

Clermont State Historic Site

Columbia County
Town of Clermont, NY



Clermont State Historic Site Final Environmental Impact Statement

July 26, 2023



New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation



Final Environmental Impact Statement
for
Clermont State Historic Site
Town of Clermont, Columbia County

Prepared by:
The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation

July 26, 2023



New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation

SEQR NOTICE OF COMPLETION OF A FINAL EIS

Date of Notice: July 26, 2023

Lead Agency: New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP)

Title of Action: Adoption and Implementation of a Master Plan for Clermont State Historic Site

SEQR Status: Type I

Location of Action: Clermont State Historic Site is located in the Town of Clermont, in Dutchess County and Columbia County, NY.

This Notice is issued pursuant to Part 617 of the implementing regulations pertaining to Article 8 (State Environmental Quality Review) of the Environmental Conservation Law. A Final Master Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on the proposed action has been prepared and accepted by OPRHP. The Final Master Plan includes proposals for natural and cultural resource protection, recreational resource enhancement, actions related to operations, infrastructure and facilities, and actions related to education and outreach.

The Final Master Plan and FEIS describe the proposed action, the environmental setting, alternatives, and potential environmental impacts and mitigation of those that may be adverse. Areas or resources that have been evaluated with respect to impacts include land, water, air, biological/ecology, cultural/archaeological, agricultural, scenic, open space and recreation, traffic and access, public health and safety, energy, and noise, odor, and light.

The Final Plan/FEIS also includes a chapter summarizing public comments on the Draft Master Plan/Draft EIS and the Agency's responses to comments.

AVAILABILITY OF FEIS: The online version of the Final Master Plan and FEIS are available at the following publicly accessible website: <https://parks.ny.gov/inside-our-agency/master-plans.aspx>. Copies of the Final Master Plan and FEIS are available for review at the Clermont State Historic Site office and at the offices of the agency contacts, and at the Germantown and Tivoli branch public libraries.

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The Agency worked with and coordinated input from the Friends of Clermont, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the New York Natural Heritage Program, and the many others who contributed to the development of this Master Plan.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
BEO	Buffered Element Occurrences
BHS	Bureau of Historic Sites
CRIS	NYS Cultural Resource Information System
CSC	Climate Smart Community
DEC	New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
DEIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
DHP	OPRHP Division for Historic Preservation
EB	OPRHP Energy Bureau
FEIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
LWCF	Land and Water Conservation Fund
NYNHP	New York Natural Heritage Program
NPS	National Park Service
NWI	National Wetlands Inventory
NYSEG	New York State Electric and Gas
NYS	New York State
OPRHP	New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
RIN	Relative Index of Needs
SEQR	State Environmental Quality Review Act
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office



Executive Summary

The Commissioner of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) is proposing the action of adoption and implementation of a Master Plan for the Clermont State Historic Site. Developing a master plan is a significant step for a historic facility, ensuring its continued preservation and enhancing the cultural, recreational, and natural resources for the best possible public experience in the future. This Final Master Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (MP/FEIS) also provides the opportunity for individuals, organizations, and other government agencies to participate in shaping the Site's future operation.

The Clermont State Historic Site ("Clermont") offers a unique destination for visitors seeking to spend time with family and friends, enjoy a range of events and outdoor recreation activities, and experience glimpses into New York State's past. This FEIS analyzes and recommends future actions that will ensure continued public access and enjoyment of the Site. An analysis of the potential impacts from future implementation of these actions and mitigation, if needed, is also included.

Development of Alternatives

A comprehensive inventory of existing conditions at Clermont is found in Chapter 1. This information serves as a base for formulating actions that will help realize a vision for the Site's future. To develop these alternatives for action, a group comprised of Site and regional staff, park planners, historic preservation staff and specialist met over a series of months to consider feasible alternatives for improvements at the Site. Chapter 2 of the FEIS documents the development process for these proposed future actions to be implemented at the Site. This process allows the planning team to explore the possible implications of different courses of action and to determine which will ultimately be the most beneficial to the facility, the environment, and the public. Proposed actions always consider the status quo (no change) alternative. This process allows the planning team to explore the pros and cons of potential operational, programming, and infrastructure options.

Identification of the Preferred Alternative

"Preferred" actions are those selected by the group that are considered will best protect the Site's resources. Actions are chosen that will enhance public recreation opportunities, develop educational and interpretative materials, as well as improve access, circulation, and maintenance in the years to

come. As the planning group analyzed alternatives, they focused on those actions that will enrich the visitor experience and help achieve the vision for the Site. Selected Alternatives are presented in the Implementation Priorities Table, shown in the Final Master Plan, page 7, and they are represented graphically on the Final Master Plan Map.

Public Participation

Chapter 5 of the Final EIS includes comments and questions received from the public and stakeholders that were collected throughout Master Plan/FEIS development, along with the agency’s responses.

Environmental Impacts and Mitigation

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) considers potential adverse environmental impacts that may result from implementation of the preferred alternative and describes any mitigation needed.

Resilience and Climate Change

The OPRHP's Energy Bureau (EB) is committed to making NYS Parks the most resilient park system in the country. The Bureau provides individual facilities with training, funding, project management, and other resources to implement projects that positively impact the sustainability of their operations, actively implementing projects that improve energy efficiency and replace fossil fuel use with renewable energy. The EB also works with regional staff to fund and implement energy efficiency improvements, such as upgrades to heating and cooling systems. The Bureau works with fleet management to replace old or polluting equipment with clean fuel alternatives. It organizes the design and installation of solar arrays at OPRHP facilities and works with staff to identify and implement projects that reduce water usage and other operational costs.

The Master Plan will ensure that Clermont is an active part of regional resilience efforts. The nearby Town of Germantown registered in 2021 to become a NYS Climate Smart Community (CSC), an interagency initiative that supports local governments in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The Town has since replaced 100% of its streetlights with high-efficiency LED lights, and has been awarded grants from National Grid and NYSEDA to install its first EV charging station in the municipal parking lot. In 2022, Germantown received a Bronze certification from the CSC.¹

Germantown has also joined the Towns of Livingston and Clermont in a “Keep Farming” project that helps sustain agriculture as a significant local activity.²

Implementation

A master plan establishes OPRHP’s vision for capital improvements and operational enhancements at a facility over the next ten to fifteen years. The Master Plan/FEIS proposes phased implementation of the Preferred Alternatives, prioritizing actions that stabilize, rehabilitate, and repurpose underutilized buildings, improve overall Site access, enhance natural resources, and create new or expanded recreational opportunities.

Detailed cost estimates have not been developed for proposed components, but it is likely that improvements will cumulatively cost tens of millions of dollars to implement. The pace and sequencing of recommended actions will be determined by the availability of funding (a function of OPRHP’s annual capital and operations budgets), the availability of staff, and the need to balance investments throughout OPRHP facilities statewide.

Clermont State Historic Site FEIS – Executive Summary

Once adopted, the Master Plan/FEIS will be reviewed annually to select projects for implementation and inclusion in the Site’s budget, and to assess implementation progress. Operational improvements that are already planned at the time of the Plan’s adoption will go forward as scheduled.



Heirloom blossoms along the historic Lilac Walk frame the mansion in the spring.

Chapter 1 – Environmental Setting

Introduction

As the Hudson River base for generations of New York’s Livingston family, the Clermont State Historic Site offers a tangible reminder of this politically and socially prominent family’s impact on the nation, state, and region, as well as that of the many others who lived, worked, or were enslaved in this place. The Site today includes 503 acres of lands once held by the Livingstons.

When first opened in 1962, Clermont was initially operated as a traditional recreational park, and the original visitor parking lot, paved roads, a public restroom, and picnic areas are still in use. The Site was designated a U.S. National Historic Landmark (NHL) in 1972, and gained a new administrative framework as a historic park when a Historic Site Manager and Interpretive Programs Assistant were hired in 1974.

