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From the Editors

It is hard to imagine anyone associating George Washington with un-American activities, but our lead article reveals that some expressed just such a sentiment toward the Washington Benevolent Society during the War of 1812. The cover article, on the Springside estate of Matthew Vassar, rounds out the noteworthy presentations from our 2015 symposium dedicated to the legacy of Andrew Jackson Downing, the founding figure of American landscape architecture characterized by art scholar Morrison Heckscher as “endlessly fascinating [and] charismatic.” We want to thank Mr. Heckscher for his commentary throughout the symposium, and to recognize J. Winthrop Aldrich for his witty and inspired concluding remarks, especially his parting wisdom regarding historic preservation: “Be on the alert to say what needs to be said and do what needs to be done.”

What are the lessons and circumstances that shape an individual’s ambition and actions? The article on Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Hyde Park upbringing and our adapted Cunneen-Hackett lecture on General Jacob L. Devers provide answers to this question as it relates to these two men who influenced international events and relations. And in addition to our regular Regional History Forums and book reviews, the issue introduces a new, occasional feature called “Personal Reflection.” This first installment focuses on the beginnings of the Hudson River Valley Greenway.



On the cover:

Henry Gritten (British, 1818-1873), *Springside: View of Barn Complex and Gardens*, (1852). Oil on canvas. 25.5 x 37 inches. Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, gift of Thomas M. Evans, Jr., in honor of Tania Goss, class of 1959, 2015.22.3

Saving Springside: Preserving Andrew Jackson Downing's Last Landscape

Harvey K. Flad



Figure 1: See color plate on page 37

Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852) was the preeminent figure in landscape design in antebellum America. On July 28, 1852, Downing died tragically in the explosion and sinking of the Hudson River steamboat *Henry Clay* on his way to continue work on the Public Grounds in Washington, D.C.¹ Three days later, on July 31, the *Poughkeepsie Eagle* published a poetic reverie of “An Hour at Springside.” In it, the author seeks a cool retreat from the “sultry month of July” in “shady hill-sides, where under stately trees, and upon the fresh green grass we may repose ourselves, listening to the rustling of the leaves and the gentle chanting of birds. We may watch the murmuring [*sic*] bubbling

¹ David Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste: Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and D. Schuyler, “Andrew Jackson Downing: Promoter of the Urban Public Park,” *The Hudson River Valley Review*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Spring 2017), 54.

[sic] spring, as it fills brim full and gently reckless o'er its mossy brim." At the end of the hour in "the glowing tints of a setting sun...the waters of the spring steal over the brim, like tears down a sorrowing face, noiselessly."²

In both time and place, the reverie was a fitting memorial to Downing, for Springside was his last major completed work.³ Downing created Springside for Matthew Vassar, a wealthy retired brewer, philanthropist, and founder of Vassar College. From 1850 until his death in 1868, it served as Vassar's summer retreat and ornamental farm. Designed in the Romantic style with elements of the picturesque and beautiful, Springside was described by visitors in glowing prose and poetry. For example, a nine-stanza poem titled "Ode to Springside" was published in the *Eagle* in June 1852. Its first two stanzas exclaim:

Oh tell me not that Paradise
Bloomed in the distant East,
Ere culture o'er this darkened world
Her radiant light had cast.
No, Paradise near home is found,
As future poets will sing,
And nature's beauties ever crown
'Springside's' returning spring.⁴

Vassar enjoyed showing off his landscaped grounds to visitors. He entertained students and faculty from Vassar College there, and spent his summers in the gardener's cottage. In 1867, Vassar retired from his city home and lived at Springside until his death a year later. Vassar had no children, and upon his death the northern side of the estate was purchased by a neighbor, John O. Whitehouse, whose family enjoyed picnicking on the landscaped grounds.⁵ Whitehouse's son-in-law, Eugene N. Howells, occupied the property and expanded the farm until his bankruptcy in 1901, when he sold it to neighbor William Nelson. Nelson built a substantial house on the property, known as Hudson Knolls, south of the Springside gatehouse. Upon his death, it was bequeathed to his wife, and upon her death to their children: Gerald Nelson, Geraldine Nelson Acker, and Gertrude Nelson Fitzpatrick, each of whom lived on separate parcels of the combined property. The Nelson family lived in the Hudson Knolls mansion until the 1940s, while the Fitzpatricks resided at Springside. In 1929, the Ackers built a new house, called Spring Gable, on the site Downing had selected for Vassar's stone mansion, which was never constructed. In 1952, a century after Downing's death, the site was considered for a new high school, the first of a number of proposals to develop, alter, or destroy his most enduring and well-documented landscape.

2 *Poughkeepsie Eagle*, 31 July 1852.

3 Harvey K. Flad, "Matthew Vassar's Springside: "...the hand of Art, when guided by Taste," *Prophet With Honor: The Career of Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852*, eds. George B. Tatum and Elisabeth Blair MacDougal, Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture, XI (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Trustees for Harvard University, 1989), 219-258.

4 *Poughkeepsie Eagle* (12 June 1952)

5 Notes on the property's ownership after Vassar's death can be found on the website of Springside Landscape Restoration, Inc., "Springside Landscape Restoration: Historic Designed Landscape – History," at <<http://springsidelandmark.org/history/>>

By the 1960s, the site faced abandonment; Springside's formerly well-groomed grounds were becoming overgrown and its buildings on the verge of collapse. In New York State and the nation generally, historic preservation efforts were at an early stage, with most focused on properties of historical significance to the public. However, Springside was privately owned, decaying, and virtually unknown even to historians of landscape architecture.⁶ Meanwhile, surveys by the New York State Council on the Arts in the mid-1960s began to focus attention on preservation of sites of local history and vernacular architecture.⁷ Also, efforts in the late sixties to preserve Olana, the home and studio of Hudson River School artist Frederic E. Church in Hudson, N.Y., garnered interest from art and architectural historians in the landscapes of the Hudson Valley.⁸

Saving Springside

An inventory of historic resources in the Hudson River Valley by Governor Nelson Rockefeller's Hudson River Valley Commission in 1967 spurred further surveys by local planning agencies. Dutchess County began an inventory of the county's historic sites that year; it would include Springside.⁹ The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) also documented Springside's structures, and the following year the property was declared a National Historic Landmark.¹⁰ During this period, public interest in preserving local architecture by local volunteer groups such as Dutchess County Landmarks was spurred by the clearance of whole city blocks by the Poughkeepsie Urban Renewal Agency.¹¹

In February 1968, the Ackers planned to sell the Springside estate and petitioned the City of Poughkeepsie Common Council to rezone the property from single- to multi-family and commercial land use.¹² After a review, the planning board concluded that the site was "one of the most significant historic landmarks existing in Dutchess County"

6 Springside is not included in Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). In fact, Newton is remarkably dismissive of Downing, suggesting that "Downing's book and his fieldwork leave so much to be desired" (265), even while he "seems to have been held in awe and a sort of patron saint in the years just after his tragic death." (309)

7 New York State Council on the Arts, "Architecture Worth Saving" publications: *Architecture Worth Saving in Onondaga County (1964)* and *Architecture Worth Saving in Rensselaer County, N.Y. (1965)*

8 David Schuyler, "Saving Olana," *The Hudson River Valley Review*, vol. 32, no. 2 (Spring 2016), 2-26. A decade later the Sixteen-Mile National Historic District was formed of the contiguous great estates along the river's east bank in Dutchess and Columbia counties. The nearly twenty-mile district was officially designated as the Hudson River Valley Historic Landmark District in 1990 through the efforts of J. Winthrop Aldrich, then New York State Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation and a board member of Hudson River Heritage. John Russell, "Endangered Houses on the Hudson," *New York Times* (Sept. 27, 1979); "Protecting a Heritage," *Hudson River Quarterly*, Center for the Hudson River Valley, vol. 2, no. 2 (Winter 1979), 4-5; Harvey K. Flad "The Hudson River Shorelands Task Force: Citizen Participation in the Preservation of a Historic Landscape," *Partnership in Conservation: Second Conference of National Trusts* (The National Trust for Scotland, 1980), 57-62; and Robbe Stimson and Harvey K. Flad, "Preservation of an Historic Rural Landscape: Roles for Public and Private Sectors," *Farmsteads & Market Towns* (Albany: Preservation League of New York State, 1982), 34-38.

