

The Van Buren Chronicles

Newsletter of the Friends of Lindenwald Fall/Winter 1999

CHRISTMAS AT LINDENWALD

The park winds down its visitor season in December by commemorating President Van Buren's 217th birthday and initiating the holiday spirit at our annual Candlelight Evening. Enjoy the crisp night air and the adornments to the house created by the Kinderhook Garden Club. The house will be open for tours during the day and be lit by lamp and candle light in the evening from 6:00pm to 9:00pm on Saturday, December 4. The next day, the 5th, Martin Van Buren's birthday will be commemorated at the annual graveside ceremony. Join the community as it honors Kinderhook's most famous native son.

THE PRESIDENT'S BIRTHDAY

On Sunday, December 5th, 1 p.m., the birthday of Martin Van Buren will once again be observed at the Kinderhook Cemetery. The wreath sent from the White House for President Clinton will be placed at the Van Buren monument by Brig.-Gen. Barry Hartman, of the New York Guard. A New York Guard will also present colors. Other wreaths will be presented by Columbia County and the village of town of Kinderhook, and a student from Martin Van Buren School will present a piece about the President.

Following the ceremony, all attendees will be welcomed at Columbia County Historical Society's Gallery of Wreaths and the festively decorated

CHANGES IN LINDENWALD PERIOD ROOMS by Patricia West

Exciting additions to Lindenwald's period rooms were featured this summer. The Cultural Landscape Report inspired most of these changes.

The staff continues to enthusiastically investigate the lives of the large community of people that made Van Buren's estate such a splendid one. As a result there have been small but important changes, like the placement of rosary beads on the cook's bedstead to represent the social and political meanings of the Catholicism of Lindenwald's Irish domestic servants. Even a relatively small installation like this requires a great deal of research and deliberation. Margaret Lynch Brennan, a doctoral candidate at SUNY Albany, generously spent part of her recent research trip to Dublin to make inquiries for us with museum historians associated with the national museum of Ireland about the history of nineteenth-century rosaries. Professor Colleen McDannell, author of *Material Christianity*, also consulted with us to determine what types of

devotional objects would best embody the religion of the servants.

After all of this effort, the staff rewarded themselves by placing the rosary on the bedpost in the cook's bedroom in a fun (and poignant) ceremony on Saint Patrick's day. (p 3)



NEWS OF THE FRIENDS

This year's Friends Annual Meeting was at the Hearthstone Inn in the Town of Copake was well attended and proved to be an interesting, informative, and pleasant affair.

After a fine lunch, a short business was held to elect new trustees. Acting Superintendent Vivien Rose led the group in developing a vision of what the Friends' organization may become in the year 2014. The results are appended.

Then Robert M. Kelly of Wallpaper Reproduction News, Lee, Massachusetts, presented a slide lecture on "Wallpaper Styles at Lindenwald and The Hermitage" that illustrated the wallpapers used by the two men in their respective mansions. He showed samples of early nineteenth century papers used for wallpaper as well as samples of the paper used at Lindenwald. He knew these papers well, for he did the paper hanging in the house.

See page 7 for excerpts from his fascinating handout – two letters from Harriet Butler recommending wallpaper selections.

by Priscilla Frisbee

SUPERINTENDENTS: CHANGING OF THE GUARD

ACTING SUPERINTENDENT, SPRING 1999
by Priscilla Frisbee

Dr. Vivien Rose was Lindenwald's Acting Superintendent while Michael Henderson was Acting Superintendent at the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt NPS sites in Hyde Park.

Ms. Rose joined the Park Service eight years ago to develop the cultural resources and interpretive programs at Women's Rights National Historic Park, Seneca Falls, New York. She is a graduate of Georgetown University and received her doctorate in history from SUNY Binghamton.

She feels that to understand President

Van Buren one has to also understand the other people who lived with him and the issues of the time. For instance, he dealt with the immigration issue on two levels: as the president and as an employer at Lindenwald, where he had an Irish servant in his kitchen and African Americans living in the North Gate House. Including all of the players in historical interpretation "adds richness to the stories of our great men," she notes.