Arrival at the main parking lot brings visitors directly to the Site’s most frequented activity area, with westward views of the Hudson River and Catskill Mountains. Historic trees dot the open lawns in this area, where visitors can stroll along bluffs overlooking the Hudson. A well-developed trail system leads through woodlands and meadows, and past small streams and pools. Mown paths wind through former agricultural fields in less-traveled portions of the Site, which can be accessed on foot or by bicycle.



Clermont’s picnic area offers views west across the Hudson River and Catskill Mountains.

Location and Access

The Clermont State Historic Site, found within the 11,000-acre Township of Clermont, is situated on the east bank of the Hudson River, at the extreme southwest corner of Columbia County, New York. To the east is the Town of Gallatin; Livingston is located to the northeast and Germantown to the north. The Village of Tivoli lies directly to the south of the Historic Site (“the Site”). The name “Clermont” is French for “Clear Mountain.”³

Located at One Clermont Avenue in the Town of Clermont, the Historic Site straddles the Columbia and Dutchess county line. The majority of the 503-acre Site is in Columbia, with 33 acres in Dutchess. The Site is near the center point of four counties, including Columbia, Dutchess, Ulster, and Greene Counties (the latter two on the west side of the Hudson River, in the Catskill Region).

The Clermont Site is accessed primarily by vehicle from County Route 6 West, off Route 9G, one mile north of the Village of Tivoli. The closest railroad stop is at the Rhinecliff Amtrak Station in the Town of Rhinebeck, approximately 14 miles from the historic site. Public bus lines in the area do not service the Site. New York’s Empire State Trail runs through the Site along Woods Road, and cyclists can use the Site’s paved entry road to access the Site directly from along the route.

Site Boundaries

A map showing the Site’s property boundary is available in the FEIS Appendices, Figure 2.

Adjacent Land Uses

This section of Columbia County is characterized by rolling hills with steeper, wooded areas near the Hudson River. Much of the land is arable but there are wetlands and marshes, as well as smaller brooks and streams, threaded throughout the landscape. The majority of land in the Town of Clermont is zoned two-acre

residential/agricultural, with a strip along the Hudson River in low-density, five-acre zoning. The region is known for its agricultural products, especially its fruits – pears, apples, peaches, plums, berries, and grapes are all grown there.

Open Space

Development pressures in Columbia County have increased significantly in recent years, as home prices have risen in both the NYC metropolitan area and in the Hudson Valley second-home market. Conservation groups such as Scenic Hudson, the Open Space Institute, and the Columbia Land Conservancy work to conserve the region’s farmland, forests, and wildlife and to protect ecologically significant habitats.

Scenic Hudson holds conservation easements on 22 acres of land adjoining Clermont that has ecologically important woods, wetlands, and 1,600 feet of shoreline along the Clay Kill, as well as an easement on a nearby 230-acre horse farm.⁴ Conservation efforts such as these help to preserve the County’s rural character and provide permanent protection from development.

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has over 1,100 acres of conservation easements with private property owners in Columbia County, including 590 acres along the Hudson River in the Town of Stockport, north of Clermont. The DEC’s Hudson River Estuary Program also collaborates with state and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, academic and scientific institutions, businesses, local governments, and interested citizens to protect and restore open space in the region.⁵

The DEC’s *2016 Open Space Conservation Plan* cites the Clermont property as a regional priority for conservation, with a focus on “...properties which protect the integrity of existing conservation lands or historic sites.”⁶

Columbia County includes other important ecological lands, particularly along the approximately 30 miles of Hudson River waterfront on its western border. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program helps protect critical habitat along the River by providing funding to purchase or obtain conservation easements for threatened coastal and estuarine lands.⁷ Properties selected for this program have been identified as ecologically important or possess other coastal conservation values, such as historic features, scenic views, or recreational opportunities. Tivoli Bays, a few miles south of the Clermont Site, is a targeted watershed that has received support through this program.



Palatine Park, Germantown

Regional Parks

Several public parks are located within the vicinity of the Clermont Site. Germantown’s Palatine Park has a playground, softball and soccer fields, a picnic beach, and a dog park. In the Town of Clermont, Hettling Park offers soccer fields, walking trails, and is developing an arboretum, and Clermont Park has a half-basketball court, Little League baseball field, and hiking trails. These two parks are planned to be combined as part of Clermont’s Future Park Complex, to create 26 acres of public outdoor space with universal design, accessibility, wildlife-friendly plantings, an all-abilities playground, and interpretive signage.⁸

Socioeconomic Characteristics

Population data helps recreation planners paint a picture of a region and helps to inform decisions about public needs and preferences. The Clermont State Historic Site is located at the southern border of Columbia County, and north border of Dutchess. Residents of these two counties comprise the majority of its visitorship. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the median age in Columbia County is nearly 10 years older than New Yorkers overall (48 years old vs. 39 statewide) and its residents have slightly more education than the state overall

(44% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher vs 40% statewide.⁹ While the median household income in Columbia County (\$68,750) is lower than statewide (\$74,314), Columbia County residents have a significantly higher rate of homeownership (74%) than the overall state (55%).

In Dutchess County, a somewhat different picture emerges. Although characteristics for both counties are similar in the areas of education and homeownership, Dutchess has a median age of just over 42 years and a median household income of \$88,051, indicating a slightly younger, more affluent population.¹⁰

Population Trends

Several population shifts are anticipated in New York that may impact visitor use patterns at Clermont. Over the past decade the State’s population has grown more slowly than the nation overall. Between 2010 and 2019, the State’s population increased by just 0.4 percent, compared to a national rate of 6.3 percent.¹¹ Additionally, according to The Empire Center, an Albany-based think tank, NY State could be moving toward its first population decline since

the 1970s.¹² In fact, between July 2019 and July 2020, the state’s population fell by 126,355 people, to 19.3 million, a decline of 0.65%, and the most of any state by total and by percentage. This period coincides with the start of the Coronavirus Pandemic.¹³

Beginning in 2020, the Covid-19 Pandemic brought marked changes in the use of public lands. As people sought safe outdoor recreation opportunities, large numbers of urban residents dispersed to the suburbs, or further, significantly affecting both park visitation and resident work patterns.¹⁴ The state may continue to see a work-from-home trend and, as residents find ways to provide their services remotely out of their rural homes, Hudson Valley counties may continue to see a rise in residents working from home-based offices and businesses.¹⁵

Second home and commuter home ownership may also continue to grow as more urban residents, primarily from the New York City metropolitan area but also from Albany,

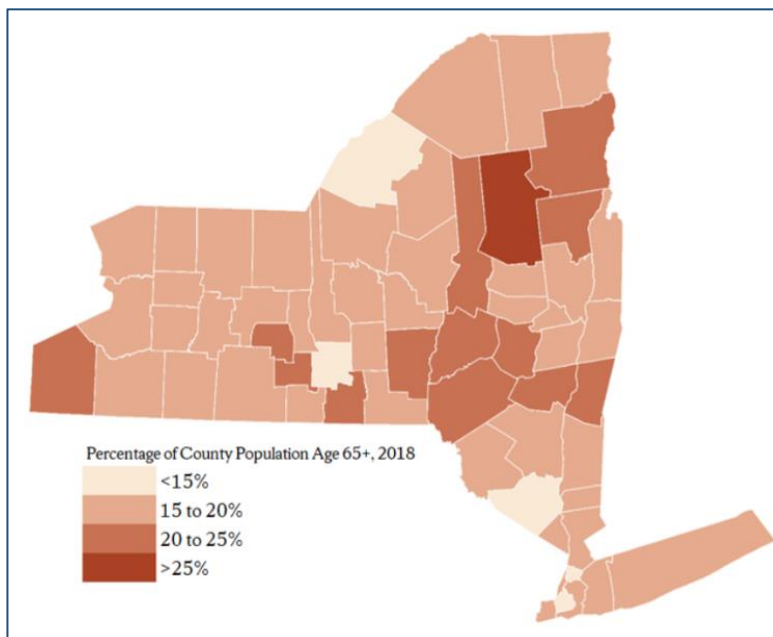
Kingston, and Poughkeepsie, take advantage of the accessibility of the region’s relative affordability, safety, and appealing, rural quality of life.¹⁶ While it is not clear whether these changes may persist, all have potential to influence future recreation patterns and demand.

