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A DOCUMENTARY STUDY OF THE VANDERBILT
GATE HOUSES

APRIL 11, 1962

BY: MARY B. WEATHERWAX

Vanderbilt # 1

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Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites
Hyde Park, N.Y.

H2215

April 19, 1962

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five
From: Superintendent, Roosevelt-Vanderbilt
Subject: Research Project No. VM-13, "Documentary Study of the
Vanderbilt Gate Houses"

We are submitting Research Project No. VM-13, "Documentary Study of the Vanderbilt Gate Houses." Although both of these buildings are historic structures, they are also used as employee residences and this report should provide valuable background information for future maintenance and rehabilitation

The report is submitted in duplicate with photographs.

Robert H. Atkinson
Superintendent

In duplicate

Attachments: (2) Report

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites
(Park or Office)

A DOCUMENTARY STUDY OF THE VANDERBILT GATE HOUSES

by

Mary B. Weatherwax
Historian

FILE NUMBER
OR SUBJECT: H-22-15



April 11, 1962

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FROM: _____
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TO: _____
(Date)

A DOCUMENTARY STUDY OF THE VANDERBILT GATE HOUSES

The first mention of the Gate houses occurred in the Poughkeepsie paper in an article describing Mr. Vanderbilt's new property on Hyde Park. It said: "....10 miles of new drives will be laid out and a new gate house and stable will be erected."^{1.} Two years later it reported: "Norcross Brothers have contracted for the erection of 3 stone cottages on the Vanderbilt estate. Work will be started at once."^{2.} Two months later it said: "Norcross Brothers have commenced work on another cottage at the river entrance to the Vanderbilt estate."^{3.} Finally: "the gate houses were designed by McKim, Mead and White and the work performed by the contractors, Norcross Brothers."^{4.}

THE MAIN GATE HOUSE - Structure #6 on the Historical Base Map

Before work could be started on the Main Gate House, a dwelling already standing in its place had to be removed. "The old undertaker house had been torn down and the cottage at the entrance of Mr. Vanderbilt's where Mr. Monaghan lived, will be moved to the grounds where the undertaking building stood."⁵ (This house is still standing on the lot south of the gate House.)

1. Poughkeepsie Sunday Courier, August 4, 1895, p 3 & 6.
2. Poughkeepsie Sunday Courier, March 27, 1898, p.7.
3. Poughkeepsie Sunday Courier, June 5, 1898, p. 3.
4. Poughkeepsie Sunday Courier, July 31, 1898.
5. Brassan's Scrapbook, June 25, 1898.

When this cottage was moved, Mr. and Mrs. Pat Monaghan moved into the Gate House. Mr. Monaghan had been a servant of the Walter Langdons and stayed on as houseman with the Vanderbilts. When they became too old, Mr. Vanderbilt bought a house for them "out east" and after that the house was unoccupied for many years principally because Mr. Vanderbilt would not allow people with children to live there.^{6.}

Finally Mr. Alfred Martin, second butler and steward on Mr. Vanderbilt's yacht, prevailed upon them to allow him and his wife to live there even though they had a daughter. Before the Martins moved in, Mr. Vanderbilt renovated the house, installing a bathroom and moving the kitchen to the first floor, the kitchen having formerly been in the basement. They lived there from 1922 to 1939 when Mr. Martin built his own house having inherited \$10,000.00 from Mr. Vanderbilt.^{7.}

During the first year after the National Park Service took possession nothing was done to the Gate House except general cleaning by the maintenance employees at the Mansion. Three clerks by the name of Lannigan, Dill, and Cole lived there at different times.^{8.}

In a description of Quarters on Feb. 15, 1941, the gate house was described as: "2-story; electric light; hot-water heat; plumbing, sanitary facilities, Present condition poor." There was no telephone.

6. Interview with Mrs. John Farley, Jan. 1961. Her husband worked for the Vanderbilts at that time.

7. Interview with Alfred Martin, January 1961

8. Farley, Op. cit. #6

Water for domestic and protection purposes was supplied to the Gate House by the estate water system. Drinking water was obtained from a well located near the building. Sewage from the Gate House was disposed of in a nearby cesspool. \$9,550.00 was allocated by a P.W.A. grant for renovation of 3 houses.^{9.}

The plans for the gate house consist of 3 sheets, NHS-VM2017. These are: 1. Old Post Road, Lodge at south entrance, general lay-out. 2. Plan of main entrance & Lodge on old Post road. 3. Second floor Plan of Lodge (Plans for Lodge apparently not followed.)