SUPERINTENDENT SUMMER 1999

After serving at Hyde Park, Michael Henderson returned to the Lindenwald for the Summer. In September he began his tenure at Morristown National Historic Park, a Revolutionary era site in New Jersey. The Friends recognized his work at Lindenwald during the Park's 25th Anniversary observance.

A NEW SUPERINTENDENT AT LINDENWALD

Steve Beatty arrived at the Park this fall. He comes from the Springfield Armory, Springfield, Massachusetts, where he was also Superintendent. With his wife, he has found a home at Kinderhook Lake.

After a number of years in business, Steve joined the National Park Service and has worked at the Ozark National Scenic Riverways in Missouri, Blueridge Parkway, Cumberland Gap, and the Natchez Trace Parkway. He has wide experience with interpretation and various aspects of Park administration, including agricultural leases.

"This is the perfect time to arrive at the park. There are opportunities to carry out great plans based on the groundwork laid by my predecessors, he said.

The Friends take delight in welcoming him to the site.

NEW TRUSTEES, 1999

by Dana Berntson

PETER BUJANOW, Valatie, holds a BS in Finance from Siena and an MS in Public Administration from Sage. Formerly an auditor and accountant for General Electric Co. and Facilities Development Corporation, he is now Purchasing Coordinator for the State Dormitory Authority. He is a member of numerous professional and civic organizations. A past member of the Ichabod Crane Board of Education, he is currently a member of the Kinderhook Town Council.

LINDA DRAHUSHUK, a Hudson native, is a graduate of Elmira College with an MS from SUNY-Oneonta. She teaches at Germantown Central School and is a member of many organizations, including the Columbia-Greene Reading Council, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and Delta Kappa Gamma.

DAVID GILLESPIE, Kinderhook, grew up in Buenos Aires. A graduate of Colorado College, he received his MA and PhD from Michigan State. His extensive background includes Professor of History at Albion College, the northeast director for the National Trust of Historic Preservation and director of Field Services for the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation. He is currently a consultant with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). He has written dozens of professional articles, a syndicated series for the *Chicago Sun Times*, and materials published by the National Park Service.

GERARD RIELLY, long-time Kinderhook resident, received his BSME from RPI. The retired CEO of the Rielly Co., the well-known area apparel manufacturer, he has also served on the Kinderhook Town Board and Zoning Board of Appeals, as well as the Kinderhook Village Planning Board. Gerry is a charter member of the Friends of Lindenwald and his late wife Barbara was previously a trustee. Many remember his wonderful portrayal of President Van Buren at last year's Candlelight Open House.

(Continued from page 1) The largest change, however, is the new farmhand installation in the basement bulkhead room next to the cook's bedroom. The idea began with research into the question of whether or not it is likely that the farm workers ate in the servants' dining room. Not only was this affirmed in terms of period practice by consultation with agricultural historian Sally McMurry, but it was discovered that farmhands often slept on bedrolls in service areas of farmhouses. This sent the staff scurrying to find a way to bring this new information into the period rooms. Since former Curator Phyllis Ewing had already begun to suggest this theme in the bulkhead room when she installed a washstand, we decided to start there. Friends member Ruth Piwonka helped by identifying a Lindenwald-associated row of pegs in the collection as an early Dutch- style *capstock*, just the type of object that might have been used in the servants' areas by the mid-nineteenth century. As always, our staff worked as a team to contribute expertise to the exhibit: maintenance mechanic Michael Delaney carefully installed the *capstock*, Karen Leffingwell consulted with New York State Parks and Recreation curator Robin Campbell and made an accurate reproduction bedroll, and Judy Harris perused reference works and ordered the correct reproduction clothing. Of course the most fun task was "dirtying up" the farmworker's sack coat and wearing the straw hat so they wouldn't look new! The overall effect of the installation, which we dubbed the Allen Kern exhibit after a 23-year-old farmhand found in the 1850 Lindenwald census, successfully invokes the presence of the people so crucial to the functioning of Van Buren's farm.