Another significant change is an increase in the state’s older adult population, which is growing faster than any other age group. Over the past decade, the number of people in NYS aged 65 and over increased by 26 percent, making this a larger portion of the State’s population than ever before, with nearly one in six, or 3.2 million, residents.¹⁷

Economic Contribution

The nonprofit organization, Parks & Trails NY, notes that NYS Parks contribute as much as \$5 billion in park and visitor spending and support nearly 54,000 jobs in the state.¹⁸ Factors that determine the economic impact of a recreation facility on its region may include money spent locally for operations, staff salaries, housing,

Figure 1 – New York State counties with more than 20% of residents over 65 years old



Data source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey (Map: Clare Pendergrast)

and other services and materials required to maintain or improve the site.

A facility’s economic contribution is also determined by how many people visit the site from outside the immediate area and how much they spend while they are in the community. These visitors can have a significant impact on local economies, and bring new revenue to the overall region as they shop, eat out, pay for transportation, and stay at local inns and hotels as well as to the facility for special events, entry fees, and gift shop items.¹⁹ Dutchess County Tourism estimated that, in 2021, tourists generated approximately \$632 million in spending in the region.²⁰

A number of significant tourist destinations are located within a 20-mile radius of Clermont, and both state and federal historic sites of interest to history buffs are found within a two-hour drive of the Site. The Olana State Historic Site (City of Hudson) is located to the north and Mills-Norrie and Staatsburgh State Historic Site (Staatsburg) and Clinton House (City of Poughkeepsie) are to the south.

National Park Service sites in the region include the Martin Van Buren National Historic Site (in the Village of Kinderhook), the Vanderbilt Mansion, the Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site, and Springwood National Historic Site, home of Franklin D. Roosevelt (in the Town of Hyde Park). Across the Hudson River in Ulster and Greene Counties are the Senate House State Historic Site (City of Kingston) and the Thomas Cole National Historic Site (Town of Catskill).

Tourism related specifically to history, or “Heritage tourism,” continues to grow as a leisure time activity. The National Trust for Historic Preservation defines this activity as “traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present.”²¹ Heritage tourists from outside a region may stay multiple days, visiting more than one site. Both

domestic and international travelers participate in heritage tourism and, according to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, “those that do stay longer, spend more, and travel more often.”²² In addition to creating jobs and business opportunities, heritage tourism helps to protect historic resources and related open space, and can ultimately improve the quality of life for residents.



Top to bottom: Independence Day at Clermont (2021), Operation Unite NY (2022); Potential Fields Opening (2015)



Other draws to the region have resulted from a renewed interest in storied personalities from American history generated through popular culture, including theatrical productions such as “Hamilton.” Additionally, milestones such as the 250th anniversary of the Revolutionary War, to be commemorated by New York State from 2024 to 2033, is likely to bring in history buffs and renewed interest to the region.

The wedding industry is another economic driver in Columbia and Dutchess counties, as guests patronize local inns, restaurants, shops, beauty salons and spas, while visiting. Clermont is a popular wedding venue, hosting 18 to 20 weddings annually, with an average of 125 guests per event, and they represent an important source of revenue for the Site.

Designations

Clermont’s boundary corresponds with three distinct historic designations. The first is a National Historic Landmark nomination for Clermont, with the boundary consisting of the southern two-thirds of the Site. The second is the Clermont Estates Historic District. The northern third of the site is contained within this boundary, and it includes three historic/ contributing features. Lastly, the entire Site is within the Hudson River Historic District National Historic Landmark. That nomination served to unite the Sixteen Mile and Clermont Estates districts, while also including land to the east, with its more typically vernacular buildings and landscapes associated with Palatine Germans and others.

Clermont is also a designated site in the National Park Service’s Maurice D. Hinchey Hudson River Valley Natural Heritage Area, with significance in Architecture, Corridor of Commerce, Landscapes & Gardens, and the Revolutionary War.²³

The Hudson River Historic District is a National Register of Historic Places designation that includes several historic features along the Hudson River, including Clermont. The district encompasses a two-mile stretch with seven estates that were developed from the mid- to late-nineteenth century, represents some of the most significant historic sites and iconic landscapes in the nation²⁴

Legal Considerations

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), Section 106, requires federal agencies to consider the effects on historic resources on projects they carry out. If a federal or federally-assisted project has the potential to affect historic resources, a Section 106 review is undertaken. This process gives the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, interested parties, and the public the chance to weigh in before a final decision is made. This process is an important tool for citizens to lend their voice in protecting and maintaining historic properties in their communities. New York State Section 14.09 of the State Historic Preservation Act (1980) places similar regulation of cultural assets on state agencies.



Historical Marker, Rhinebeck, NY

Clermont's Partnerships

Hudson City Dept. of Youth
Edward J. Arthur Elementary
Hudson Bluehawk Nation
After School Program,
Montgomery C. Smith Intermediate
Operation Unite NY (Hudson)
Catskill Wheelhouse School
Cornell Cooperative Extension of
Columbia and Greene Counties
Germantown Community Cupboard
Community Action of Greene
County
D.R. Evarts Library (Athens)
Hudson City School District
Bulkeley Middle School
Germantown Central School After-
School
Starr Library
Hudson Department of Youth
Education Network for Teachers and
Artists (ENTA)
Camp Palatine
Perfect Ten
Hudson Area Library
Greene County YMCA
Columbia County Historical Society
Crailo State Historic Site
1st Ulster County Militia
34th British Regiment
Hudson Hall
Stockbridge Munsee Community
Hillsdale Summer Youth Program
Hunter Elementary School
Columbia County Tourism
Dutchess County Tourism
Hudson Valley Greenway
Staatsburgh State Historic Site
Red Hook and Tivoli Libraries
New York Historical Society
Great Estate Consortium
Hudson Valley Writers Project
National Trust for Historic
Preservation
The Landmark Collaborative

Partnerships

Partnerships benefit the Site by helping to maintain close ties with the community and bring in fresh ideas, knowledge, and skills. Clermont has developed many valued partnerships, over the years (a partial list is shown, at left). The Friends of Clermont has 175 members and more than 2,000 individuals and organizations on their outreach mailing list. Established in 1978 as a 501c3, not-for-profit organization, the group is very active in its support of the Site.

The Friends facilitated the donation of property on the north end of the Site as well as nearly 8,000 historical objects to Clermont's collections. The Friends also helped to restore the exterior of the historic mansion and created a new video shown at the Visitor Center exhibit and worked to restore four formal gardens and the circa 1910 Children's Playhouse, as well as partnered with the Site to mount two important art exhibitions. The group also provides educational programming for local youth, including their largest and successful Harvesting History program.

Programs

Clermont offers programs and events for all age groups, and hosts live performances, bringing in musicians and speakers on special topics. Recently, the Site offered an informal playgroup in the Site's Teaching Garden, "Little Sprouts Day," Landscape Highlights: A Walking Tour of Clermont's Grounds, and a cooking program, "Some Like it Hot: Making a Spicy Sauce."

The National Park Service(NPS) has reported that, nationally, the average age of visitors to its parks and historic sites is around 50 years old.²⁵ The NPS notes that visitation among younger people has been declining over the past decade, at least partly due to a lack of inclusive programming.²⁶ This decline in visitation by younger ages also negatively affects the overall diversity of park visitors.²⁷ In an effort to shift these trends at Clermont, staff develop programming geared toward different age groups, including school-aged children and teens. Efforts to attract artists and develop special exhibits such as "Potential Fields" and "The Livingstons Get Inked!" have led to an increase in young adults visiting Clermont outside of school obligation. Site educators also actively develop content that reflects the



Outdoor events are popular with visitors of all ages.

agency’s “Our Whole History” initiative, which looks to bring forward the under-told stories of all the people who lived and worked at State Historic Sites.