9 Dutchess County Planning Board, *Landmarks of Dutchess County, 1683-1867: Architecture Worth Saving in New York State* (New York State Council on the Arts, 1969), 194-95.

10 "'Springside' listed as historic site; council hears rezoning request," *Poughkeepsie Journal* (22 Oct. 1968); "'Springside' Ruled Eligible to be United States Landmark," *Poughkeepsie Journal*, 4 April 1969. National Historic Landmark Springside Designation, August 11, 1969.

11 Harvey K. Flad, "A Time of Readjustment: Urban Renewal in Poughkeepsie, 1955-1975," *New Perspectives on Poughkeepsie's Past*, ed. Clyde Griffen (Poughkeepsie: Dutchess County Historical Society, 1988), 152-80.

12 "'Springside' listed as historic site; council hears rezoning request," *Poughkeepsie Journal* (22 Oct. 1968)

and refused the request.¹³ Meanwhile, the threat to Springside spurred public reaction.¹⁴ At Vassar College, President Alan Simpson and art historian Thomas McCormick spoke out about the site's significance; the acting chief of HABS and assistant to the regional director of historic preservation for the National Park Service wrote letters of concern to the mayor; and Congressman Hamilton Fish, Jr., convened a meeting of local, state, and federal officials to discuss approaches for



Figure 2: See color plate on page 38

its use as a historic resource. From the Dutchess County Department of Planning, Commissioner Henry Heissenbuttel and Senior Planner Kenneth Toole issued a booklet titled “Springside – Partnership with the Environment.”¹⁵ Letters from art and architectural historians George B. Tatum, Jane B. Davies, Christopher Tunnard, Donald B. Egbert, H.R. Hitchcock, and George F. Earle supported the efforts of local, regional, and national organizations such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, New York Historic Trust, Hudson River Valley Commission, Poughkeepsie Area Vassar Club, and the Women’s City and County Club.¹⁶

In August 1969, Springside’s carriage house and stable burned to the ground. Recognized as a tragic event, it was characterized by *New York Times* architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable as another “note” on “doomsday” in the “rotten game” of escalating land use conflicts between development and historic preservation in the nation at large.¹⁷

The next year the Ackers sold the property to Robert S. Ackerman in consideration of future development. In the 1970s, the property was rezoned to allow a 700-unit luxury apartment complex.¹⁸ These plans were not executed,



Figure 3: See color plate on page 39

13 Henry Heissenbuttel, Commissioner of Planning, “Recommendation with full statement of reasons, zoning referral 68-12 – City of Poughkeepsie Re: John B. Fitzpatrick & Others Rezoning Petition,” Dutchess County Planning Board (15 Apr. 1968)
 14 “U. S. seeking delay in rezoning ‘Springside,’” *Poughkeepsie Journal* (5 Nov. 1968)
 15 Letters of support in “Springside” file, Department of Planning, City of Poughkeepsie, reprinted in *Springside: A Partnership with the Environment*, (December 1968)
 16 “Vassar Club joins ‘Save Springside’ move,” *Poughkeepsie Journal* (20 Oct. 1968)
 17 Ada Louise Huxtable, “Doomsday Notes on a Rotten Game,” *New York Times* (28 Sept. 1969); R. Stearns, “Fire claims buildings at Springside,” *Poughkeepsie Journal* (18 August 1969)
 18 “City planning recommends Springside rezoning,” *Poughkeepsie Journal* (29 Oct. 1970) and “Springside is rezoned,” *Poughkeepsie Journal* (22 Dec. 1970)

and in 1973 the Common Council eventually withdrew its approval.¹⁹ Over the next decade, the site remained dormant; the summer cottage deteriorated, and in 1976 the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation removed the front dormer, entrance porch, and most of the front façade to Albany, where it is now on exhibit on the second floor of the State Museum.²⁰ Today, only the porter's lodge (gatehouse) remains intact.

In 1983, Ackerman's Springside Associates filed a preliminary site plan with the City of Poughkeepsie Planning Board for a 191-unit condominium project identified as "Springside." This plan superseded the developer's 1982 proposal for 190 townhouse condominiums "on substantially the same site."²¹ The new proposal called for the condominiums to be located throughout the property; there was little consideration of the existing historical or topographical environment.²² Local preservationists sprang into action. Members of Dutchess County Landmarks, including Stephanie Mauri and Jeanne Opdycke (recently appointed to the city planning board by Mayor Thomas Aposporous), as well as Tim Allred for the Dutchess County Historical Society, generated public support to save Springside by offering informal talks before local groups and tours of the site.²³

Meanwhile, Springside Associates pressed its case and after a public hearing on August 23, 1983, the planning board, without any New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) review, voted conceptual approval of the site plan and voted to recommend that the Common Council consider rezoning the site for a multi-unit project. After further review and discussions with representatives of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the planning board rescinded its approval and rezoning recommendation and voted to send a letter to the developer with comments regarding its earlier SEQRA Environmental Assessment Form (EAF) that had been submitted in July and a support memorandum submitted in September. The planning board's letter, dated October 27, 1983, required the developer to submit a corrected and updated EAF as well as corrected support data.

The next month, the planning board reviewed a new EAF. Even though its members agreed that several potentially large environmental impacts remained, they decided these issues could be mitigated. On December 6, 1983, the board voted to approve a negative declaration under SEQRA (a decision that justifies no further changes are necessary); thus approving the preliminary site plan and recommending

19 "Planners may rescind Springside project," *Poughkeepsie Journal* (27 Aug. 1973)

20 Vandalism on the site is noted in *The Old House Journal*, 2, no. 10 (1974), p. 10 and in "Springside — monument to vandals," *Poughkeepsie Journal* (23 May 1975); removal of the façade is reported in Sleight, "Pieces of City's heritage spirited away to Albany," *Poughkeepsie Journal* (28 Dec. 1976)

21 Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, "Short Chronology of 'Springside' Events," press release (February 29, 1984).

22 Although located on the site of a National Historic Landmark, the proposal was reviewed as "an intelligent and sensitive treatment," by A.F. Fleming and D. McFadden of AKRF, Inc., consultants to the city planning board, letter (6 Dec. 1983)

23 Jesse Effron, "How Springside an important National Landmark was saved," typescript copy, November 1988, Springside Landscape Restoration archives; Timothy Allred, "Springside: Where the Public Met Nature & Art," *Clearwater Navigator* vol. 15, no. 2 (March/April, 1984), 7-9.

rezoning the property.²⁴ The planning board's preliminary site plan approval and determination of non-significance (negative declaration) under provisions of SEQRA drew widespread rebuke.²⁵

A large gathering attended a public hearing before the planning board in January 1984 to determine the "Environmental Significance" and subsequent necessity for a full SEQRA review.²⁶ Meanwhile, the planning board and the Common Council debated the need to rezone the property for multi-unit development.²⁷ John Mylod, executive director of Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, an environmental organization with its national headquarters in Poughkeepsie, submitted testimony opposing the proposed zoning change to Planned Residential Development (PRD). As an example of the planning board's inadequate review of the developer's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), Mylod noted that no visual impact assessment had been made of the proposed twin six-story residential structures.²⁸ Mylod also submitted an evaluation report commissioned by Clearwater. In it, professional landscape architect Robert M. Toole referred to a "romantic garden" zone and a "farmstead zone" that, he wrote, would more adequately address the status of the site as a National Historic Landmark.²⁹ Nonetheless, the following month, on February 20, 1984, the Common Council approved the site plan without a full environmental impact statement as required by SEQRA.