One aspect of the Lindenwald cultural landscape are represented in two new manifestations this year: Van Buren's horse husbandry. A reproduction riding crop was placed in the library as a way of bringing up his legendary daily rides into the village on Duroc, a thoroughbred given to him by the Virginia politician John Randolph. Also replaced is Van Buren's long lost marble mounting block in the area near the north entry. It was

reproduced by Allen Williams of Chester Granite Company in the Berkshires, a renowned expert on nineteenth century stonecutting. In order to determine the type of stone from which the block was made, Mr. Williams painstakingly analyzed early twentieth century photographic evidenced and cross-referenced it with his extensive knowledge of period practice, local geology, and nineteenth century quarries.

In addition to these new elements, the Lindenwald sitting room is now truly the "green room" referred to in Van Buren family correspondence. An extraordinarily green reproduction carpet has been installed, replacing the previous one because new research gave us a more accurate idea of what the carpet looked like. Although it may seem a bit odd looking by 20th-century standards, our research into 19th-century color theory tells us that it would have been quite fashionable in Van Buren's day.

IT RAINED ON OUR PARADE !

Nineteenth century history came alive again at the Martin Van Buren National Historic Site on Saturday, August 21, with the second annual day long *Living History at Program*. And so did the gods of rain.

Although our spirits were literally dampened, the Nineteenth Century Craft Fair went on, with two well known entertainers balladeer Rich Bala and magician Robert Olson along with a blacksmith, broom and bast makers, a pewter caster, a cabinet maker, spinners, weavers and dyers. For the young and the young at heart there will be horse and cart



rides. Soldiers from the War of 1812 showed their gear and weapons. be on hand to display costumes and weapons and there will be many more. We are determined that the weather on August 20, 2000, will be better!

In the afternoon, the Park Service staff welcomed dignitaries who officiated for the observance of Lindenwald's twenty fifth anniversary as a National Park Service Site. In honor of the occasion, four heritage fruit trees were planted at the north side of the property and dedicated to memory of Lee Konkle, Town of Kinderhook Supervisor, a true friend of the Park. The Bartlett pears and Northern Spy apples are symbolic of the restoration orchard to be planted at the back of the Park property.

LINDENWALD ON NATIONAL TELEVISION

Judging by the numbers of phone calls, e-mails, and web site hits the park has received, most of you and innumerable others saw the C-SPAN live broadcast from Lindenwald on May 3, part of their acclaimed and popular series on the American presidents. What you may not know was what an enormous amount of preparation went into that two and a half hours of fame.

Months ago, we received a call from Mark Farkas of C-SPAN telling us about the broadcast and requesting a briefing on Van Buren historiography. After spending long hours fervently discussing the minutiae of Van Buren's political career with Mr. Farkas, I unwittingly gave him the impression that I was an expert, an idea which I afterward tried to disabuse him of to no avail. This sealed my fate as one of the interviewees in the program. Then Michael Henderson met the producer, Maura Pierce, at a Texas barbeque at Lady Bird Johnson's estate, and his ability to make the subject of Martin Van Buren fascinating dinner conversation sealed his fate as well.

Then Karen Leffingwell and Judy Harris of the curatorial staff set about to find objects and scenes that reflect Van Buren's life for the C-SPAN crew to film. Footage of the gravesite, artifacts, prints of Van Buren, and of course, of the house itself, all took days to assemble. John Miles, Art Hedges, Sam Scott, and Mike Delaney of the maintenance crew doubled their usual efforts to make sure the springtime grounds would look beautiful; Chief Ranger Jim McKay, sent forth publicity, checked historical facts, and made arrangements so that Lindenwald would be secure and safe during the shoot. Meanwhile, the anxious curator studied antebellum America, knowing that any and all topics were fair game in a live call-in show.