School and adult tours are offered throughout the year by reservation, except on major holidays. Clermont welcomes groups from 10 to 100 people and offers garden, mansion, and specialized tours that run from 50 minutes to three hours. Group tours are available for a small per-person fee. Reservations must be made at least two weeks in advance of the visit. Bus parking and lunch packages are also available.

Interpretive and Educational Programs

Clermont has many objects and materials worthy of preservation and interpretation that represent a range of periods of the Site’s development. The Site is particularly well-documented for the early 20th century, however, and therefore a restoration date of circa 1930 has been adopted to govern treatment of the main house, the landscape, and other historic structures on the property. This historical period is considered to provide the best opportunities for restoration and interpretation, as few modifications were made to the main house or landscape after the mid-1930s, when the estate was home to Alice Delafield Clarkson Livingston and her daughters, Honoria Alice and Janet Cornelia.

Interpretive and educational content has been expanded and developed in recent years with the intent of conveying material related to a wider range of the Site’s previous occupants. In addition to the story of the Livingston family, material developed for the Site has begun to convey the experiences of the servants, enslaved people, free black workers, tenant farmers, immigrants, women, and indigenous people who have lived, worked at, and helped to shape, the Site. Interpretive signs installed in various locations at the Site are mostly concentrated around its historic structures.

Clermont’s educators have identified the expansion of research and interpretation of previously underrepresented groups as a priority, as part of the agency’s “Our Whole History” initiative that seeks to provide multiple perspectives, and to better reflect evolving demographics and contemporary interests.²⁸ Best practices and agency initiatives for interpretation prioritize conveying a more complete depiction of a site’s history, diversifying audiences, and encouraging visitors to interact with content in new ways. To move toward these objectives, Clermont’s education staff develop a mix of programming approaches and add interpretive elements that highlight the Site’s under-told history. In 2022, the Bureau of Historic Sites installed a new exhibit in the Visitor Center to reflect this more inclusive perspective.

Interpretation at Clermont falls into several categories: general visitor and group tours, public events, exhibits, school programming, internet and social media, and interpretive signage. Each is detailed below.

Tours

Clermont offers mansion tours year-round. All tours are guided and typically last 45 minutes to an hour. Groups generally visit the first and second floors of the mansion; however, the second floor is not wheelchair accessible. Tour tickets are purchased at the Visitor Center before entering. From 2021 to 2022 the mansion was closed for a capital project to restore the exterior. During this time a series of new programs and tours were created that highlighted the Site’s history and grounds, and these continue to be offered. The mansion reopened for public tours in 2023.

Exhibits

The main exhibit spaces at Clermont are in two separate areas: in the Visitor Center (historic carriage barn and stables) and in the mansion, where a second-floor gallery offers changing displays of artifacts from the Site’s collections. Exhibitions are created in close collaboration with conservation and/or curatorial staff from OPRHP’s Bureau of Historic Sites (BHS) and are rotated periodically, depending on staff capacity. The Visitor Center features a permanent exhibit which orients visitors to the Site’s history. In 2022, a new permanent exhibit was installed in the Visitor Center that reflects the Site’s more inclusive approach to telling its history. The Visitor Center also hosts changing panel exhibits in its stall spaces.

Special Events

Special public events represent a significant portion of Clermont’s annual attendance. The Site’s calendar is anchored by two major festivals – the Chancellor’s Sheep & Wool Showcase and a July 4th Independence Day celebration. Seasonal performances or tour-oriented events include Legends by Candlelight



Top: Artwork from the History Comics program in the Visitor Center

Above: Junior History Club members pose on the mansion steps.

Halloween tours, A Child’s Christmas, and Candlelight Evening Tableaux. These programs are supplemented by annually changing specialty tours, lectures, children’s programs, workshops, and musical events that bring variety to the Site’s regular offerings.

School Programs

Clermont offers field trips, a summer history club, and after-school programs, partnering with children’s organizations that either come to the Site or host Clermont educators at their own location. Field trip programs are open to public and private schools, as well as home-schooled groups, and summer campers who

visit the Site for organized educational programs, based on group needs. Primarily directed at fourth grade students, the Site has also hosted third and seventh grade groups.

Clermont’s after-school programming is robust, including a comic-themed program delivered at various local schools, as well as “Harvesting History,” held in a recreated nineteenth-century kitchen garden at the Site. Based on journals kept by Clermont Livingston from 1854-1880, and on a gardening book, *The Young Gardeners Assistant*, by Thomas Bridgeman, from Clermont Livingston’s collection, this free program provides an opportunity to use the Site’s natural and historic assets as a working tool for students to gain a better understanding of—and appreciation for—the open space and agricultural traditions of Clermont and the Hudson Valley. Located behind Sylvan Cottage, the teaching garden is planted and maintained by students and staff.

A NYS field trip grant program, “Connect Kids,” has been vital to supporting regional school groups visits at Clermont, providing funds for transportation. The Friends of Clermont are instrumental in helping schools apply for grants and bringing students the Site. Clermont’s educators are continually developing new materials and content that will reflect previously untold stories as Clermont seeks to create content that is more reflective of our multicultural past and welcoming to all.

Clermont’s History Comics Club brings in students from local elementary and high schools to learn about comic books as an art form in the context of Clermont’s many stories. The Junior History Club offers children 7- to 12-years-old a chance to explore the Site’s grounds, play popular games of other eras, and make crafts that help them learn about the lives of the Livingston family. At the end of the week-long program, the children put on a costumed performance for their parents.



Free concerts and other special events often take place on the lawn with the Hudson River as a backdrop.

Special workshops and events are offered throughout the year, some focused on the Site’s history and traditions of farming, such as jam-making, fermentation, or bookmaking, as well as on contemporary topics related to agriculture, food, and nutrition. A teacher orientation program, designed to bring teachers to review Clermont’s updated Visitor Center exhibit, is under development.

Internet and Social Media

Clermont staff use Facebook, Instagram, and WordPress blog entries to ensure an active social media presence for the Site. Interpretative content, ranging from easily digestible facts to higher-level academic material, is also posted online. Regular social media postings keep an active userbase up to date on events and programs, helping to maintain relationships with fans and history enthusiasts across the globe.

Cultural Resources

Visitors to Clermont will encounter a broad range of historically and culturally significant elements in the built environment. In addition to the former Livingston residence (mansion), there are historic barns, cottages, gardens, and a children’s playhouse. Among the surrounding landscape are also found ruins of earlier structures, including those of the Arryl and Englekirk houses, with their aura of mystery, as well as remains of a stone root cellar and underground icehouse, cemeteries, early farmhouses, and a Livingston family burial vault.

Historic Buildings

Mansion

The 8,050 square foot mansion seen today at Clermont represents the culmination of occupation by seven generations of the Livingston family. The structure saw significant changes over time according to the needs of the Livingston Family. Its evolution is as follows:

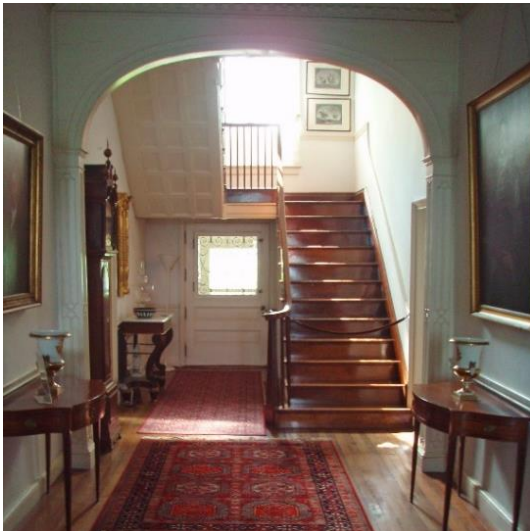
- 1740s** – The first mansion at the Site was constructed, a two-story, brick Georgian structure.
- 1777** – Mansion burned by the British army and successively rebuilt on the same foundation by a combination of enslaved and free laborers. Reusing the still-standing chimney walls, the replacement structure employed a thin veneer of stucco, painted white and scored to look like cut stone.
- 1813-14** – A one-story brick kitchen wing added on the mansion’s north side.
- 1827** – A one-story bedroom wing added on the mansion’s south side.
- 1874** – A mansard roof with dormers is added, giving the mansion its third floor.
- 1894** – A second story with matching mansard roof constructed on the south wing and a large porch added to the building’s west side (removed in the 1920s).