A group of private individuals opposed to the development met in the offices of Hudson River Sloop Clearwater to challenge the site plan approval. Robert Stover, a lawyer and activist in environmental affairs with the New York City law firm Raggio,

24 City Planning Board minutes December 6, 1983; see minutes of previous planning board meetings for debate between Planning Board chairman David Aldeborgh who favored a fuller EIS and City Corporation Counsel Richard Cantor who did not (November 22, 1983), and "short chronology of 'Springside' events," Hudson River Sloop Clearwater press release (February 29, 1984). Letter to Mayor Thomas Aposporos and Aldermen of the Common Council from John Mylod, Executive Director of Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, Inc.; Kay T. Verrilli, Vice President of Hudson River Heritage; and Stephanie W. Mauri, Chairman Board of Trustees, Dutchess County Landmarks Association, Inc. (January 27, 1984)

25 Letter to Mayor Thomas Aposporos and Aldermen of the Common Council from John Mylod, Executive Director of Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, Inc.; Kay T. Verrilli, Vice President of Hudson River Heritage; and Stephanie W. Mauri, Chairman Board of Trustees, Dutchess County Landmarks Association, Inc. (January 27, 1984)

26 City Planning Board minutes January 22, 1984 public hearing "A determination of Environmental Significance pursuant to Section 617 of the SEQRA regulations regarding the development of 115 townhouses, 72 mid-rise units, 3 cottage condominiums, and 1 unit in the porter's lodge, located at 171 Academy Street, submitted by Springside Associates." The planning board held the public hearing to review an Environmental Assessment Form (EAF) that had been "revised" from a November presentation. Speakers who urged the city to follow the law with a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) included: Ellen Muller (NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation), Loretta Simon (NYS Heritage Task Force), Don McTernan (Roosevelt/Vanderbilt National Park Service), Neal Larsen (NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation), Melody Katz (Dutchess County Historical Society), Stephanie Mauri (Dutchess County Landmarks), Elizabeth Carter (City of Poughkeepsie Historian), Tim Allred (Dutchess County Historical Society), Virginia Hancock (City of Poughkeepsie Shade Tree Commission), Richard Birch (Dutchess County Planning Department), William Rhodes (Professor of Architectural History, SUNY New Paltz), Harvey Flad (Chairman Geology & Geography Department, Vassar College), Ken Lutters (Landscape Architect, Taconic region, NYS O.P.R.H.P.), Ellen McClelland Lesser (Landscape Architect), Joel Russell (Scenic Hudson), and other local residents. Noel A. DeCordova spoke for the developers in opposition to the need for a full EIS. See also Preservation League of New York State, "Springside: Preserving a National Historic Landscape," *Newsletter*, vol. 10, no. 1 (January-February, 1984), 2-3.

27 Letter from William Theyson, city manager, to Common Council in favor of rezoning.

28 John Mylod, "Testimony on Proposed PRD Zoning," January 23, 1984, also offered during public hearing February 6, 1984.

29 Robert M. Toole, "Evaluation Report for Restoration Potential and Proposed Development at Springside National Historic Landmark, Poughkeepsie, NY," Saratoga Springs, NY, 28 January 1984.

Jaffee, Kayser and Hunting, agreed, at no charge, to initiate a lawsuit to reverse the planning board's decision.³⁰ At issue was the board's failure to require developer Springside Associates to prepare an adequate environmental impact statement (EIS), even though the site was of national significance and listed as a National Historic Landmark, and the city itself had observed established historic preservation policies for more than a decade.

The lawsuit was initiated in New York State Supreme Court on February 29, 1984. Petitioners included two non-profit environmental organizations (Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, and Hudson River Heritage) and five Poughkeepsie residents (Tim Allred, Barbara Borgeson, Michael George, Virginia Hancock, and John Mylod).³¹ Attached to the press release issued by Hudson River Sloop Clearwater was documentation that detailed the various decisions by the Common Council, planning board, and the developers over the previous year. It included comments by a number of professionals engaged in historic preservation and landscape architecture, including Julia S. Stokes, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation deputy commissioner for Historic Preservation; U.S. Department of Interior Landmark Coordinator Gene Peluso; James Ryan, director of Olana State Historic Site; Patricia M. O'Donnell, chair of the American Society of Landscape Architects' Historic Preservation Committee; George B. Tatum, H. Rodney Sharp professor of Architectural History, Emeritus, at the University of Delaware; architectural historian Dr. Arthur Channing Downs, Jr.; Dr. Deborah A. Howe, senior planner for the Dutchess County Planning Department; and Everett M. Rood of the Dutchess County Horticultural Society.³²

The Article 78 proceeding to annul the December 6, 1983, determination by the planning board was denied and the petition dismissed by Supreme Court Justice John C. Marbach on May 18, 1984.³³ The petitioners filed a notice of appeal and were pursuing the case when the prospects for a settlement became apparent. Robert Ackerman, for the developers, and John Mylod of Clearwater, for the petitioners, negotiated over an extended period of time.³⁴ Each party also arranged for two professional landscape architects to work up new plans that would both preserve the historic landscape and

30 Stover was a resident of Poughkeepsie and had previously been lead attorney in the successful opposition to the Greene County Nuclear Power Plant in 1979; see Robert C. Stover, letter to Edward Cohen, presiding examiner, State of New York Public Service Commission and Andrew Goodhope, Atomic Safety & Licensing Board, prepared testimony of Harvey K. Flad, Alan Gussow and David C. Huntington re: CASE 80006 and NRC Docket 50-549 Power Authority of the State of New York Greene County Nuclear Generating Facility (March 2, 1979).

31 Article 78 proceeding against the Planning Board of the City of Poughkeepsie and Springside Associates, Supreme Court of the State of New York, County of Dutchess, Index No. 1090/84, May 18, 1984. See also "Affidavit in support of the petition," by Robert M. Toole (February 6, 1984).

32 Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, Inc., "City Sued on Springside Decision," Press Release (February 29, 1984), signed by John Mylod and Sarah Johnston for Clearwater and Harvey Flad for Hudson River Heritage.

33 Supreme Court of the State of New York County of Dutchess "In the Matter of the application of...petitioners, for a judgment pursuant to Article 78 of the Civil Practice Law and Rules against...respondents," Index Number 1090/84 (motion date 4/23/84).

34 A description of the discussions is in Elizabeth Pacheco, "Understanding America's First Gardener: Andrew Jackson Downing and his legacy at Matthew Vassar's Springside Estate," Vassar College senior thesis, 2010, 83-85. John Mylod offered a remembrance and tribute to Robert Ackerman, "recalling his generosity of spirit," at the Springside Landscape Restoration Board of Director's meeting on May 19, 1986 (SLR minutes May 19, 1986).

allow development.³⁵ On behalf of the petitioners, Clearwater contracted with Robert M. Toole for “technical review oversight with respect to design criteria and project impacts.”

Finally, in December 1984, a settlement was reached with Ackerman. It allowed for development to continue outside the area of the historic landscape, primarily on the former Nelson parcel.³⁶ Speaking for the petitioners, John Mylod described the settlement as a compromise: “Although our lawsuit was narrowly focused on the Planning Board’s divergence from the strict SEQRA process, Robert Ackerman opened a door for us and we walked through. We saw a way to save the site and accepted his offer along with the challenge of restoration.... To his credit, Bob Ackerman altered his development plans, among other reasons, so that historic preservation values could be maintained. This is a significant compromise through which the people of Poughkeepsie, the Hudson River Valley and the Nation will be well served.”³⁷ Years later, Mylod would recall the dedication and diplomacy of “Bob Stover in reaching a compromise and Bob Ackerman’s epiphany in recognizing the value of the historic site.”³⁸ The city gave final site plan approval in May 1985.³⁹

The settlement stipulated that Springside Associates, by way of property owner Robert Ackerman, would donate the approximately twenty acres of historic landscape – the major part of the Vassar property – to a non-profit organization for the purpose of restoration and public access.⁴⁰ That organization, Springside Landscape Restoration (SLR), was required to develop a master plan to restore, maintain, and provide public access to the site as well as



Figure 4: See color plate on page 40

35 Robert M. Toole, “Evaluation Report for Restoration Potential and Proposed Development at Springside National Historic Landmark, Poughkeepsie, NY,” Saratoga Springs, NY, 28 January 1984; see also “Historic Landscape Report of Springside National Historic Landmark Poughkeepsie, New York 12601,” 20 May 1987.

