

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

THEME: Architecture

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Van Cortlandt House

AND/OR COMMON

Van Cortlandt House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Van Courtlandt Park at 242nd Street

CITY, TOWN

New York-Bronx

__NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

22nd

STATE

New York

CODE

36

COUNTY

Bronx

CODE

005

3 CLASSIFICATION**CATEGORY**

__DISTRICT

 BUILDING(S)

__STRUCTURE

__SITE

__OBJECT

OWNERSHIP PUBLIC

__PRIVATE

__BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

__IN PROCESS

__BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS OCCUPIED

__UNOCCUPIED

__WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE YES: RESTRICTED

__YES: UNRESTRICTED

__NO

PRESENT USE

__AGRICULTURE

__COMMERCIAL

__EDUCATIONAL

__ENTERTAINMENT

__GOVERNMENT

__INDUSTRIAL

__MILITARY

 MUSEUM

__PARK

__PRIVATE RESIDENCE

__RELIGIOUS

__SCIENTIFIC

__TRANSPORTATION

__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

New York City, administered by Dept. of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs

STREET & NUMBER

Arsenal Building, 830 Fifth Avenue

CITY, TOWN

New York

__ VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey-8 photographs

DATE

1934

 FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress/Annex

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Van Cortlandt mansion is a two-and-a-half story L-shaped house, an excellent example of an elegant country house built from a carefully considered plan rather than expanded over a period of time according to the need of the residents. The building is constructed of dressed fieldstone with red brick enframements around the windows which is a typical feature found in many New York stone buildings of the period. Grotesque masks carved into the keystones of the windows provide the only exterior decoration for the building in a unique occurrence of this feature in the area. The double hipped roof has no deck or balustrade and is now covered with slate. The cornice projects boldly with a broad soffit featuring widely spaced modillions.

There are a total of seven dormer windows with triangular pediments and six over six windows, three on the east and south front and one on the west. The style of the moldings and the arrangement of panels enframing the windows is typical of New York dormers of the early nineteenth century so it is possible that the dormers were either remodelled or installed at that time.

There is a wooden porch at each entrance. These are later construction but since the doors are so high above the ground some sort of platform and steps would have been required. These porches have simple railings supported by two plain round columns. The existing Dutch doors are not originals and probably date from the early restoration of the house. The original door enframements and reveals of the early nineteenth century and the panel arrangements of the existing Dutch doors do not match the panel arrangement of the reveals. A photograph of 1907 shows the house with six-over six light windows and wooden paneled shutters. Since then the windows have been changed to twelve, correct for 1748. The shutters have also been removed. An attached stone wing was built in 1916 and is used as a residence for the curator.

The interior woodwork is a fine example of high Georgian design. The mantelpiece in the main parlor, somewhat later than the house, has an elaborate broken pedimented overmantel with dentiled detailing and a delicate foliated frieze under the mantel shelf. A small scale, well proportioned cornice with Greek fret band runs around the room. The mantelpiece in the dining room is in the Federal style and dates from around 1800. The lighter, shallow carving of elliptical forms creates a pleasant contrast with the more robust forms of the Georgian parlor. The woodwork throughout the rest of the house, although not as elaborate, is of the highest craftsmanship. Dutch tiles are used in several fireplaces in the less pretentious rooms. What is called the West Parlor, the room used by George Washington for his office, has two cupboards on either side of a fully paneled wall. The fireplace here has no mantel shelf but is lined with delft tiles depicting biblical scenes. As is customary the second floor is less elaborate. One of the bedrooms has been fitted as a seventeenth century Dutch bedroom and the attic, once a nursery is used to display antique toys.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1748

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Van Cortlandt House, erected in 1748-49, is one of the most notable early Georgian manor houses. The architectural importance of this building lies in its beautiful stone and brick masonry and the excellent detail of its woodwork. Unusual grotesque masks are carved into the keystones of the window heads. The beautiful refined and executed paneling of the principal rooms are the finest surviving examples of mid-eighteenth century paneling in New York City. The Van Cortlandt family was in continuous residence until 1889 when the house and grounds were deeded to the City of New York. As a result many of the original furnishings remain to recreate its former elegance.