Stone patio on the west side of the mansion, the original front entrance

Clermont State Historic Site FEIS – Environmental Setting

Presently furnished to its 1931 appearance, the mansion's interior is largely based on photographic evidence and oral history interviews with Honoria Livingston McVitty. The first and second floors are used for public tours, while the basement and third floors are reserved for staff offices, equipment, and collections storage. The fourth floor or attic largely houses air-handling ductwork.



The mansion's interior today appears much as it did in the 1930s.



From top to bottom: Visitor Center (Carriage Barn), Clermont Cottage, the Red Barn

Visitor Center (Carriage Barn)

Located on a rise southeast of the mansion, the Carriage Barn is functionally associated with the Livingston's late 19th to early 20th century use of the property. The wood frame, 2640 square foot building was first constructed as a working barn (circa 1860). An attached shed was added around 1876, and horse stalls were installed in the 1880s or early 1890s. When the Site was established in 1962, the structure was used as a facility maintenance building, and that use continued until 1985. Between 1985-1987 the carriage barn was converted into a public visitor center with educational exhibits, a bookstore/giftshop, and restrooms. A loft area is used for storage, and stalls in the former stable are used for activities and exhibit space.

Clermont Cottage

A simple, vernacular structure with mid-20th century additions, Clermont Cottage is an important building and still in active use. The cottage's historic core dates to between 1790-1830, when it likely housed estate employees and, in the later 19th century, possibly a head gardener.²⁹ An addition was constructed in the mid-1940s, and the cottage was expanded again in the early 1950s, to a total of 2,500 square feet. The cottage's main section is one-and-a-half stories, and the one-story addition includes a full basement. The building now houses offices for the Friends of Clermont groups and is used as an event space that can accommodate up to 65 people.

Red Barn (McVitty or Cow Barn)

The NYS Cultural Resource Information System (CRIS) lists this structure as the John Henry Livingston Barn, c. 1875.³⁰ Physical evidence, however, suggests that the barn was built no earlier than the mid-1880s, most likely in the 1890s or slightly later.³¹ Although it was known by Honoria Livingston as the Cow Barn, the interior does not appear to be configured to house cows. The two-story, 5000 square foot barn has gable end doors and a rubble stone foundation. Its modest but distinctive architecture and interior finishes are evidence of its function as an estate outbuilding.³²

The barn is mostly unrestored, though structural stabilization was completed in 1994, and the roof was replaced in 2019. The exterior has significant deterioration, especially to the wood siding and decorative trim. The interior is largely intact and relatively free from water damage. The Red Barn is not served with electrical service or water, although there is a water supply system with wells, pumps, and underground piping of undetermined age. Associated outbuildings include a pump house north of the barn, and a separate building site, about 20 feet to the east, where a structure is visible still standing on a 1962

survey map, labeled “garage;” however, this is possibly the site of an earlier cow barn that may have housed John Henry Livingston’s dairy operations, which began at Clermont about 1879. A 1956 aerial image shows a second structure of frame construction with a metal roof is visible to the west of the Red Barn that is considered likely to have housed livestock.³³



Sylvan Cottage

Sometimes referred to as the Gatekeeper’s Cottage, Sylvan Cottage contributes to Clermont’s historic significance. Constructed in the late 18th or early 19th century, Sylvan was the last portion of the estate to be occupied by a Livingston family member.³⁴ Reginald and Honoria McVitty lived there seasonally from around 1935, and Mrs. McVitty continued to use the cottage until her death in 2000. During the 19th century and early 20th century, the cottage was used as an employee residence. The 2,500 square foot, five-room residence is sited along the northern carriage road loop not far from the original entrance. Associated outbuildings include a garage, tool/work shed, and a foundation of what possibly was a barn. While some stabilization work has been done on the cottage, the structure is in a highly deteriorated condition.



Children’s Playhouse

Built around 1911 as a utility building (historically used as a garden shed), this 18-foot by 10-foot structure was remodeled in 1913 as a children’s playhouse by Alice Livingston, who also created a nearby “children’s garden.” The structure was restored in 2022 and has interpretive potential.



Greenhouse

A circa 1912 greenhouse (likely an expansion of an earlier structure) has a metal framework and concrete pad connected to a small adjacent brick and wood frame building. All are in unstable condition.

From top: Sylvan Cottage, Children’s Playhouse, greenhouse



Icehouse and Root Cellar

Remnant historic structures at Clermont include various remains from the estate's use as a functional country residence. The stone foundations of an icehouse and root cellar are found south of the mansion, likely dating from the late 18th or early 19th century.³⁵ An 1880 photo shows the icehouse as a small wood frame building with a gable roof, but this portion of the structure is no longer extant.³⁶ Another icehouse foundation is found at the base of a hill west of the main parking lot.



The root cellar is a simple stone structure, typical of those used in this era, which used the earth's insulating properties to store vegetables, typically carrots, turnips, beets, and potatoes.

Early House Sites

The remains of several houses are found today at Clermont. Most appear to have housed staff employed by the Livingstons, or tenant farmers. These structures are no longer standing, and their foundations are mostly filled with rubble and vegetation.

Clermont's remnant structures include stone foundations of an Icehouse (top) and a root cellar

Known house sites at Clermont include:

Martin Rifenburg House – A remaining cellar cavity with evidence of nearby outbuildings. Livingston family members recount that this may have been the home of an estate employee in the 1920s.³⁷ A building in this approximate location also appears in 1873 and 1888 county atlas maps.³⁸

Adam Donely House – Remains include a cellar and a stone cistern, along with brick debris comparable in size and characteristics to that used in the Arryl House. Nineteenth century census data show several individuals with the name Donely (or variants) residing on or near Clermont around the mid-1800s, and some residents of that name (or similar) are indicated as employed at the estate as gardeners, coachmen, laborers, and domestic workers.³⁹

M. Lasher House – Likely a tenant farmer house; M. Lasher is indicated as the resident on an 1873 map. This parcel was identified as held by C. Livingston and as part of the Livingston family's leased agricultural lands. A 1956 aerial photo also shows a large barn at the end of a driveway at this location.

Miscellaneous Site Infrastructure (Non-Historic)

Other buildings at the Site are part of the day-to-day function or have been determined to have no historic significance (see also Appendix A). Non-Historic structures identified at the Site include:

- Maintenance Building (1985), Storage Sheds
- HVAC Bunker (1982)
- Sylvan Garage (added in 20th century)
- Sylvan Pump House
- Pump (Chlorinator) House
- Entrance Contact Booth
- Public Restroom (1969)

Historic Landscape

Clermont's landscape has been consciously designed over generations by individual members of the Livingston family and their staff. Some areas are associated with a single person, and all reflect trends and aesthetic values of their era. Landscape elements associated with the Livingstons include:

- Arryl House (ruins and associated elements, e.g., horse track to the east)
- Historic North Road (the Avenue)/various carriage roads
- Underwater acreage/dock
- Gardens and Lilac Walk
- Stone walls and piers
- Ice Pond and dam
- Family burial vault mound
- Pet cemetery
- Northeast and northwest dumps, Pine Avenue Ravine Dump

Arryl and Belvedere Houses

Belvedere was a mansion constructed circa 1770 for Robert R. Livingston, the future Chancellor, and his new wife, Mary Stevens. Mary's father, John Stevens was a future member of the Continental Congress who purchased a suite of furniture as a wedding present for the couple. The brick Georgian house was burned by the British in October 1777. Rather than rebuild at that location, however, the Chancellor chose to have the foundation filled in and planted a single weeping willow in the center of the former house site.