36 John Mylod, executive director, Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, letter to Robert S. Ackerman (March 25, 1985), attaching memorandum from Robert M. Toole (March 19, 1985).

37 John Mylod, quoted in “National Historic Landmark Saved: Preservation and Development Goals Compatible,” Press Release, Hudson River Sloop Clearwater (December 28, 1984), 3.

38 John Mylod, email to Harvey Flad 10 September 2016.

39 Susan Sanderson, senior planner City of Poughkeepsie, “Springside Site Plan – Final Comments,” (memorandum April 20, 1985), “Final Site Plan,” (memorandum April 24, 1985); and “Final Site Plan Approval for Springside Project,” (memorandum April 30, 1985).

40 The stipulation was drafted in May 1984 and filed as Index no. 84/1090 and reviewed by the city later that year by Richard I. Cantor, City Corporation Counsel in a letter to Ronald C. Blass, Jr., copied to Robert C. Stover, in general agreement with the Stipulation and without “any serious problem or reservation as to its content or form.” (October 30, 1984). Upon Robert Stover’s death late that year, Daniel Riesel, environmental lawyer at the firm Sive, Paget & Riesel, signed a “memorandum of understanding” with Robert S. Ackerman “to retain as much as possible of the original A.J. Downing landscape at Springside.” (6 December 1984). The next month Riesel wrote Cantor to “initial” the Stipulation of Settlement (January 3, 1985). Signed by Robert S. Ackerman for Springside Associates, Ronald C. Blass, Jr., attorney for Springside Associates, Daniel Riesel attorney for petitioners and Richard I. Cantor corporation counsel of the city of Poughkeepsie for the Poughkeepsie Planning Board, the stipulation was “so ordered” by Judge Joseph Fundice on January 9, 1985. Ronald C. Blass, Jr., of Van Dewater and Van Dewater reported the order to John Mylod, executive director of Clearwater, in a letter the next day (January 10, 1985), and filed the “so ordered” stipulation of settlement in the Dutchess County Clerk’s Office on January 21, 1985.

raise \$200,000 in funds from private and non-governmental sources by the time the developers had reached a certain stage of construction.

Springside Landscape Restoration, Inc., was fully organized in 1986.⁴¹ The first acting Board of Directors included Roger Akeley, head of the Dutchess County Department of Planning as chairman; John Mylod, executive director of Clearwater; Harvey Flad representing Hudson River Heritage; Jeanne Opdycke from Dutchess County Landmarks as secretary; Tim Allred; Judith (Kip) Bleakley; John Clarke; Lisa Dreishpoon; Michael George; Virginia Hancock; and Robin and Sabrina Ackerman, son and daughter of the developer.⁴² At its meeting on June 2, 1986, an Executive Board was elected. It included: Akeley, president; Opdycke, vice president; Clarke, secretary; Gerard Dathowski, treasurer; and board members Mylod, Hancock, and George.⁴³ The organization received its charter as a historical educational society from New York State in September 1987.

Throughout 1985 and 1986, the board developed plans to meet the requirements of the settlement, such as hiring a consultant to research existing conditions and prepare for a restoration master plan. Committee members met with local professional gardener Everett Rood and Tom Ciampa as well as Neil Larson from the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. In addition to reviewing Toole's report, they offered changes to the draft of a design for the entrance drive by Ackerman's son Robin; the drive would go from Academy Street through SLR's property to the condominiums on the twenty acres on the southern border of the historic property.⁴⁴ By late December 1986, SLR remained in negotiation with Springside Associates on numerous "unresolved issues."⁴⁵ Over the next two years, discussions were held and funds raised to comply with the \$200,000 settlement requirement.

In May 1986, SLR was given a \$1,000 grant by the Heritage Task Force of the Hudson River Valley to survey the restoration needs of the gardener's cottage. Abandoned and in disrepair, it was one of only two existing structures then on the property along with the porter's lodge/gatehouse. A caretaker lived in the latter and maintained it and the associated original gates.

In August 1987, the Poughkeepsie Common Council voted to grant the organization \$15,000 to pay for the development of a master plan. That December, the state Office

41 Incorporators included: Roger Akeley, John Mylod, Jeanne Opdycke, Frances Reese and Kenneth Toole.

42 Springside Landscape Restoration, Inc., minutes (April 29, 1986)

43 Springside Landscape Restoration, Inc., minutes, June 2, 1986; Elizabeth Daniels, Vassar College Historian, joined the board on June 23, 1986.

44 Springside Landscape Restoration, Inc., minutes, June 23, 1986 and August 25, 1986. Letter from Richard Cantor, City of Poughkeepsie Corporation Counsel to Robin Ackerman regarding site plan changes for entranceway (December 5, 1986). For concerns about the master plan draft see Robert M. Toole, *Historic Landscape Report for Springside National Historic Landmark, Poughkeepsie, New York 12601* (Saratoga Springs, N.Y., May 15, 1985) and the letter summarizing the committee's opinion and suggestions for changes.

45 Letter from Roger Akeley, President of Springside Landscape Restoration, Inc. to Thomas Aposporos, Mayor of City of Poughkeepsie requesting a meeting with Richard Cantor, City Corporation Counsel and Robin Ackerman of Springside Associates in which he notes "a distressing pattern of violations to the spirit and the letter of the agreement, and, in some cases, to the site plan....There are still many unresolved issues and opportunities for continued destruction of the landscape if the pattern of unresponsiveness and disregard for the landscape continues." (December 15, 1986).

of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation made a \$200,000 matching grant with the requirement that a similar amount be raised from non-governmental sources.

Among the first efforts of the newly formed SLR was the development of a landscape master plan. Over the fall of 1987, Anthony Walmsley, principal of Walmsley & Company, produced a *Site Analysis Landscape Master Plan and Maintenance Plan of Springside National Historic Landmark* with assistance from landscape architecture historian Charles Birnbaum as associate project director. It included the history of the site and was designed as a Cultural Landscape Report.⁴⁶

Over the next decade, much natural disturbance occurred as many of Springside's older trees were lost to age and storms. In 1999, SLR in partnership with the Garden Conservancy received a Preservation League of New York State Council on the Arts Program grant to update Walmsley & Company's study. As stated in the ensuing report, *Preservation Maintenance Plan for a Historic Landscape: Springside National Historic Landmark*, "[T]he focus was to be on shorter and on-going management actions that the small but active band of SLR volunteers could undertake to stabilize the site, prevent further destruction and safeguard its essential surviving features."⁴⁷

Over the past three decades, a number of studies have been done of Springside with the aim on discovering the changes to its natural and cultural landscape and for planning its future. Meanwhile, storms and diseases have brought down a number of older trees, underground hydraulic systems have failed, and much of the footprint of former structures has yet to be recovered. Still, a great deal has been accomplished by a small group of volunteers. Grants have been received to repaint the porter's lodge and repair the formal gates, while carriage roads and parklands have been reopened to view. Springside's historic landscape offers the visitor and the landscape historian the most completely documented testimony to Andrew Jackson Downing's legacy.

The Site

The ongoing preservation efforts on the Springside property have been undertaken with the guidance of extensive research on Matthew Vassar's intentions and decisions, and on Andrew Jackson Downing's role in designing the estate.

46 Walmsley & Company, Inc., *Site Analysis, Landscape Master Plan and Maintenance Plan of Springside National Historic Landmark*, New York, NY, [undated draft; letter from Charles Birnbaum to Harvey Flad dated 20 December 1988 with enclosed "final master plan report" with revisions; final report dated 1989]. Other professional consultants in architecture, horticulture and archaeology contributed, as did art historian George B. Tatum, co-organizer of the Downing symposium at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C. in 1989, of which the Marist symposium on the 200th anniversary of Downing's birth in 2015 was a natural successor. See also G.B. Tatum and E.B. MacDougall, eds., *Prophet With Honor: The Career of Andrew Jackson Downing 1815-1852* (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks, 1989; G.B. Tatum, "Introduction," in A.J. Downing, *Landscape Gardening and Rural Architecture*, Dover edition of 1852 *Treatise*; and Flad, 1989. For note as "Cultural Landscape Report," see Tourbier & Walmsley, 2000, 6.