At last May 3rd arrived, and the program went off flawlessly. The Friends of Lindenwald received spectacular publicity with the appearance of Mary Leigh Witmer, whose poise was clearly a reflection her heritage as a Van Buren

descendent. Most of our fan mail has remarked on the breadth of knowledge and *savoir faire* of Michael Henderson, especially given the fact that every possible controversial topic – from slavery to white house sex scandals – was brought up by the callers. Immediately afterwards Maura Pierce joked that he had done such a skillful job that they wished he could do all the rest of the presidents! And since then a C-SPAN consultant has evaluated our segment as the best to date in the series. Now it seems that the rest of the world know what we already knew: Van Buren is fascinating dinner conversation!

Fans and friends will be happy to know that tapes of the program can be ordered by calling 1-800-cspan or copies can be purchased at the Park.

A NEW BOOK BY PATTI WEST

by Judy Harris
Lindenwald's curator, Dr. Patricia West's book, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* has "hit the stands".

Using George Washington's Mount Vernon, Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, and the Booker T. Washington National Monument, Dr. West explores the political origins of these historic house museums. She shows that the reason these houses were set

aside as museums was not so much to honor the person, but had more to do with the political "intrigues" of the time.

This is a fascinating look at historic house museums that has never been explored before. I'm sure that all of you will be very much impressed and will thoroughly enjoy the "behind the scenes" look and the research this book brings to light. In fact, it's been nominated for the American Historical Association's Dunning Prize for first time book authors!

Please join with all of the staff at the Martin Van Buren NHS in conveying to Patti our hearty congratulations and applause for a job well done!

by Priscilla Frisbee

Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums, published by the Smithsonian Institution



Press, had its beginning at Lindenwald several years ago, when Dr. West was part of the curatorial staff assigned to duties such as cleaning furnishings in the house. She decided to find how such menial tasks were accomplished in Van Buren's day which lead her to a nineteenth century advice manual by Catherine Beecher titled *Housekeeping Manual*. This started her thinking about the role servants played in the life of Martin Van Buren and also in the other early households, now museums. She went on to study their lives and soon became an expert on interpreting the servants' lifestyle, thus revealing a true picture of how people lived in the nineteenth century.

Dr. West has done a great deal of research to establish what life in the service area at Lindenwald, was like. As a result not only Van Buren's life at Lindenwald is portrayed but also the lives of people who helped to make his life possible.

It was no easy task to find information about servants, who did not or could not leave written histories as did the famous owners of the big homes. Her book expands on the topic of historic houses to see how community forces changed from residences into museums. Now Dr. West is back at Lindenwald where the idea for the book started, this time as curator of President Van Buren's retirement home. Her book is on sale at the interpretation center in the Gate House and is well worth reading.

by Priscilla Frisbee

FRIENDS' TRUSTEES LOOK TO THE FUTURE

The Friends' Board of Trustees are in the process of reviewing our activities and membership programs. As a member of the Friends, you will be receiving some correspondence about this in the coming year. We will be seeking input from you regarding the kinds of programs you might like to participate in and also your level of interest in volunteering at the Park or at Friends' programs.

YEAR 2014

by Vivien Rose, Acting Superintendent, Spring 1999

This vision of Lindenwald in the year 2014, shared by members of the Friends of Lindenwald at its annual luncheon, provides park staff and the Friends ample opportunity to work together to preserve Van Buren's legacy. Park staff look forward to many fruitful endeavors with Friends as we build together their vision into reality.

"Martin Van Buren National Historic Site celebrates its 40th birthday this year. The visitor center features state of the arts exhibits and interactives explaining Martin Van Buren's accomplishments through the history of all the residents at his home and farm. The historic home and grounds is open to visitors year round, are restored to their mid nineteenth century appearance. The fruit orchard, gardens, farm manager's office and carriage house behind Lindenwald show how the farm community supported itself. A short walk through the field's to the creek links visitors to the path between Stuyvesant Falls and the Village of Kinderhook, where Martin Van Buren was born.

