

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

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DATE ENTERED

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC "Springside" (The Matthew Vassar House)

AND/OR COMMON

The Matthew Vassar House ("Springside")

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER Academy Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Poughkeepsie

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

025

STATE

New York

CODE

036

COUNTY

Dutchess

CODE

027

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Mr. Robert F. Ackerman

STREET & NUMBER

31 Forbus Street

CITY, TOWN

Poughkeepsie

VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, County Clerk, Records Room, Dutchess County Courthouse
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET & NUMBER

22 Market Street

CITY, TOWN

Poughkeepsie

STATE

New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

1969 (photographs only)

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" 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

In 1850, Matthew Vassar, philanthropist, advocate of higher education for women, and founder of Vassar College, purchased 43 acres of land at Poughkeepsie, New York on behalf of the Poughkeepsie Cemetery Committee, of which he was chairman. When the committee rejected his choice of site, Vassar engaged Andrew Jackson Downing to design the tract as his country seat, and named the property "Springside", in recognition of a fine natural spring within the grounds. Matthew Vassar planned to erect a large villa which, however, was never built. He lived in the Springside cottage from 1852 until his death in 1868. Of the original 43 acres, an eastern portion was subsequently sold off, leaving 26.5 acres which are part of the original "Springside" of Vassar's time.

Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852), engaged by Vassar to design Springside, was the first American landscape architect, and exerted a profound influence on national taste both through his executed work and by means of his immensely popular and internationally recognized publications on landscaping, architecture, and horticulture. Although Downing was the most potent American "tastemaker" of his day, it is an irony of history that no evidence of his work except the original 26.5 acre portion of Springside has survived intact the vicissitudes of time. In his published works, Downing relied primarily upon Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892) and, from 1850, upon Calvert Vaux (1824-1895) for architectural designs. Springside is unique in possessing the only building, the cottage, definitely known to have been designed by Downing himself, and his signed plans and elevations are in the Vassar College Library.

Just inside the stone parapet wall which borders the property on its Western edge is the gatehouse, or porter's lodge, standing just south of the entrance road from Academy Street. While the gatehouse cannot be certainly attributed to Downing, since no signed drawings have yet been found, Benson J. Lossing, writing in the middle of the 19th century, states that Downing was the designer. The gatehouse is a board and batten, one-and-a-half storey house of an irregular L-shaped plan, combining Italianate and Gothic-Revival details. The condition of the structure is very sound and has been and continues at this writing to be repaired by its occupant.

The grounds of Springside are laid out in the romantic-picturesque style at which Downing was so adept. Meandering drives and paths skirt knolls and hillocks, and natural features are subtly combined with man-made elements to take maximum advantage of available vistas. Some of the original trees continue to flourish, while a small pond east of the gatehouse has dried up, leaving its slightly depressed site clearly visible. Except for this body of water and a small stream and pool near the south-west edge of the original area which has now been diverted, all the principal landscape features remain intact.

(Continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Special Report for The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings,
 Dennis Peter Myers (April 1969).
Springside, A Partnership with the Environment, Dutchess County Department of
 Planning (Poughkeepsie, New York, December 1968).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 26.5 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,8	5,89,0,4,0	4,6,1,5,1,6,0	B	1,8	5,8,9,1,4,0	4,6,1,5,7,1,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	1,8	5,8,9,5,6,0	4,6,1,5,3,6,0	D	1,8	5,8,9,0,0,0	4,6,1,5,4,0,0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See Continuance Sheet)

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

James Dillon, Architectural Historian, Landmark Review Project

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

December 1974

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington 20240

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

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Several buildings and minor constructions, among them the conservatory, gardener's cottage, aviary, apiary, pagoda, and farm sheds have vanished. Ornamental sculpture, including "Jet Vale Fountain" and "Willow Spring," has also disappeared, and the rock group called "Stonehenge" has been overturned.

The cottage itself is a Gothic-Revival one-and-a-half-storey board and batten structure with a projecting central gable and clipped, jerkinhead, end gables ornamented with barge boards. The site slopes off towards the west where the fully exposed ground floor is fronted by a brick and stone arcade. The composition admirably conveys the rather informal and picturesque effect Downing deemed appropriate for domestic architecture. The west chimney and the dormers are not original, while the interior has been altered and today contains little of interest. The picturesque little building is today in what must be called a precarious physical condition. With an owner who has at least tolerated destruction of parts of the cottage, if not actively encouraged or financed it, the future of this last example of Andrew Jackson Downing's architecture is very much in doubt.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The largest part of this report is rewritten from the Special Report prepared by Dennis Peter Myers for the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, dated April 14, 1969. Since that time, however, a number of important events have occurred:

- 1) The property was transferred in 1970 from the sympathetic ownership of three individuals to Mr. Robert F. Ackerman of 31 Forbus Street, Poughkeepsie, a developer who succeeded in having the site rezoned to permit medium-density housing, in accordance with a \$12 million condominium scheme that he and his financiers hoped to complete within 8 years.
- 2) The barn and carriage house, immediately adjacent to the Matthew Vassar Cottage and also definitely designed by Downing, were burned and totally destroyed in August 1969.
- 3) The Matthew Vassar Cottage has been sadly neglected by Mr. Ackerman from the time of his acquisition to the date of this report and has suffered minor spates of vandalism.
- 4) Within the past month, virtually the whole of an addition at the western side of the cottage, and a significant section of the roof of the cottage have been torn off--or as Mr. Ackerman says, "disassembled." The accompanying photographs will demonstrate amply the unconscionable damage that has been inflicted. Unless something is done very shortly, the

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ravages of a Hudson Valley winter will affect the fabric of the cottage to such an extent that it may become very difficult to save.

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BOUNDARY INFORMATION

While Matthew Vassar commissioned Andrew Jackson Downing to landscape over forty acres of his estate in Poughkeepsie, New York, a number of acres of the original plan were subsequently sold off. Today, it is a parcel of 26.5 acres which remains as the best substantially-unaltered landscape architecture plan of Andrew Jackson Downing. This land is contained within the rectangle indicated on the accompanying U.S.G.S. map and is more precisely indicated by a red line on the accompanying assessment map of the City of Poughkeepsie (1933) #43. Within these boundaries lie two buildings: the gatekeeper's cottage and the Matthew Vassar Cottage. Until August 1969 when they burned, Downing's carriage house and barn also were within these lines.

It is that parcel designated on the assessor's map as 60-A which constitutes the boundary of this National Historic Landmark. Bounded on the west by Academy Street, the other bounds are the surveyor's lines indicated on the assessor's map and conform to no particular natural features, but rather lie across the romantically contrived hillocks, drives, and glades of the Downing plan.