47 Tourbier & Walmsley, *Preservation Maintenance Plan for a Historic Landscape: Springside National Historic Landmark, Poughkeepsie, Dutchess County, New York* (New York, NY: May 2000), 7. The *Springside National Historic Landmark Master Plan*, 1989 by Walmsley & Company was described as "A pace-setting report for its time – including important historic contributions by Professor Harvey K. Flad of Vassar College and John Clarke of the Dutchess County Planning Office – the team produced what in the early 90s became known as a Cultural Landscape Report. It has guided preservation efforts since."



Figure 5: See color plate on page 41

Matthew Vassar had acquired the property for Springside as a possible site for a rural cemetery for the Village of Poughkeepsie. A cholera epidemic in 1842 had caused much anxiety; by 1850, Poughkeepsie's existing burial grounds were overcrowded. Most churches were "anxious to have a cemetery established because they had no grounds of their own." According to an article in the *Poughkeepsie Eagle*, "eight out of every ten of our citizens generally are in want of some spot to lay their heads when they sleep the 'sleep that knows no waking.'" ⁴⁸

In the mid-nineteenth century, cemeteries were being built outside of populated areas in bucolic settings. Existing graveyards in more densely populated areas had become crowded. They were cause for concern on sanitary grounds, based on fear of the possibility of contamination of nearby wells and water supply. Moreover, as Aaron Sachs has posited, these spaces of "repose" offered a new, more peaceful perspective on death: they brought into the rapidly expanding and industrializing cities elements of the pastoral countryside that could remind visitors of the natural cycles of life.⁴⁹ In 1831, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society organized Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, a few miles outside of Boston. It initiated a Rural Cemetery movement.⁵⁰

Cemeteries, Gardens, and Parks

In July 1846, Downing became editor of the journal *The Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste*. In monthly editorials, he developed his theory and practice of landscape gardening, begun since the 1841 publication of his *Treatise on the Theory*

48 *Poughkeepsie Eagle*, 5 April 1851.

49 Aaron Sachs, *Arcadian America: The Death and Life of the Environmental Tradition* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 2013); David Schuyler, "The Evolution of the Anglo-American Cemetery: Landscape Architecture as Social and Cultural History," *Journal of Garden History* 4, no. 3 (1984), 294 and Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Pr., 1986).

50 Blanche M.G. Linden, *Silent City on a Hill* (Amherst, MA: Univ. of Massachusetts Pr., 2007); B. Rotundo, "Mount Auburn: Fortunate Coincidences and an Ideal Solution," *Journal of Garden History*, 4, no. 3 (1984), 255-67.

and *Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America*.⁵¹ In an essay on “Public Cemeteries and Public Gardens” in *The Horticulturist’s* July 1849 issue, Downing observed that rural cemeteries had become public gardens akin to parks. Outside of the increasingly polluted cities, landscaped cemeteries provided pastoral open spaces, open to all the community for contemplation, pleasant walks, or picnicking, as well as burials. He wrote that the Rural Cemetery concept had taken “the public minds by storm. Travelers made pilgrimages to the Athens of New England solely to see the realization of their long-cherished dream of a resting-place for the dead, at once sacred from profanation, dear to the memory, and captivating to the imagination.”⁵² He added that “at the present moment, there is scarcely a city of note in the whole country that has not its rural cemetery.” Downing noted how the public flocked to the cemeteries as desired open space. For example, he wrote that Laurel Hill in Philadelphia, developed in 1836, attracted 30,000 visitors in 1848; he suggested that “double that number visit Green-Wood,” established in 1838 in Brooklyn, “in a season.”⁵³

In 1849, the year of this essay’s publication, Downing took Fredrika Bremer, a Swedish social reformer and champion of women’s rights, to Green-Wood Cemetery on her first day in New York. She observed, “One drives as if in an Extensive English park, amid hill and dale...I should like to repose here.”⁵⁴ The following year, Downing traveled to England and visited many of the English parks of which Bremer had spoken and became an advocate for public parks: “how much our citizens, of all classes, would enjoy public parks on a similar scale,” he wrote.⁵⁵ Graceful, expansive rural cemeteries offered the opportunity to engage the civic interest in such a useful purpose for public benefit.

Poughkeepsie, Vassar, and Springside

The effort by Poughkeepsie in 1850 was, therefore, an obvious act for city betterment and progress.⁵⁶ As part of the Rural Cemetery movement, a local committee searched for a site that would best express the aesthetic principles of the Romantic movement, one in which it was “the setting, not the grave itself, which inspired emotion,” where visitors would be engaged in “a kind of luxuriating in a solemn and picturesque environment.”⁵⁷ Even more important, according to Downing, “the true secret of the attraction lies in the natural beauty of the sites and in the tasteful and harmonious embellishment of these sites by art.”⁵⁸ Indeed, for Downing they would act as moral educators in taste,

51 Downing, *Treatise*; Judith K. Major, *To Live in the New World: A.J. Downing and American Landscape Gardening* (The MIT Press, 1997, 4).

52 Downing, *Horticulturist*, noted in Sachs, 2013, 56 and Major, 1997, appendix 176.

53 Sachs, *ibid.*

54 Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World* (1853). Over the next two years Bremer became fully aware of Downing’s role as the “arbiter of taste” in domesticating the American landscape and of combining “the beautiful and the useful” in his designs for cottages and villas. Schuyler, 1996, 170; Tatum and MacDougal, 1989.

55 Downing, *Rural Essays* editorial, reprinted in Major (1997).

56 Edmund Platt, *History of Poughkeepsie*, 1909, 148. J.B. Jackson, *Landscape 1967-68*, 25.

57 J.B. Jackson, *Landscape 1967-68*, 25.

58 Downing, “Public Cemeteries”

where, “in the absence of great public gardens, such as we must surely one day have in America, our rural cemeteries are doing a great deal to enlarge and educate the popular taste in rural establishment.”⁵⁹

On May 29, 1850, the cemetery committee reported that a forty-four-acre portion of the Allen Farm, on the south side of “Eden Hill” one mile south of the village, was “the most suitable and attractive grounds” considered.⁶⁰ The committee’s report discussed the site’s attributes and outlined possible development. The property was described as “undulating,” with “a portion of meadow, groups of forest trees of luxuriant growth, about 10 acres laid out in an apple orchard; there are also several curious mound formations of rocky character, studded with oak, hickory, chestnut and evergreens.”⁶¹ A “rivulet” was mentioned as flowing through the site. Landscape development was anticipated, with the property was said to be “susceptible of tasteful embellishment.” A “spacious lake” is suggested, with “its outlet enlivened by small cataracts.” “Much of it,” according to Benson J. Lossing, the nineteenth-century historian and biographer of Matthew Vassar, “was in a state of natural rudeness. Wooded knolls arose about tangled hollows. Springs gushed out from oozy little hill-sides, and formed rivulets. . .the committee saw in that topographical rudeness the substantial elements out of which a most beautiful landscape might be fashioned by the hand of Taste.”⁶² In other words, the site had all the potential of variety of landscape and vegetation admired by Downing.

About a month after the committee’s report, Vassar purchased the Allen Farm property for \$8,000, intending to hold it for cemetery use.⁶³ Unfortunately, subscribers were few.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, that autumn Vassar began to make improvements. Meanwhile, Downing had just returned from his trip to England and had established an architectural firm at Highland Gardens, his home and nursery outside Newburgh, New York, with assistance from the young Calvert Vaux, whom he had met in London.⁶⁵

As one of Downing’s first commissions since his return, Vassar engaged him to “suggest a plan of avenues for walks and drives” and to design several buildings.⁶⁶ The improvements were made to be “suited to a Cemetery” yet also in a design vocabulary of the *beautiful* and the *picturesque* from Downing’s *Treatise* for a potential house and garden.⁶⁷ The curving avenues, roads, and paths would be equally suitable for visitors

59 Ibid.

60 *Poughkeepsie Eagle*, 1 June 1850.