Martin Van Buren National Historic Site draws visitors from around the globe for its historical and recreational opportunities. The nearby guesthouses offer hospitality from tent sites to suites. Staff housing allows summer employees easy access to the site, where the ample staff provides excellent interpretive programs, special events, and educational outreach.

The site owes much to the Friends of Lindenwald, a 1500 member nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of the Van Buren legacy. Their volunteer work, lobbying efforts, national fund-raising campaigns and community liaison work have achieved what the National Park Service could not achieve alone: a vibrant, active and important national historic site.

The organization's officers are President William Spampinato, Vice President Ruth Piwonka, Secretary Richard Anderson, and Treasurer Dana Berntson.

The present Trustees are :
Dana Berntson, Richard Brady, David Gillespie, Lars Johnson, Jane Miller, Ruth Piwonka, Ardelle Stewart, and James Van Buren whose terms expire in 2000.

Jeanne Akers, Mary Bartolotta, Albert Knoll, Helen McLallen, Calvin A Sheldon, William Spampinato, Roy Thomson, and Mary Leigh Whitmer, whose terms expire in 2001.

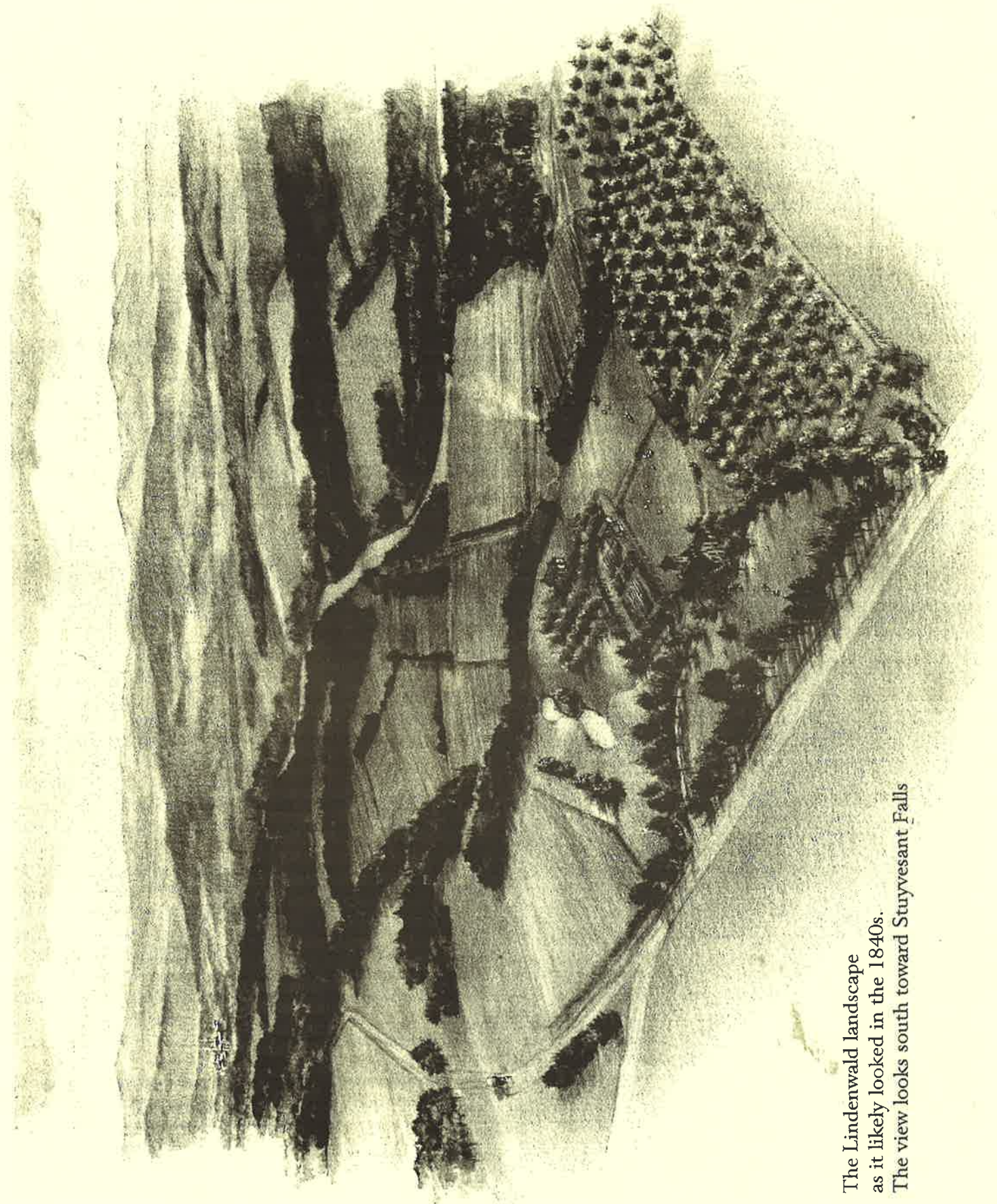
Those with terms expiring in 2002 are Richard Anderson, Ray Andrews, Priscilla Frisbee, Muriel Gibbons, William Palmer Gerard Rielly, Linda E. Drahushuk, and Peter Bujanov

