style house and nursery that she names Chateau de Montgomery in memory of her husband, General Richard Montgomery.

Richard Montgomery was killed in 1775 at Quebec during the Revolutionary War. Janet was the oldest of the ten surviving children of Judge Robert Livingston and Margaret Beekman. This family lived at nearby Clermont, now a state park in Columbia County.

1810

John Cox Stevens and his wife Maria Cambridge Livingston purchase Annandale (now Blithewood)

A member of the storied Stevens family, for whom the Stevens Institute of Technology was named, John Cox Stevens was an inventor who designed an early steamboat during the period that Robert Fulton was building his famous steamboat, the Clermont. As Stevens' sister Mary was married to Fulton's sponsor and father-in-law Chancellor Robert R. Livingston, a family feud ensued. John Cox Stevens was also an avid sportsman who raced horses on the estate and built racing yachts in the bay. He went on to found the New York Yacht Club and establish the America's Cup Race.

1827

July 4, 1827, marks the date that New York State ended two centuries of slavery within its borders.

Bard recognizes that early estates on today's campus were maintained through the labor of enslaved people. Bard continues to work to document their lives as information is available.

1828

Janet Montgomery dies at home at Montgomery Place and leaves the estate to her youngest brother, Edward Livingston, and his wife Louise D'Avezac.

Edward served as the third mayor of New York City, a U.S. senator from Louisiana, the United States Secretary of State, and the United States Minister to France. He is best known for authoring the Louisiana Penal Code that advocated for the abolition of the death penalty.

1833

John Church Cruger and his wife, Euphemia White Van Rensselaer, purchase Annandale (now Blithewood) from John Cox Stevens.

John Church Cruger was a member of the Cruger family of merchants and politicians, two of whom served as mayor of New York City.

1835

Cruger purchases the island that now bears his name and builds a large house there (which no longer stands). He maintains rights to the Saw Kill Creek and immediate surrounding acreage.

Cruger is remembered for building follies on the small island south of Cruger's Island known as Little Cruger. Here he displayed Mayan artifacts taken from Uxmal on the Yucatán Peninsula. These artifacts were a gift of explorer and archeologist John Lloyd Stephens and his partner Frederick Catherwood. The artifacts are now displayed in the American Museum of Natural History.

Cruger sells 95 acres, including Annandale, to Robert and Susan Donaldson.

Susan named the estate Blithewood for the "lighthearted symphony of bird life emanating from the surrounding woods." Donaldson worked with architect and landscape designer Alexander Jackson Davis and Andrew Jackson Downing to shape the Blithewood estate into a showpiece of Picturesque ideals.

1836–1872

Edward Livingston dies in 1836. His widow Louise, daughter Cora, and her husband Thomas Barton undertake a renovation and development of the estate with the help of Alexander Jackson Davis and Andrew Jackson Downing lasting for many decades. The changes include additions to the mansion, the construction of the coach house, farmhouse, and Swiss Cottage, and the creation of gardens and an arboretum. Alexander Gilson, a descendant of enslaved people, is widely recognized for his work as the head gardener at Montgomery Place with two plant species named in his honor.

1839

Louise Livingston commissions Frederick Catherwood to design an elaborate gothic conservatory on the grounds of Montgomery Place.

1840–1841

Robert Donaldson and Louise Livingston jointly purchase the water rights to the Saw Kill and immediate adjacent lands from John Church Cruger preventing him from developing the property and building a water-powered factory. Effectively implementing an early conservation easement, Donaldson and Livingston dismantle existing mills and agree to maintain these adjacent lands and the creek as "pleasure grounds."

1852

Robert Donaldson sells Blithewood to John and Margaret Johnston Bard.

Margaret, a descendent of Mary Johnston, renamed the property Annandale to acknowledge her Scottish roots. John Bard was the son of William Bard, a pioneer in the life insurance industry and grandson of Dr. Samuel Bard, physician to George Washington.