The Arryl House was also the Chancellor Livingston's home. The house was well-known during its time. Constructed circa 1790 by Robert R. Livingston, its "H"-shaped design was presumably influenced by European sources. This house also all but burned to the ground in 1909, from a fire started by workmen who were burning leaves.⁴⁰ With no roof to protect them, the Arryl house remains have been subject to ongoing damage from weather and vegetation. Earlier damage occurred from vines planted by the Livingston Family, "to create a picturesque ruin."⁴¹ Years of heavy plant growth compromised the mortar and kept the walls damp. The ruins are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and represent an important chapter in U.S. history.



From top: The Wilderness Garden (2022); Janet Livingston at work; historic dock

Historic Gardens

Clermont’s gardens were created by Alice Livingston in the 1920s and 1930s. Influenced by her European travels, the gardens include an Italian staircase, a walled garden, with some Arts and Crafts-style plantings. Historic gardens maintained at the Site are:

Walled Garden – Symmetrical paths and planting beds, influenced by gardens in Florence, Italy

Wilderness Garden – Informal design associated with English gardens; centerpiece is a fishpond.

Upper Cutting Garden – Provided cut flowers for the mansion; accompanied by a circa 1926 greenhouse that replaced an earlier and larger greenhouse dating from the late 19th century.⁴²

The Children’s Garden – Adjacent to the Upper Cutting Garden and the Children’s Playhouse

Carriage Roads

Carriage roads were central features of large Hudson Valley estates, allowing for strategic contemplation of nature at various outlooks and scenic points. The Clermont Site is interlaced with carriage drives and trails, some with names associated with the Livingston Family’s use. The “Garden Road” leads south from Clermont Cottage toward the greenhouse and cutting garden, and “Pine Road,” which leads north from the mansion through a stand of mature pines. The original surface of Pine Road was rough cobblestone, still visible in some spots under more recent applications of gravel. A carriage road on the hill above the Arryl house site is still in use as part of the Site’s active trail system.

Clermont Dock and Boathouse Site

Remnants of a stone and timber dock are found on the Hudson River shoreline. No firm date is documented regarding when a permanent dock was established at Clermont, but some sort of boating access was likely built when the estate was developed in the 1740s.⁴³ The dock went through several forms as needs evolved over the years and the adjacent rail corridor expanded. Family lore suggests that the landing was used for coal deliveries as well as for recreational craft. An undated photo shows a small building on the dock, possibly a boathouse.⁴⁴ In aerial photos, traces of a road leading from the mansion down to the waterfront are still visible.



The Ice Pond and its pastoral setting are integral elements of Clermont’s cultural landscape.

Ice Pond

In the very late nineteenth or twentieth century, John Henry Livingston had a small spring-fed pond dug. It was later used for ice harvesting and skating. Today it is a key part of the cultural landscape, contributing to the character of this part of the Site as well as providing wildlife habitat.

Viewshed

Catskill Mountain views from Clermont are important to the Site’s history, having been the inspiration for the name that Robert Livingston gave to his estate (Clare Mount or “clear mountain”). The designed landscape at Clermont includes plantings that were carefully placed to accentuate views. The family traditionally maintained a clear view to the Saugerties Lighthouse from the patio at the west entry, and Alice Livingston created what is still called the “Long View” when she cleared the tree line to the south so the Shawangunk Ridge could be seen from the mansion patio.⁴⁵

Archaeological Resources

Early Inhabitants

The Hudson Valley has been a home for Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. Carbon tests dating back to 3000 BC found cooking fires containing remnants of meals, with mussel shells and animal bones. The Haudenosaunee, Mohican, Munsee-Lenape, and Schaghticoke Nations included all or parts of today's Columbia and Dutchess Counties in their traditional lands. The Munsee and the Mohican peoples' homelands centered around the Hudson River and used similar words, Muhheakantuk and Mahicannituck respectively, meaning "Waters that are Never Still."⁴⁶

In the early 1600s, European settlers entered into economic and military agreements with Native peoples to create alliances, increase trade opportunities, or engage in land "deals." Participation (or attempts to remain neutral) by indigenous groups in the war between the Patriots and Loyalists had affected Native communities and compromised their livelihoods. With populations diminished and lands taken over, some Indigenous groups, such as the Munsee-Lenape and the Stockbridge Mohicans, joined together on new land provided by the Oneidas in New Stockbridge, near Oneida Lake in central New York.⁴⁷

While some smaller Mohican groups moved in and out of the area, by 1736 most larger communities were pushed out of the region. During the gradual removal of the Stockbridge, Massachusetts community in the late 18th century, at least some of these people established a community in a marshy area near

the Clermont estate. Some were employed intermittently on the farm at Clermont, but their freedom to leave when they found conditions unfavorable frustrated their employers. By 1793, this group had relocated farther west.

In 1830, former president Andrew Jackson signed into law the Indian Removal Act which forcibly moved Native communities from east of the Mississippi to the west. While some Indigenous nations resisted, and remain to this day in their homelands, not all were able to persevere. Eventually the Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians resettled and now live on a reservation in Wisconsin.



Iroquois engaging in trade with Europeans, 1722, illustration by Claude-Charles Le Roy de la Potherie, a French chronicler who wrote about Indigenous People, including the Huron, Iroquois Confederacy, and Abenaki. (See Endnote 47)

Archaeological Investigations



Archaeological excavations and scans were completed at Clermont in the 1970s and 1980s.

Because of its location in the Hudson Valley region, it is likely that evidence of regional indigenous communities occurs at the Clermont Site. Archaeological items found at the Site, however, have primarily been related to the Livingston Family's occupation.

In 1967, excavations for the main visitor parking lot revealed a square stone foundation and a circular stone feature near the lot's central eastern edge. Rubble stone foundations (approximately 40' x 40') estimated to date from around 1774-76, and a circular stone path (48' in diameter) were identified as the remains of Belvedere, the Chancellor Livingston's home, which had been burned by the British in 1777. Archeological test pits dug in the area in 2016 revealed evidence of the structure's burning, as well as shards of china and other materials consistent with daily life at the house. At least one of the test pits may have touched into the midden (refuse heap) for the house. Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) testing in 2017 revealed the outline of Belvedere's foundation. The circular feature was determined likely to be a walkway in a decorative garden.

When discovered, the Belvedere ruin was partially uncovered, measured, and mapped, then covered with gravel and paved to protect the material from disturbance. The ruins appear to have been only marginally impacted when uncovered and will likely provide important information related to the Chancellor's period of occupation, as well as help to clarify facts related to the Family's early development and use of the estate.

In the 1970s and 1980s, archaeologists from the OPRHP Division of Historic Preservation (DHP) conducted extensive excavations at Clermont. Excavations along a utility trench extending from the mansion's northwest corner to an existing HVAC bunker revealed a significant archaeological deposit of household debris downslope from the mansion. The stratified deposit included construction and kitchen debris related to Clermont's original ca.1730-1777 occupation, as well as subsequent construction rubble associated with the ca.1777 burning and destruction of the Site. Overall, the deposit within the utility line represents a significant archaeological feature at Clermont.

The 1982 *Clermont State Historic Park Master Plan Update* indicated that test excavations were completed for sitewide utility work and archaeological study. These included those completed for Arryl House (1978), the east porch of the mansion (1977), and the northwest wing of the mansion (1976). Less detailed reports prepared by the OPRHP Archaeology Unit include: Mansion North Porch Wall (1971) and West Foundation (1975), Radio Line (1975), Braziers (1975 and 1976), Monument Location (1976),

Fence Line (1977), Security Lighting (1979), Walled Garden (1979), East Lawn Sidewalk (1980), Handicapped Access/Sign (1981). The 1982 Master Plan Update also noted a backlog of materials salvaged during past excavations that still required cataloguing and additional analysis. The document also indicated that there are possibly many unknown sites scattered throughout the property and recommended that a park-wide archaeological survey be completed.⁴⁸

Since 1982, excavations in and around the various site structures (e.g., Clermont Cottage (2003, 2012), Visitor Center/Carriage Barn (1986-1989, 2009-2010), and the Children’s Playhouse (1994-1995)) and site utilities (2010 septic system, 2019 boiler replacement) have continued to be carried out as needed.

A map of excavations and known archaeological elements was developed during the production of this Master Plan, providing the most extensive documentation of these resources at the Site to date.

