



The mansion house's Montgomery Room

## MONTGOMERY PLACE: A DESIGNATED NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK AND SIGNIFICANT REPOSITORY OF HUDSON VALLEY HISTORY

### An American Treasure

Montgomery Place, a 380-acre estate adjacent to the main Bard College campus and overlooking the Hudson River, is a designated National Historic Landmark set amid rolling lawns, woodlands, and gardens, against the spectacular backdrop of the Catskill Mountains. Renowned architects, landscape designers, and horticulturists worked to create an elegant and inspiring country estate consisting of a mansion, farm, orchards, farmhouse, and other smaller buildings. Montgomery Place was owned by members of the Livingston family from 1802 until the 1980s.

### The History

Originally, the land was occupied by Native Americans who used it for hunting and harvesting wild foods. During the 18th century, European settlers farmed the area and harnessed the power of the Saw Kill creek for gristmills and sawmills. In 1802, Janet Livingston Montgomery, widow of Revolutionary War hero General Richard Montgomery, purchased the land to create a fashionable country house. In 1804–5, she built a Federal-style mansion on the property. Janet's true passion was for plants and botany, and she established and ran a commercial nursery for fruit trees, shrubs, berries, and seeds.

As proprietor of Montgomery Place, Janet followed the conventions of large estate owners in the Hudson Valley in the use of slaves as workers. During her years at the property, New York was in a state-mandated period of gradual manumission of slaves. Janet's personal papers disclose that she bought a female slave, Katie, and her son, Alexander, in 1810. When Janet died in 1828, her younger brother Edward Livingston and his wife, Louise, inherited the property. The 1830 federal census shows that Edward had eight "free colored persons" living in his household. Since this was just three years after the state completely outlawed slavery, some or all of these might have been Janet's former laborers. Slaves worked as domestics, farm hands, chauffeurs, and craftspeople.

After Edward's death a few years later, Louise, daughter Cora, and son-in-law Thomas Barton transformed portions of the estate from a working farm into a showplace. Renowned architect Alexander Jackson Davis redesigned the house, adding new wings and porticos in classic revival style to suit prevailing Romantic sensibilities. Landscape designer Andrew Jackson Downing created plans for elaborate flower gardens, several walking paths, rustic benches, and an arboretum. (Both Davis and Downing were also involved in the original design and layout of the Blithewood estate, now part of the main Bard College campus.)

In the 1920s, Violetta and John Ross Delafield (a Livingston descendent) inherited the estate. Violetta, a botanist, created multiple gardens, continuing the legacy of Janet, Louise, and Cora. In 1986, Livingston heir John Dennis Delafield transferred the estate to Historic Hudson Valley, in whose hands it remained until 2016, when Bard College acquired the property and a new chapter began.

### The Landscape

The property's basic layout and contours have remained constant throughout most of the estate's existence. Apart from formal gardens and manicured lawns, 45 acres of farmland and 235 acres of woodlands stretch from the Hudson River to the front of the property on River Road. Much of Downing's original 19th-century design remains, as well as gardens, water features, and trails from the early 20th century. Exceptional vistas include the Hudson River and Catskill Mountains, the rushing waters of the Saw Kill's lower falls, and the 80-acre South Woods forest. Montgomery Place's orchards and agricultural land are another vital component of the site's heritage and appeal. The orchards are a cherished part of the local community, represented by the popular farm stand on Route 9G.

### Hours of Operation

Montgomery Place grounds are free and open to the public, most days, from sunrise to sunset.

### About Bard College

Bard College is a four-year residential college of the liberal arts and sciences with a 162-year history of academic excellence on nearly 1,000 parklike acres in the Hudson River Valley. The College offers bachelor of arts degrees in nearly 40 academic programs in four divisions—Arts; Languages and Literature; Science, Mathematics, and Computing; and Social Studies—and Interdivisional Programs and Concentrations. Bard also bestows several dual degrees, including a BA/BS in economics and finance, and at the Bard College Conservatory of Music, where students earn a BM and a BA in another field. Bard's distinguished faculty includes winners of MacArthur Fellowships, National Science Foundation grants, Guggenheim Fellowships, Grammy Awards, and Pulitzer Prizes, among others. The College operates numerous graduate programs and encompasses regional, national, and global partnerships. The undergraduate college in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, has an enrollment of 1,800 and a student-to-faculty ratio of 10:1.

### Indigenous Land Acknowledgment Statement

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.

**Bard**  
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## Bard College: The Montgomery Place Campus







The Coach House

**The Architecture**

Montgomery Place has incorporated numerous styles of architecture over the years. The original Federal-style mansion was built by Janet Livingston Montgomery with help from her nephews, William Jones and Lewis Livingston, who employed local laborers (including slaves owned by the family), stonemasons, and carpenters. The end result was a stucco-clad, rectangular, neoclassical structure. In 1841, Louise and Cora, the next generation, discussed the transformation of the mansion with the architect Alexander Jackson Davis, marking the start of a program of design and construction that would span 30 years. The mansion is considered Davis's finest neoclassical country house, significant for both its design excellence and its rarity. Other Davis-designed buildings on the property include the Coach House, farmhouse, and Alpine-style Swiss Cottage. Davis's original cottage drawings are in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In 1839, Louise and Cora commissioned architect Frederick Catherwood to design an opulent wood-and-glass conservatory. Andrew Jackson Downing designed formal garden beds and manicured paths to surround the gothic revival-style conservatory, framed by a forest to the north and an allée of locust trees to the south. From its construction in 1840 until its destruction circa 1880, the conservatory was the most commanding structure on the Montgomery Place landscape aside from the mansion. In 1935, Violetta Delafield designed the first "wayside stand" for a garden club display and as a way to encourage local farmers to sell their produce and make roadsides more attractive. Eventually, it became a farm stand which still exists, selling the estate's apples and other fruit.



Westward view of the grounds

**Montgomery Place Today**

Montgomery Place illustrates Americans' changing relationship with nature and landscape over time. As the attitudes of the people who lived and worked there shifted, the estate changed from productive landscape to ornamental showcase to recreational retreat. Today, the Montgomery Place setting functions as a microcosm of American landscape history, from the early wilderness to its latest reincarnation as part of the integrated campus of Bard College. Bard is committed to conserving Montgomery Place's significant historic and cultural assets as well as preserving its landscape and maintaining its public access and farm.

**For Your Safety and Enjoyment**

Please help us maintain the beauty of these grounds by carrying out whatever you bring in. Trash bins are located only at the Visitors Center.

Please do not disturb or collect our plants, animals, or rocks.

When walking the trails, please remain on the paths to assist us with erosion control and reduce incidents of Lyme disease.

The Saw Kill Trail and South Woods Trail have uneven terrain and are occasionally steep and muddy. The West Lawn Trail features sloping terrain.

Pets are not allowed on the property.