Additionally, our Honorary Chairs are: President Gerald Ford and President

Jimmy Carter

George W Franz, Gerald Docteur, Hilles Timpson, and Albert S. Callan are Honorary Trustees, while Mark Helprin John Scheriff, John Faso, and Stephen Saland serve in Advisory capacity.

Our operating budget for this year is expected to be about \$6000. Most of our expenditures relate closely to activities at the site. From year to year, these vary: in some years we have paid for conservation of artifacts; other years we have made contributions to the Summer Program events; and presently we are sponsoring the Nineteenth Century Craft Fair. In addition, we have assumed responsibility for the popular Van Buren Nature Trails, which the Friends lease from Columbia County. Our programs are developed in cooperation with Park staff to ensure funds being spent in ways that our consistent with our mutual purposes.



The Lindenwald landscape
as it likely looked in the 1840s.
The view looks south toward Stuyvesant Falls

... HOW VERY NEAT ALL YOUR ROOMS WILL LOOK"

by Robert M. Kelly of W R N

Van Buren was putting the finishing touches on the redecoration of Lindenwald as he settled into his retirement home, which had been built by Peter Van Ness in 1797. A green-patterned paper was pasted face-first to the rough walls of the lower hall for use as a lining paper and then a French scenic wallpaper from Zuber, *Paysage A Chasse*, was hung there above a wallpaper balustrade from Jacquemart & Benard. In other rooms chairrails were removed and the walls patched and the areas of plaster repair were lined in the same manner before papering. The following exchange of letters took place between Martin Van Buren in Kinderhook and Mrs. Harriet Butler in New York City during May 1841.

My Dear Mrs. Butler,

Will you have the goodness to select this paper for me mentioned in the enclosed memorandum of Messrs. P and F? Now you will see by his memorandum his reason for haste. After you have made the selections Messrs. P and F will, with the advice of my friend William find the first speedy conveyance to Stuyvesant so that I may have the paper at the earliest practicable moment + write me by mail that I may send down for it. I have numbered Mr. Thurston's memorandum - I can only make the following suggestions. For the rest you must decide for yourself.

No. 1. This is for the hall upstairs including the temporary Bed Room at the end of it. Let the paper be neat but not expensive, something like that we first selected for the lower hall might do.

No. 2. This is to be the best Bed Room + is down stairs. Paper should

be good.

No. 3. Let this be of the same kind with that which was got for the Dining Room. Yellow with gold, etc.

No. 4. Martins Bed Room - neat but cheap.

No. 5. Bed Room up stairs - may be a little more expensive

No. 6. Messrs. P + F will know.

The memorandum contains a general remark which is founded [?] on the roughness of the wall + will be sent to us too by P + F. Excuse this trouble and believe me very truly yours, Mrs. Butler.