Natural Resources

While OPRHP classifies more than 70 percent of Clermont’s total acreage as undeveloped, or “natural,” Clermont’s landscape is largely a human-modified environment. As a former agricultural and residential property, its lands have been fully cleared in the past and, aside from a few significant old-growth trees, the woodlands are predominantly second-growth forest. Mowing has been reduced in some open areas, which provides grassland habitat for wildlife.



Rock outcroppings along at Clermont’s trails are characteristic of those found throughout the region.

Flora

A biodiversity inventory was conducted as part of plan development (see Appendix B for a listing of known and potential plant species found at the Site). Cultivated plants around the mansion and gardens include ornamental species such as Japanese wisteria (*Wisteria floribunda*), sweet mock orange (*Philadelphus coronarius*), and many lilac varieties (*Syringa spp.*). Trees planted by former occupants include black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), Eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*), and honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), many of which are aging and in decline.

Clermont has an abundance of native nut trees, including white oak (*Quercus alba*), chestnut oak (*Quercus montana*), and shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*). Successional old fields at the Site are dominated by native and non-native forbs, goldenrods, aster, rubus (rose family), multiflora rose, grasses, and other species. Old-growth trees can still be found within Clermont’s woodlands.

Areas of successional northern hardwood forest are found at the Site, with a subcanopy of red cedar, ash, red maple, white pine, and oak have a weedy understory, which includes invasive Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*), and there are many downed trees. Aerial images and 1938 topographic data show that these areas were formerly open cropland. Two discoveries of note during the June 2022 BioBlitz were a healthy population of wild ginger and a few specimens of walking fern.

Fauna

Clermont is home to a varied assemblage of fauna, generally species characteristic of western Dutchess and Columbia Counties (for a list of fauna identified at the Site see Appendix C.) The Site supports a wide range of mammals, including coyotes, foxes, woodchucks, rabbits, chipmunks, deer, snakes, frogs, turtles, eagles, owls, red-tailed hawks, and wild turkeys, but additional species are undoubtedly present. Fauna lists developed for the Master Plan are based on information from the OPRHP Regional Biologist, Clermont Staff, NYNHP, Hudsonia, Ltd., and biological surveys of the facility.

The Hudson River offshore from Clermont is identified by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) as both a Waterfowl Conservation Area and an Anadromous Fish Concentration area. The generally undeveloped nature of the shoreline in this stretch likely provides an important buffer which contributes to the quality of wildlife habitat in these areas.

Ecologically Significant Communities

While its long history of human use has greatly altered its ecology, Clermont's natural landscape is characterized by diversity. Fields and forests, tidal flats and wetlands, rock outcrops and meadows all provide habitat for an abundance of wildlife. Plant communities, in varying states of maturity, include Appalachian oak-pine forest, calcareous talus slope woodland, successional northern hardwoods, and successional red cedar woodland.

A red maple swamp-white oak swamp area in the northeastern part of the Site that has been confirmed as a state-rare type of wetland and mapped as significant in NY Natural Heritage Program's (NYNHP) database (Conservation Rank G3G4 S2 – imperiled in NYS). According to historic topographic maps and orthoimages, the wetland has been forested at least since the 1940s and 50's, but the surrounding area was

likely cleared, and farming into the edge of the wetland may have slightly reduced its size. There is another occurrence of that wetland type in the south-central part of the Clermont property that has not been mapped in the NYNHP database. This plant community is not a large enough area or of high enough quality to be significant statewide but is of local significance for its native flora.

An Appalachian oak-hickory forest community is found on a lower slope of the Site, facing the Hudson River. This area has very flat terrain, with shallow standing water and mossy hummocks. Ash trees (both live and in decline) are present in the canopy at its periphery and may be a good candidate to propose as a living ash monitoring plot or for biocontrol release.

The Calcareous Talus Slope Woodland documented at Clermont is locally significant, with potential for rare or uncommon flora. Marked by a large old-growth white oak, this open woodland is found on a narrow north-south running ridge, dominated by shale talus (rock debris that accumulates at the base of a slope) with some small rocky outcrops. Although invasive plants, including Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) and Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) are present, this woodland community is a priority area for conservation due to the richness of its native flora.

The Hudson River is designated as a Significant Natural Community (tidal river) In the NYNHP Biodiversity Databases.

Threats

The greatest threat to natural resources at Clermont is the invasion and spread of exotic species. Invasive plants are locally abundant, and, at Clermont, are often found at woodland edges and along trails.⁴⁹ Increasingly impacting the region's native ecological communities, invasive species at the Site include Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*), common

buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*), various shrub honeysuckles (*Lonicera spp.*), Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*), Common mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) and garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*).

Other species confirmed at the Site (via IMap Invasives) are Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*), Summer Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*), Wineberry (*Rubus phoenicolasius*), Porcelain Berry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*), and Japanese knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*). Also of concern at Clermont include black swallowwort (*Vincetoxicum nigrum*) and tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), present at the Arryl House ruins.

Water chestnut (*Trapa natans*) has been documented in the Hudson River at the Site as well as in Clermont's historic Ice Pond. An invasive species that can spread very rapidly, it forms dense mats that shade out other submerged aquatic plants, contributing to low dissolved oxygen levels. In 2022, stewardship staff, hand-pulled the water chestnut infestation in the Ice Pond. Water chestnut seeds can remain viable for up to 12 years, so their removal will be an annual project.

Field visits have confirmed the presence of invasive vines at Clermont, including Oriental bittersweet (*C. orbiculatus*) and aggressive natives such as poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) and Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), which are growing into the woodland canopy in some areas. Oriental bittersweet grows densely along Pine Road, which leads north from the mansion. The vines are particularly abundant in areas where the pines have been replanted. Woody vines such as bittersweet can destroy masonry, damaging foundations or walls of significant historic buildings. A 2021 project targeted Oriental bittersweet removal from areas with historical significance and high visibility, including walkways, trails, and in the historic gardens. An estimated 30 acres impacted by bittersweet and

vines were targeted for manual treatment via cutting and hand-digging the roots.

A control project is planned to address Japanese knotweed along the Bridle Trail in the Site's northeastern section. Common reed (*Phragmites australis*) was found in a wet meadow area, and a small patch of black jetbead (*Rhodotypos scandens*) was discovered in 2022 and removed by digging that summer. Invasive species treatments require multiple years of follow-up treatment and monitoring.

Other efforts to address invasive species include a biocontrol project targeted for Spotted knapweed (*Centaurea stoebe ssp. micranthos*). A biocontrol project was implemented in the field adjacent to the Ice Pond, where a root boring weevil (*Cyphocleonus Achates*), which are known to weaken or kill existing knapweed plants, was released.

Animals the DEC identifies as invasive that have already or may impact Clermont include Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), Spongy Moth, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, and Southern Pine Beetle. The EAB was first detected in the region in 2013. More recently, the rapidly spreading Spotted lanternfly can damage crops and other plants, including grapevines, maples, black walnut, birch, willow, and other trees. This pest has the potential to impact the state's forests as well as agricultural and tourist industries.⁵⁰

Diseases affecting the state's trees include Beech leaf disease, which can kill a mature tree in six to ten years. While not yet identified in Columbia County, occurrences have been documented in Dutchess as far north as Rhinebeck, Putnam, and Westchester Counties.⁵¹ Beeches are an important woodland species in northeastern forests, and mature trees with historic significance are being affected at many OPRHP sites (e.g., the Beech Allée at John Jay Homestead State Historic Site).

The NY Natural Heritage Program database indicates there are seven Buffered Element Occurrences (BEO) that intersect with the project site. Three of those occurrences are fish, found within the Hudson River. Two additional BEOs are fish concentration areas within the Hudson River. The sixth occurrence is bald eagle. An eagle nest site has been documented more than 4,500 feet from the project site, and the area in between the site and the nest site is heavily vegetated. The seventh occurrence is a Red Maple-Swamp White Oak Swamp significant natural community.