In 1940 Engineer Charles W. Andras reported: "This building is heated by an open-type, gravity circulation hot water system with a round sectional hand-fired, cast-iron boiler located in the basement. The plumbing system is of a modern type and, sufficient for all practible purposes. The domestic hot water is supplied by a water-back in the coal-fired kitchen range, and in summer by an oil fired heater located near the range in the kitchen. The wiring as visible seems in good order."^{10.}

On Nov. 12, 1941 Superintendent Cooper wrote: "Digging operations were begun for the installation of new water lines at the Main and West Gate houses. Considerable difficulty was encountered in drilling through

9. Utilities in the Vanderbilt Estate, April 30, 1940, Alfred D. Curradi, Assistant Engineer.

10. Charles Andras: Aug. 28, 1940, Mechanical Equipment Report of VMNHS.

shale rock on the line to the West Gate house. Satisfactory progress was being made on both projects, however, as the month came to a close.^{11.}

On December 11, 1941 she wrote, "The water line for the whole area was complete and the town water turned on in the last building on Nov. 28."^{12.}

The final report of the National Park Service included these alterations and additions:

"New heating boilers and domestic hot water heaters were installed replacing old and antiquated equipment.

Kitchen equipment was in poor condition and has been replaced.

Metal roof has been repaired.

New outside screens were installed.

Heating system extended to include the kitchen.

Hot water heating system changed from open expansion tank job to the closed pressure type.

Fuel oil storage 275 gallon capacity installed in the basement.

The old kitchen range (coal fired) with domestic hot water and storage tank was removed.

The water closet bowl in the bath was found to be cracked. This was replaced with a new one, the remaining bathroom fixtures being in good condition, were unchanged.

New combination laundry tray and kitchen sink was installed replacing badly worn and stained one.

11. Superintendent's Narrative Report for October 1941.

12. Superintendent's Narrative Report for November 1941.

New electric range installed. This electric load required new and heavier service line, which was included as part of the work.

Wiring revised. New Light fixtures, switches and receptacles were installed.^{13.}

In 1942 Fiscal Clerk Alton Aaron and family moved into the Gate House and lived there until 1955.^{14.} On July 12, 1945, he wrote, "Also we managed to get the roofs of the gate houses painted."^{15.} In Nov. 1949 Superintendent Palmer reported that the quarters had been weather stripped.^{16.}

The old metal roof was replaced by a new copper roof in 1953~~54~~.^{17.} A pot stove was substituted for the existing electric hot water which proved to be expensive to run; later the pot stove was removed and the water was heated by oil. A septic tank was constructed by the Park maintenance force to replace the cesspool. Metal cabinets were installed in the kitchen. Also the house was completely redecorated inside.

When Mr. Aaron was transferred to Philadelphia in 1955, Museum Curator Albert McClure moved into the Gate House. A china closet was built into the dining room. A new floor was constructed in the Kitchen. This consisted of an underlaying floor with tile on top of it.^{18.}

13. Charles Andrae: Final Report on Alterations and Additions to Quarters, Nov. 20, 1942.

14. Superintendent Palmer's monthly Narrative Report for April 1955.

15. Acting Superintendent Alton Aaron's Narrative Report for 1945.

16. Superintendent Palmer's Monthly Narrative Report for October 1949.

17. Interview with William Plain, Maintenance Supervisor, January 1961.

18. Ibid.

THE LOWER GATE HOUSE - Structure #7 on the Historical Base Map

When the two Gate Houses were built, they were identical in architecture and distribution of rooms. The first occupants of the Lower Gate House were Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Goss. She was Mrs. Vanderbilt's masseuse and he was a night watchman. They did not live there very long for in 1902 the Poughkeepsie paper said, "Superintendent Shears of the Vanderbilt estate took a trip to Delaware county on Wednesday and returned with a bride. The happy couple have taken up their residence in the cottage at the river entrance of the estate."^{19.}

It is the consensus among old-time Hyde Parkers that the Superintendent's cottage on the east side of the Albany Post road was completed and the Shears moved into it sometime around 1904-1905. Before the next occupants moved in, the Vanderbilts renovated the Gate House. They added a wing on the back, moving the kitchen and bathroom from the cellar to the first floor and built a room on the second floor over these two rooms. There is no cellar under this part of the house. When this renovation was completed, Mr. and Mrs. John Reeves moved in. He was the engineer for the estate electrical system and they lived there until the Government took possession.