M VAN BUREN

My dear Sir,

I received your commissions late on Saturday evening and this morning took a carriage & hastened to execute them - I sent up or requested the young man who waited on me to do so, two kinds of paper for the lower bedroom - one at \$1 pr piece, the other 10/. That at a dollar, one of the "firm" though would be best, said he would stand between me & harm. That for Martins room 5/ is Miss Butlers choice & she did not shrink from the responsibility. There is certainly nothing exciting in the colors & to an invalid it will be rather quieting to the nerves - The hall-paper you will observe is an old favorite of mine - The paper for the upper bed room, Harriet said she should have an eye to her own comfort as she might occasionally be an occupant the room -

We looked at a large number of the fire papers & they will be sent up for you to make your selections - The borderings for the fire-boards you will take like the bordering in the rooms for which they are intended.

There was no pattern among them that would match very well with the drawing-room paper - There was one gold one which I thought might answer for the dining-room - They reiterated their promise to send it all up by the Express this P.M. and I reiterated my

desire that it should be. Mr. William Butler presented himself at our house just as I was preparing to go out - I did not see him. I mention it that you may know of his safe arrival - How very neat all your rooms will look with all this new and beautiful paper upon them.

By the by, my cook has desired her dismissal and as I have raised her wages - flattered - & coaxed her for two years I begin to grow tired of it - I have therefore determined to let her try her fortunes else where & throw myself upon the mercies of another - Will you have offer her a situation with you & what inducements may I hold up as a compensation for her burying herself in the country? We all desire, old & young, to express our affection for you with the sincere hope that you will soon be established in your own house, not doubting you will find more real enjoyment there than in the Peoples House.

Very truly yrs.

H. BUTLER

P.S. Mary Howard has glanced over this letter and says you will never be able to read it & that she is sure I have been trying to pay you off in your own coin.

Notes: Mary Howard's comment was directed at the atrocious handwriting of the correspondents. Stuyvesant, New York, was the Hudson River landing closest to Lindenwald, and also the birthplace of Benjamin Franklin Butler (1795-1858), a law partner of Van Buren's in Albany, who served as his U.S. Attorney General. His wife, Harriet is the correspondent and there is reference made to their daughters, Harriet and Mary Howard. The Martin referred to Van Buren's invalid son.

Lindenwald underwent a complete re-do by the National Park Service in the 1980s to return the house to Van Buren's time and it is papered to the rafters with reproduction wallpapers

from Scalamandre. A scrap of the dining room paper ("yellow with gold, etc." and "one gold one which I thought might answer ...") was found and reproduced. This paper bears a strong resemblance to one shown in the book *Das Biedermeier* (Gerhard Stalling Verlag, 1965). The 1845 oil painting on page 10 shows "Oberforster Seyd und Familie" in a scene of familial *gemutlichkeit* gathered around a dark Empire living room sofa with white and gold striped wallpaper in the background. The resemblance to the restored Lindenwald dining room is striking.

Van Buren's choice for "fire papers" turned out to be a set of four fireboards first printed by Zuber in 1838. Their use as fireboards was actually a recycling of the designs, for the four animals depicted in the center of the fireboard cartouche (lion, eagle, swan, and deer) were earlier used as the centerpieces for an elaborate set of *decors* entitled "Decor Louis XV". Two of the fireboards survive at the house.

The New York shilling of the time probably had a value of 12.5 cents, which would be the better of the two

wallpapers at 10¢ equal to \$1.25 per piece, and the "neat but cheap" paper at 5¢ equal to 62.5 cents per piece. These are not low prices, as the best American paper at this time was selling for about a dollar a piece, and since really cheap paper could be had from the Orr factory in Troy up the river for as little as 8 or 9 cents a piece.

Now with WPN (Wallpaper Reproduction News), in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, he is a past Winterthur Fellow and a specialist in wallpaper use in America, 1800-1850. He prepared these readings for the Friends.

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