61 *Poughkeepsie Eagle*, 1 June 1850.

62 Benson J. Lossing, *Vassar College and Its Founder*, New York, 1867, 60.

63 *Poughkeepsie Eagle*, 1 June 1850.

64 *Poughkeepsie Eagle*, 7 September 1850; *Eagle*, 5 April 1851; and *Eagle*, 12 April 1851.

65 Francis Kowsky, *Country Park & City: The Architecture and Life of Calvert Vaux* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1998). See specific reference to Springside in Kowsky, “Continuing the Quest to Elevate the Tastes of Our People: Calvert Vaux, Frederick Clarke Withers, and Frederick Law Olmsted,” *The Hudson River Valley Review*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Spring 2017), 70.

66 Lossing, 1867, 63.

67 17th and 18th century English theories of landscape design promoted by William Gilpin, Humphrey Repton and “Capability” Brown and their relationship to Downing and Springside are discussed in Harvey K. Flad, “Following ‘the pleasant paths of Taste’: The Traveler’s Eye in New World Landscapes,” in *Humanizing Landscapes: Geography, Culture and the Magoon Collection* (catalog) Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, 2000, 69-102.

to grave sites or to the cottage or farm buildings, or for poetic ramblings through an ornamental garden, by a spring-fed rivulet, or into a wild or naturalistic grove. The landscape design for Springside would eventually incorporate both the *beautiful* and the *picturesque* in its topographic features of stone outcrops, native tree species of variegated forms, domestic and utilitarian structures, formal and informal plantings, and pathways offering intimate and scenic views.⁶⁸ It would remain as Downing's testament to "Unity, Harmony, Variety."

Although subscribers were few and the local cemetery committee looked into another property to the west overlooking the Hudson River (organized two years later as the Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery), the cemetery option remained open. In December 1850, the newspaper reported this ambivalence about its ultimate use when it reported that Vassar was keeping a cemetery firmly in mind as "that object in his disbursements and plans as far as would be compatible with its improvements as a private residence."⁶⁹

Improvements

Downing, meanwhile, began to prepare for the site's use as an ornamental farm with a cottage, gardens, and utilitarian structures (Figure 1). The frontispiece for *The Horticulturist* for February 1851 featured "a perspective view and ground plan of a barn and stable designed for the villa residence of a gentleman on the Hudson."⁷⁰ The carriage house integrated both aesthetic and utilitarian elements in a harmonious whole. It was a board-and-batten structure that, Downing wrote, "is intended to produce a picturesque effect externally, and to contain internally all the convenience demanded in a building of this class" (Figure 7).⁷¹ Downing went on to praise the client's development, "whose whole establishment will be remarkable for the completeness, convenience, and good effect of the various buildings, joined to much natural beauty of features of the locality in which they are placed."⁷²

The carriage house would be the first of many designs by the Downing firm for Springside. As Lossing reported in 1867, "From the designs of Mr. Downing, a porter's lodge, a cottage, barn, carriage-house, ice-house, and dairy-room, granary, an aviary for wild and domestic fowls, an apiary, a spacious conservatory and neat gardener's

68 Flad, 1989; see also Robert M. Toole, "Springside: A.J. Downing's Only Extant Garden," *Journal of Garden History*, 9 (1989), 20-39.

69 Eagle, 7 December 1850. The Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery would eventually be built in 1853, designed by Howard Daniels. Daniels was born in 1815, the same year as Downing. Listed as an architect in 1844, although primarily known as a landscape gardener, Daniels designed a number of cemeteries in the romantic rural cemetery style throughout the 1840s and 1850s. While in Ohio he designed Spring Grove in Cincinnati, Woodlawn Cemetery in Xenia, and Green Lawn in Columbus. In 1851, Daniels moved to New York City where, according to an advertisement in *The Horticulturist* in 1855, he had designed fifteen cemeteries and an equal number of private grounds, one of which was Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery. A decade later he offered landscape design advice to Matthew Vassar for the grounds at Vassar College, although the plan by James Renwick, architect of Main Building, was chosen. Christine B. Lozner, "Daniels, Howard (1815-1863)," *Pioneers of American Landscape Design*, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2000, 73-76.

70 Downing, "Our Frontispiece," in *The Horticulturist*, February 1851.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

cottage, and a log cabin on the more prosaic portion of the domain, where meadows and fields of grain may be seen, were erected” (Figure 3).⁷³

Downing’s design for the cottage is very similar to the “symmetrical bracketed cottage” published as Design III in *The Architecture of Country Houses*. (1850).⁷⁴ Downing’s Springside version was a board-and-batten structure with symmetrical front façade, a central gabled window with two simple window hoods on either side of the front door, and small seated porch. The cottage also featured truncated gables from Design XVII “Bracketed American Farm Home.” These, Downing noted, would be appropriate to a rural English farmhouse, in “modesty and simplicity,” as, he posited, “the farmhouse seems to us to unite fitness and simplicity with as much architectural refinement of features and expression as properly belong to the subject.”⁷⁵ Downing added: “But the greatest charm of this cottage to our eyes, is the expression of simple but refined home-beauty which it conveys” (Figure 7).⁷⁶

At the time of Downing’s death, the cottage, stables, wooden gatehouse, and iron gates had been completed. Downing and Vaux drew designs for a number of other structures, including both a stone-faced porter’s lodge and a proposed mansion-style villa; however, neither was built.⁷⁷ Over the decades, through neglect and vandalism, most of the structures deteriorated and were lost. By 1987, the year of SLR’s incorporation, only the wood-framed, board-and-batten, neo-Gothic style porter’s lodge/gatehouse was extant. It and the estate’s adjacent gates remain as original picturesque elements of the 1852 Romantic landscape (Figure 8).

Downing designed Springside as an ornamental farm, or *ferme ornée*. The design is similar to Design IV and the grounds of Design VII in *Cottages and Residences*, with various utilitarian structures, a kitchen garden, open fields, and livestock.⁷⁸

Embellishments

Downing and Vaux worked on the site from 1850 to 1852, and after Downing’s death Matthew Vassar continued to add “improvements.”⁷⁹ However, in 1854 he considered offering the property for sale. In an advertisement in the local paper, Springside was

73 Lossing, 63.

74 A.J. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 1850, reprinted by Dover, 1969, fig. 12, 82. See also Schuyler, 1996, 164-166 and figs. 69 and 70, and front jacket illustration of cottage.

75 Downing, 1850, 164. See also Adam Sweeting, *Reading Houses and Building Books: Andrew Jackson Downing and the Architecture of Popular Antebellum Literature, 1835-1855* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996), 56-62.

76 Downing, 1850, 84. Jane Davies, architectural historian and biographer of Andrew Jackson Davis, who drew most of Downing’s illustrations prior to Calvert Vaux, described the Springside cottage drawing as “an epitome of Downing’s rural architectural designing. Apart from its great significance as the documented work of Downing, it is surely one of the very finest romantic cottages in the United States,” quoted in Flad 1989, 245.

77 The design for a “villa of brick and stone” by “D&V” (Downing and Vaux) was later published as Design XXV by Vaux in his 1857 edition of *Villas and Cottages*, 277, and also listed as Design No. 30 in his 2nd revised edition, 1864, 298-302. Drawings of the Porter’s Lodge, mansion, gardener’s cottage and the coach house and stables, are held in Vassar College’s Special Collections. All are signed “D&V” signifying Downing and Vaux.

78 A.J. Downing, *Cottage Residences*, 1842, 1873 ed., (Dover, 1981), 85 and 135.

79 In his “Essay on American Scenery,” Thomas Cole lamented “...meager utilitarianism...sometimes called improvement” but, through the art of landscape design, foresaw that the Hudson River Valley had the “capacity for improvement by art.” T. Cole, *The American Monthly Magazine*, n.s. 1 (1836), 3-4, 8-9.

described as having a “variety of surface formation, rural and picturesque scenery, springs of pure water, supplying jets, fountains, fish ponds, and pools for aquatic birds by its own gravitation. . .some two miles of drives and walks girding the knolls and encircling the hills, through gently sloping vales.”⁸⁰ A description of existing structures followed, including a gardener’s cottage, porter’s lodge, grapery/conservatory, carriage house and stable, and dairy building, along with a long list of farm animals and exotic fowl. “A large Kitchen garden well stocked with a choice variety of the best dwarf fruits on quince stock in full bearing last summer.” The advertisement concluded with a description of an apple, plum, and cherry orchard.