HISTORY

Olaf Van Cortlandt settled in New Amsterdam in 1638 and he and his descendants became prominent citizens. They were elected burgomeisters, aldermen, and mayors of the young New York City. They also became wealthy traders and merchants, dealing predominantly in sugar, brewing, real estate and ship building. His son, Jacobus Van Cortlandt, married the step-daughter of Frederick Philipse, Eva, and in 1699 he bought fifty acres from his father-in-law. The land of Van Cortlandt Manor was originally owned by Frederick Philipse, Lord of the Manor of Philipsburg in Tarrytown, which extended from Croton River to Spuyten Duyvil Creek. To the land first purchased Van Cortlandt added several hundred more acres, all of which remained in the family until 1889.

Frederick, the son of Jacobus and Eva Van Cortlandt, built the present house in 1748. He married the daughter of Augustus Jay and their descendants occupied the house until the property was taken over by the Park Department in 1889.

The fields, which are now a public park, were once a large and prosperous farm. The farm outbuildings were once numerous and included a saw and grist mill on Tippetts Brooks. Many prominent people enjoyed the hospitality of the Van Cortlandts over the years. During the Revolution, the house stood on the infamous Neutral Ground, thus both the British and the Americans came to call.

(Continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See Continuation Sheet)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY c. 192

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 8	5 9 3 7 9 0	4 5 2 8 1 1 0	B	1 8	5 9 3 4 3 0	4 5 2 6 6 4 0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	1 8	5 9 2 8 1 0	4 5 2 6 9 1 0	D	1 8	5 9 2 8 9 0	4 5 2 7 9 3 0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See Continuation Sheet)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Patricia Heintzelman, Architectural Historian, Landmark Review Project

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

May 1975

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

Boundary Certified:

DATE

Nov 3 1967
Aug 4 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

8/10/77

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

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ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

General George Washington used the house as his headquarters at various times throughout the war. Then Admiral Robert Digby of the British Navy brought young Prince William Henry, later to become King William IV, to dine at the house.

In 1776, Augustus Van Cortlandt, Recording Clerk of the City of New York, hid the records of the city from the British in the family burial vault. Later, in 1781, General Washington lighted camp fires on the hill of the vault to deceive the British into thinking that his forces were still in the area when in fact he had withdrawn to join Lafayette at Yorktown.

Recently, the house has been restored to its former elegance. The rooms are decorated to show the way a wealthy Dutch-English family lived in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The house has been in the custody of the National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York since 1896, and it is maintained by the Society as a public museum.

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Kimball, Fiske, Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the
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New York City Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs, Van
Cortlandt Manor File, New York City.

"Van Cortlandt House Museum," National Society of Colonial Dames of the
State of New York, New York, 1973.

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The house is set on property long owned by the Van Cortlandt family. North of the mansion is Vault Hill, site of the Van Cortlandt burial ground and family vault. On the south, steps built as a replacement in 1916 in an elaborate Georgian Revival design, lead to an area which was once laid out as a formal garden. The house itself is located well back from Broadway and is surrounded by spacious grounds which are part of Van Cortlandt Park. The boundary has been drawn to include the house, the family vault on the hill, which has important historic associations as well as being the one remaining outbuilding, and the land to the south with the steps leading to a once formally landscaped area which is still open land. The only major intrusion is a modern swimming pool facility to the southwest. This, of course, does not contribute to the national significance of the landmark. The boundary begins where the Penn Central tracks cross the Mosholu Parkway in the northeast corner, then follows south and west down the west side of the tracks to a point in line with a dirt road at UTM 18.593120.4526770 then west along this road to Broadway, then north along the east curb of Broadway to the first cut off to the Henry Hudson Parkway which curves to the east, then east along the south edge of the Parkway to the point of beginning as clearly marked on the USGS Map 7.5' Series, Yonkers Quadrangle, 1966.