After the National Park Service assumed ownership Engineer Chas. W. Andrae, in 1940 reported: "The mechanical equipment in this building is in fair condition and can easily be put in very good operating condition. The

19. Poughkeepsie Sunday Courier, August 3, 1902, p. 7.

heating consists of a closed hot-water system, with a round sectional cast-iron, hand-fired boiler located in the basement. The entire system is of a fairly modern type. The plumbing and wiring as are visible are in good, serviceable condition. ^{20.} There was no telephone. ^{21.}

The first Superintendent of Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site, Mrs. Gertrude Cooper, did not entirely agree with Mr. Andrae for in 1941 she wrote to the Director: "Little or no repair work seems to have been done during the past several years. The roof leaks so badly that more than 50% of the plaster in the 6 rooms will have to be renewed; the kitchen floor, including joists, subfloor and floor, will have to be entirely renewed; and the whole inside and outside of the house will have to be cleaned and renovated....All bathroom fixtures are antiquated, worn, and unfit for further use." ^{22.}

In Engineer Charles Andrae's Final Report on Alterations & Additions ²³ he mentions the following as being accomplished: On the outside: the metal roof was repaired, the down spouts were replaced with copper ones and new outside screens were added. In the inside of the house the wiring system was replaced and new lighting fixtures, switches and receptacles were installed.

The kitchen was completely renovated. A new combination laundry tray and kitchen sink replaced a badly worn and stained one. A new electric

21. Carradi, Op. Cit. #8

22. Memorandum of Director from Superintendent, April 19, 1941.

23. Andrae, Op. Cit. #13

range necessitated a new and heavier service line. The ceiling and floor were unsafe due to rotted timbers so a new ceiling consisting of metal, lath and plaster and a new floor were constructed. The heating system was extended to include the kitchen.

CONDITION

The bathroom, in very poor ~~kitchen~~, was also completely renovated with new fixtures, water closet, lavatory and floor.

The furnace was converted from a coal fuel to a modern oil fired system. Domestic hot water was heated with the heating system.

There were also some changes in the floor plan of the house. The former entry from the kitchen to the living room was closed, a cupboard built in on the kitchen side, and an open bookcase on the living room side. A new entrance was built from the southeast bedroom on the second floor. A new closet was built in the bath and a door installed to existing closet from the northwest bedroom. A new fireplace was constructed in the living room, rousing an existing idle flue, and a new built-in china closets were added to the dining room.

The National Park Service maps concerning the Lower Gate House are:

Water Supply Lines, Lower Gate House and Main Park area, 2 sheets, 1/1942

Sewage Disposal System, Lower Gate House, NHS-VM 5310, 1 sheet, 1941, Apr. 19.

Sewage Disposal System, Lower Gate House, NHS-VM 5310, 1954, Sept. 15.

Superintendent Cooper was the first tenant in the Lower Gate House under the National Park Service and she lived there until June 1945 when she resigned. On Nov. 8, 1945, Superintendent Palmer wrote,

24. Acting Superintendent Alton Aaron's Monthly Narrative Report for May 1945.

25.

"I Moved my family to Hyde Park on August 20th." He lived there until July 2, 1955 when he was transferred to Philadelphia. In 1952 the trim on the house was painted. In 1954 the kitchen was remodelled. An underlaying floor was put down and tile put over it. A new counter, a new stove, new cabinets and a new sink were installed. Florescent lights were added and the kitchen was repainted. In the spring of 1955 an outside entrance to the cellar was constructed. First it was excavated, then a retaining wall and concrete steps were built; the foundation was cut out, and a new door jamb and door made at the entrance to the cellar. A 1½" guard railing was added. In the same year a septic tank was installed.

26.

Superintendent James M. Myers lived in the Lower Gate House from Sept. 1, 1955 to June 30, 1958. Nothing was done to the house while he lived there except painting and papering.

27.

Superintendent Robert H. Atkinson moved in in August, 1958. In the latter part of 1959 a room was finished off in the cellar. New side walls, ceilings, stairs, and an asphalt tile floor were put in. The pipes were concealed and the furnace partitioned off. In 1960 a new water main was laid from the River road to the coattage using 2 inch galvanized pipe about 250 feet long. Also a larger electric service entrance was installed. In 1962 combination glass and screen windows and doors were installed in both cottages.

28.

25. Superintendent Palmer's Monthly Narrative Report for Sept. & Oct. 1945

26. Plain, Op. Cit #17.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.