Ultimately, Matthew Vassar did not sell the property and retained it until his death in 1868. In 1857, he hired Caleb N. Bement to manage and superintend farming at Springside, “including the purchasing, rearing and selling of live and dead stock, such as cattle, pigs, poultry, and other fancy stock, butter, eggs, fruit, vegetables, etc.”⁸¹ In 1857, Vaux revisited Springside:

This estate, being full of easy sweeps and gentle undulations, is somewhat secluded and park-like in its character, fine healthy trees being scattered in groups and masses over its whole extent. These have been sparingly and judiciously thinned by the proprietor, and the arrangement of roads and general distribution of the grounds has been adapted to the peculiar features of the situation. The effect is very rural and homelike, although a great deal of rough work has been done, and it is only a few years since the hand of improvement was first laid upon it.⁸²

A decade after Vaux’s visit, Lossing reported on Vassar’s efforts to complete Downing’s design of the ornamental grounds: “The primitive forest-trees on the knolls were left to grow on, untouched; the hollows and ravines were transformed into beautiful narrow paths or broad roadways; a deer-park was laid out and peopled with tenants from the woods; *jets d’eau* and little hollows filled with sparkling waters were formed; and in the course of years more than one hundred thousand dollars were added to the first cost of the then almost profitless acres.”⁸³ Lossing concluded: “Visitors agree that these acres, beautiful and cultivated, are not surpassed by any spot in our country, of equal area, in variety of surface, pleasant views and vistas, near and remote, and picturesque effects everywhere.”⁸⁴

Artistic Composition

As with paintings by Hudson River School artists, Downing’s landscape design for Springside offered both sweeping views toward the west and the Hudson River, as well as more intimate scenes of a domesticated homeground. The site offered artists and poets elements of both the beautiful and picturesque: Lossing’s illustration of the swan

80 *Eagle* 29 December 1854, cited in CITYSCAPE/Cultural Resource Consultants, *Analysis of Effect of Proposed Project on “Springside,” a National Historic Landscape* (prepared for The Chazen Companies), March 1999, 15-16.

81 M. Vassar and C. Bement, “memorandum of understanding,” April 1859, Vassar College Library Special Collections.

82 Calvert Vaux, *Villas and Cottages*, 1857, 2nd rev. ed., 1864, 299-300.

83 Lossing, 1867, 63.

84 *Ibid.*

in Jet Vale fountain and two ladies with parasols represents the former; an image of Cottage Avenue Gate, with a male horseback rider in a darkly vegetated farm scene, depicts the latter.

On June 12, 1852, one month before Downing's death, Vassar Professor Russell Comstock described the property in aesthetic terms: "We took a stroll over the ground of M. Vassar, Esq...and a more charming spot we never visited. There is combined within these precincts every variety of park-like and *pictorial* landscape that is to be found in any part of our country –meadows, woodlands, water-sources, jets and fountains, elevated summits gently sloping into valleys, forming the natural openings for the roads to girdle the hills and knolls, and thence again reaching upward to the highest peaks, from whence the eye at one glance can survey almost every spot of the entire enclosure."⁸⁵

After his 1857 visit, Vaux also described Springside in pictorial terms:

Although the property lies some distance from the river, agreeable peeps of the gleaming Hudson and its beautiful white sails are gained here and there. Still, it is the bold horizon lines, and the broad, free stretches of richly wooded intermediate distance contrasting, and yet in harmony, with the home landscape, that gives the peculiar charm to the place. It can, indeed with difficulty be separated from its surroundings, and a mutual understanding advantageous to both seems to have sprung up between Springside and the scenery in its vicinity.⁸⁶

Shortly after Downing died, Vassar commissioned Henry Gritten, an English landscape painter living in New York City, to undertake a series of oil paintings showing the landscape and structures at Springside. Four paintings were executed in a realistic style as the foliage was changing in the autumn of 1852.

Three of these paintings are overviews, and together they provide a nearly comprehensive view of the property. Two paintings (Figures 1 & 4) show the more utilitarian grounds; they look west over the farmyard complex and kitchen garden, with significant structures such as the coach house, stable, and cottage. A third perspective (Figure 5) looks from the Lawn Terrace south to the porter's lodge/gatehouse, entrance gate, and "Summerhouse-hill," and then east over the center of the landscape garden, showing "Jet Vale" and "Center Circle." Embellishments include a beehive-shaped aviary or conservatory, while the ornamental garden is complete with groups of deciduous oak, maple, and elm, and plantings of hemlocks along the curving carriage roads. Matthew Vassar is depicted riding in his carriage on one of the hemlock-lined carriage roads, while the background has a glimpse of the Hudson River adorned with boats and their white sails. An ethereal blue sky with wispy clouds covers the upper half of the painting. It suggests a lovely day for a visitor or artist to stroll through the grounds.

The fourth painting, "Springside: View of Gardener's Cottage and Barns, 1852" (Figure 6), has both beautiful and picturesque elements in a harmonious composition. It is an interior view focused on "Knitting Knoll" covered by maples and poplars in early-

⁸⁵ Poughkeepsie Eagle, 12 June 1852, emphasis added.

⁸⁶ Vaux, 1857/1864, op. cit.

autumnal colors, with a pastoral view of a half-dozen sheep grazing on the grassy lawn of Deer Park in the foreground. The west façade of the cottage, featuring board-and-batten siding painted a muted shade of yellow, pointed gables, and rustic porch; the coach house and stable; and Cottage Gate suggest a picturesque ornamental farm setting. A cook walks toward a kitchen in



Figure 6: See color plate on page 42

the basement of the Cottage, while two farm workers (one herding Devonshire cattle, the other with a hay rake and child) walk along South Avenue, ringed by newly planted hemlocks. All are elements of the pictorial picturesque.

Conclusion

In the same year as Vaux's 1857 visit, an artist with the pen name "Neutral Tint" wrote of his visit to Springside:

[H]ere we are in a perfect paradise of beauties. There are, as near as I could judge, about sixty acres laid out in the most perfect taste, and presenting to the enraptured eye at every turn a constant succession of the most strikingly picturesque and beautiful effects. . . .

To adequately describe Springside requires the poet's pen and the artist's pencil. It is a lasting monument to the genius of Downing, the management of Bement, and the liberality and taste of its proprietor, Mr. Vassar, who with generosity equal to his taste, permits the public to enjoy the charms he has created. I have never beheld a spot which equaled the attractions of this, nor where my pencil so longed to linger, and a new hope has been awakened in my soul, that I may yet find the opportunity of transferring to the leaves of my sketch book some of those beauties which ravished my eye and filled my soul with pleasure.⁸⁷

87 N. Tint, "A Drive through Springside with Matthew Vassar," *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, 13, no. 9 (1857), 126-128.

Downing's design for Springside fulfilled his guiding principle for a homeground where both theory and practice, ornament and utility, the beautiful and picturesque, and "the hand of Art, when guided by Taste," combined to form a landscape with "unity of expression."⁸⁸ The emerging landscape could evoke emotional responses from visitors, where one might like to "repose," as suggested by Fredrika Bremer in her musing to Downing at Green-Wood Cemetery in 1849.