1860

The Bards found St. Stephen's College (later named Bard College) on acreage donated from the Bards' Annandale estate.

Margaret serves on the college's board of trustees, one of the first women to hold this position at any college .

1877

Almont (today's Ward Manor) burns to the ground.

Mary Alice Livingston spent part of her childhood at Almont. As an adult she gained notoriety for poisoning her mother with arsenic-laced clam chowder, an event that inspired a sensational Manhattan murder trial and almost resulted in her becoming the first woman in New York to be executed in the electric chair.

1899

Captain Andrew Christian Zabriskie and his wife Frances purchase Annandale, renaming it Blithewood. The Davis-designed Donaldson home is removed, and the Hoppin-designed Zabriskie mansion and garden are built.

Christian Andrew Zabriskie was a real estate investor and numismatist, while Frances maintained an active interest in horticulture.

1913–1916

Orphaned at an early age and possessed of a great fortune, Louis Gordon Hamersley purchases the Almont property and contracts with the firm of Hoppin and Koen to design Almont (now Ward Manor). He never occupies the house which is eventually purchased by William B. Ward of the Ward Baking Company.

1921–1986

John Ross Delafield, a Livingston descendant, and his wife Violetta White Delafield take possession of Montgomery Place. They undertake extensive renovations on the mansion and estate, and they and their children use Montgomery Place as a country home through much of the 20th century.

1925–1959

William B. Ward donates the estate named in his honor to the Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor (later the Community Service Society). Under the direction of William Matthews, Ward Manor and its many buildings serve variously as a home for elderly residents and summer camps for children and families.

1951

On the death of his mother Frances Zabriskie, Christian Andrew Zabriskie meets with Bard president James Case and arranges to donate the Blithewood estate to Bard College, increasing the college's land holdings significantly. The house is used as a woman's dormitory until the 1980s.

1960

Central Hudson purchases the northern section of the Ward Manor property with the intention of constructing a nuclear power plant. This plan is opposed by citizen groups and eventually defeated. This land is later purchased by the Department of Environmental Conservation and converted to the Wildlife Management Conservation Area that we enjoy today.

1963

Under the leadership of President Reamer Kline, Bard purchases the southern section of the Ward Manor property, including Ward Manor and Manor Annex, Robbins House, the Gate House, and many acres of land, again significantly expanding the size of the Bard campus.

1981

Hudsonia, an independent, nonprofit environmental research institute is established along the Saw Kill on land formerly part of the Zabriskie (Blithewood) estate.

1986–present

The Levy Economics Institute is founded, occupying the Blithewood mansion. Extensive renovation of the house and garden is undertaken over the next several years. Today the Institute continues to operate as a nonprofit, nonpartisan, public policy research organization.

1986–2016

Livingston heir John Dennis Delafield transfers Montgomery Place to Historic Hudson Valley, a nonprofit educational and historic preservation organization. In 2016 Bard purchases the property.

1996

Congress designates this region The Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area. This encompasses the entire Bard campus and includes lands on both sides of the Hudson from Yonkers to Troy.

2003–present

The Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts opens. Designed by architect Frank Gehry, the Fisher Center provides classroom and rehearsal space, as well as public performance and programs in orchestral, chamber, and jazz music, and in theater, dance, and opera.

2012--present

The Bard Farm is established, providing local sustainable food for the college and the greater community.

2016–present

Bard College purchases Montgomery Place from Historic Hudson Valley. The college works to stabilize and restore its many buildings and to incorporate the 380-acre Montgomery Place Campus, collections, and history into Bard's holdings and curriculum, while promoting the property for public enjoyment and use. The Bard Prison Initiative administrative offices are housed here. Bard is also proud of its connection to and relationship with Montgomery Place Orchards, a family farm that continues the legacy of Janet Montgomery.

Also in 2016, the Garden Conservancy, a national nonprofit dedicated to saving and sharing outstanding American gardens, partners with Bard to begin rehabilitating Blithewood Garden. This work continues today.