Just days before Downing's death three years later, a visitor penned in Romantic prose: "the 'spirit of beauty' smiles up from every dew-laden flower, and taste appears in each fairy nook, or finely graveled walk... Surely, Paradise could scarcely have been lovelier."⁸⁹ The reverie concluded with an appeal for Springside's preservation for the future: "Long may it continue – long it be ere that ruthless engraver, 'Time,' shall write his magic work 'change' upon thee; and years hence, when the present generation shall have joined 'that caravan which is moving to the pale realms of shade,' may thou remain, a lasting memorial of what may be accomplished by the hand of Art, when guided by Taste."⁹⁰

Springside is Downing's only fully documented landscape design. It has influenced both the establishment of urban parks and the creation of the American suburban "middle landscape." The property continues to offer the visitor a peaceful respite in a fast-paced world. Saving Springside is a cultural and environmental imperative. It is to be hoped that the preservation and research in recent decades, most notably the voluntary efforts of Springside Landscape Restoration, Inc., will provide the foundation for long-term protection of this highly significant historic landscape.⁹¹



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88 Downing, *Treatise*; also see Flad, 1989.

89 *Poughkeepsie Eagle*, 10 July 1852, 3.

90 *Ibid.*

91 On June 8, 2017 the City of Poughkeepsie Historic District Commission placed Springside on the city's register of historic sites, upon nomination by Springside Landscape Restoration and "Statement of Significance: Springside Landscape" by Holly Wahlberg.



Figure 1: Henry Gritten (British, 1818-1873), *View of Springside* (1852). Oil on canvas, 26 x 37 inches. Private Collection

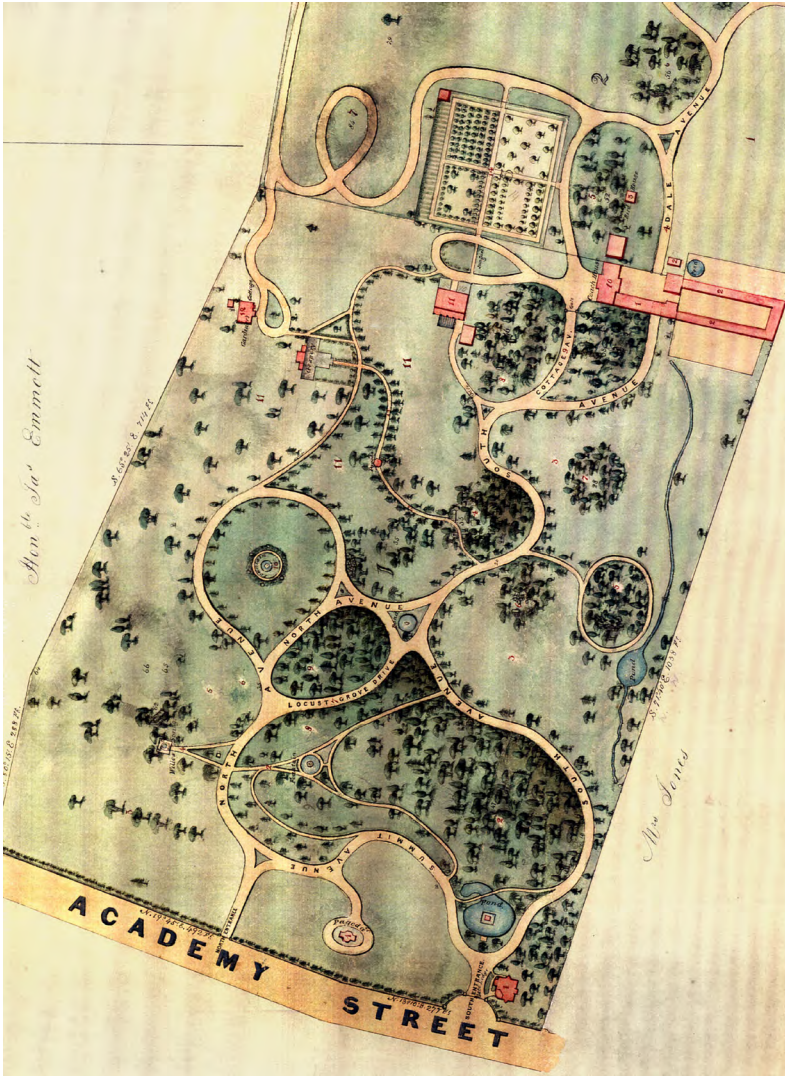


Figure 3: Unknown American artist (signed "E. Jacob"), Detail, Map of Springside (c.1853). Ink and watercolor, Local History Collection, Adriaance Memorial Library, Poughkeepsie, New York



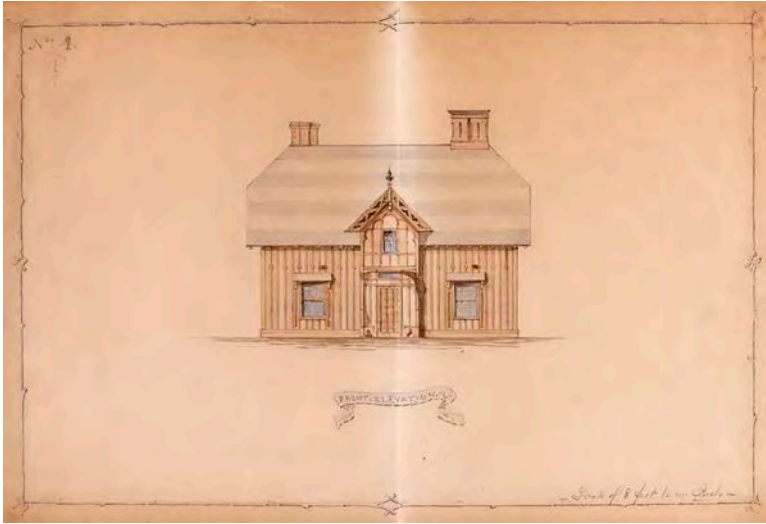
Figure 4: Henry Gritten (British, 1818-1873), *Springside: View of Barn Complex and Gardens* (1852). Oil on canvas. 25.5 x 37 inches. Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, gift of Thomas M. Evans, Jr., in honor of Tania Goss, class of 1959, 2015.22.3



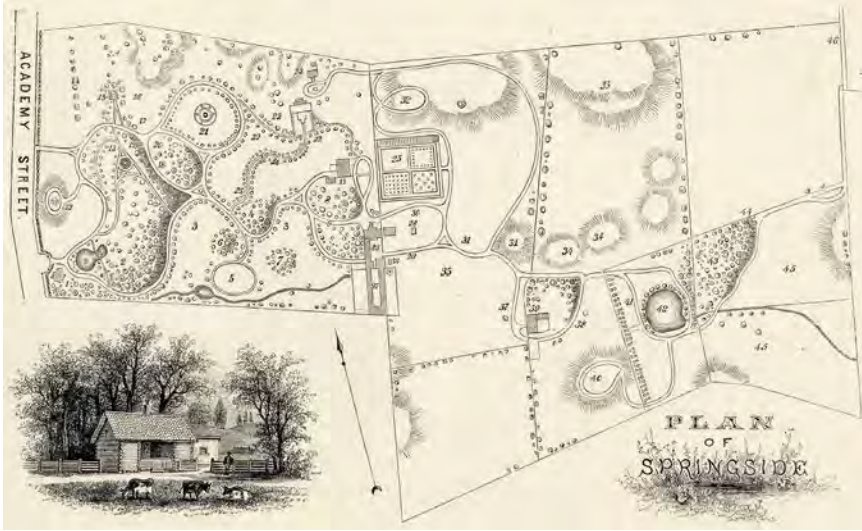
Figure 5: Henry Gritten (British, 1818-1873), *Springside: Center Circle* (1852). Oil on canvas, 25.5 x 37 inches. Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, gift of Thomas M. Evans, Jr., in honor of Tania Goss, class of 1959, 2015.22.2



Figure 6: Henry Gritten (British, 1818-1873), *Springside: View of Gardener's Cottage and Barns* (1852). Oil on canvas, 25.5 x 37 inches. Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, gift of Thomas M. Evans, Jr., in honor of Tania Goss, class of 1959, 2015.22.1



Andrew Jackson Downing's drawings of the Gardener's Cottage and the barn and stables at Springside. Vassar College Archives & Special Collections Library



Engravings of the Springside Estate from *Benson Lossing's Vassar College and Its Founder* (New York: C. A. Alford Printer, 1867).
Vassar College Archives & Special Collections Library