Top: Data collection during “Bioblitz” event at Clermont (Summer 2022) Left: Root boring weevils were released in one of the Clermont’s meadows as a targeted “biocontrol” project to address invasive Spotted knapweed. Right: Invasive Spotted knapweed flower



Male Hooded Merganser

Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats

On November 15, 1987, the NYS Department of State (DOS) designated a five-mile stretch of the eastern half of the Hudson River, from Clermont to North Germantown, as a Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat. The Germantown-Clermont Flats area includes approximately 1,000 acres of fish and wildlife habitat in an area described as “shallow, freshwater, tidal flats and submerged aquatic vegetation beds; rare in New York State.”⁵² Bird species such as osprey and large concentrations of migrant waterfowl are found in this ecological region.

Waterfowl Concentration Area

During winter months, significant concentrations of waterfowl occur in the Hudson River in the Germantown-Clermont Flats area. Diving ducks, such as the common goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), and hooded merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*), are found regularly here during fall migration periods.

Open river areas on the Hudson are also heavily used by dabbling ducks, including the American black duck (*Anas rubripes*) and blue-winged teal (*Anas discors*), during calm weather.

Waterfowl are occasionally found overwintering here, and rafts of over 1,000 birds have been observed during fall migrations. Other bird

species, such as common loons, grebes, gulls, wading birds, and shorebirds have been known to use the area. A comprehensive list of birds observed at the Site is available in Appendix C.

Reptiles and Amphibians

Germantown-Clermont Flats contains habitat used by species such as painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta*), red-spotted newt (*Notophthalmus v. viridescens*), and redback salamander (*Plethodon cinereus*), as well as gray treefrog (*Hyla versicolor*), spring peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*), and wood frog (*Rana sylvatica*). There are likely other amphibian and reptile species at the Site that have not been confirmed. A list of reptiles and amphibians observed at the Site is available in Appendix C.

Fish

This part of the Hudson River is a major spawning area for American shad (*Alosa sapidissima*); concentrations found here are unusual in NY State. These flats also serve as important nursery and feeding areas for striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*), white perch (*Morone americana*), and other freshwater species.

Nuisance Wildlife

Groundhogs are found throughout the Site, often inhabiting dens underneath buildings. Squirrels, racoons, and other small animals inhabit some of the Site’s vacant buildings (causing significant amounts of structural damage), including the Red Barn and Sylvan Cottage. Deer are prevalent at the site and protecting the historic gardens from browsing is an ongoing challenge. Mice can be troublesome in some of the buildings.

Physical Resources

Despite its long history as a residence and farm, just five of Clermont’s 592 acres are currently classified as “developed.” 140 acres are classified “managed” land – which includes lawns, gardens, and trails.

Geology, Soils, and Topography

The bedrock foundation of the Hudson River Valley was established in three mountain-building episodes beginning over a billion years ago. Beginning around 300,000 years ago, the Hudson River Valley was experiencing an ice age, during which it was covered and uncovered by several advances and retreats of glacial ice.⁵³ The entire region has been glaciated, and the Hudson River flows through ancient beds of glacial lakes and deposits of glacial sediment. Estuarine conditions were established in the Hudson River beginning about 12,000 years ago, after the glaciers receded.⁵⁴ See the FEIS Appendices for maps of surficial geology, soils, and topography of the Site.

The mineral composition and structure of shale and clay-rich sandstones change in the northwest part of Dutchess County near Clermont, where quartz and mica are found. Sandstone and shale of the “Austin Glen formation” found in these counties were originally formed in relatively deep water, as land sediments settled in ocean water. A ridge running north-south through the park has bedrock geology mapped as graywacke (a dark colored sandstone) and shale.

Soils

Of the 57 soil types found in this region, 30 or so tend to be poorly drained, largely due to the preponderance of clay.⁵⁵ Soils with the highest infiltration capacities are generally found along the Hudson River. Unconsolidated (loose) materials overlie bedrock in most of the region. Some are deposits of glacial till (accumulations of fine material, sand, and larger cobble-sized rocks from the last Ice Age), others are more recent deposits from streams.⁵⁶ The region is generally underlain with glacial till and shale bedrock. Bedrock is often near the surface along the edge of the Hudson River. Soils vary from sandy loam to a mixture of clay and sand.

The Site has a mix of soil types. Among the most predominant are somewhat level and poorly drained types (e.g., Rhinebeck series); rolling and very rocky soils found on slopes (Nassau channery silt loam); and Kingsbury and Knickerbocker soils, very deep, somewhat poorly drained, which formed in ancient lakebeds or from marine sediments.⁵⁷

Within Clermont’s oak hickory forested areas are found Canandaigua silt loam, along with Kingsbury and Rhinebeck soils (see Lundgren, flora surveys). In rocky outcrop areas soils have been mapped as Nassau channery silt loam, which are very rocky, with rolling topography. (See Appendices, Figure 8, Soils Map.)

Topography

The land at Clermont slopes down to the Hudson River shoreline, with a maximum elevation of 177 feet and a minimum of 13 feet. Much of the surrounding area is characterized by gently rolling topography. The western portion lies mostly from 100 to 200 feet above sea level, while to the east, elevations are

generally above 200 feet with some significant slopes. There are also large, level areas to the northeast and southeast, where some regulated wetlands are found. The lowest elevations, near sea level, are along the Hudson River (see Appendices, Figure 4, Surficial Geology Map).





Clermont's streams, wetlands and vernal pools provide important wildlife habitat for a range of species.

Water

The Hudson River is Clermont's key natural feature, with approximately one mile of Hudson River shoreline and 88 acres of underwater land. The River at this point is about a half-mile across. Other primary water resources include a NYS mapped wetland in the Site's north section, and the Ice Pond, (for Water Resources, see Appendices, Figure 7).

The Clermont property also has multiple small tributaries, including a small, unmapped stream that traverses the Site's southern section. Wetlands, seasonal streams, and vernal pools all contribute significantly to the area's biodiversity by providing essential habitat for many species. There are numerous unmapped wetlands found at the Site. Any activities proposed that may impact wetlands and their buffer area will require environmental review and, if necessary, permitting. There are no National Wetland Inventory (NWI, federal) mapped wetlands within the project site.

Clermont falls within the Rhinecliff to Wappinger Creek sub-watershed area of the Lower Hudson watershed. A central elevated spine bisects Columbia County, defining two major watersheds: to the spine's west, water flows via streams and creeks to the Hudson River. To the east, water flows to the Roeliff-Jansen Kill. The watershed divide passes Germantown's high point at 332 feet above sea level. Steep slopes (exceeding 15%) are mostly associated with the major waterways – the Hudson River, Roeliff-Jansen Kill, Camp Kill—but are also found along the watershed divide.⁵⁸



Visitors often come to Clermont in late afternoon to watch the sun set across the Hudson River.

Recreational Resources

Background

When Clermont was first developed, it was planned as a park to be used for recreation, and the state added picnic tables, roads, parking lot, and a public restroom. It was not until 1974 that the first Historic Site Manager was hired for Clermont, and the Site has continued to serve a somewhat hybrid function; some visitors come specifically to tour the mansion and historic setting while others come to enjoy the views, walk their dogs, and relax in a tranquil setting.

More recently, programs have been developed aimed at integrating these two elements, with fun, active, and educational activities for people of all ages. Common passive recreation activities at Clermont include enjoying Hudson River/Catskill views, picnicking, kite flying, watching a sunset, dog walking, birding, walking the grounds and trails, and viewing the gardens. These are generally unorganized and noncompetitive activities, which take place in undeveloped or environmentally sensitive areas that require minimal development.

Recreation Activity

Active recreation generally refers to more structured leisure time activities, often requiring specific infrastructure, such as playgrounds or ballfields. Although Clermont does not directly provide active recreation, visitors regularly engage in fitness or exercise activities including walking, jogging, bicycling, equestrian use (bridle/driving w/ buggy) and geocaching, as well as seasonal activities such as snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, sledding, and hunting (deer/archery only).

Programs

Accounting for a significant part of Clermont's recreational offerings at, a wide range of public

programs include seasonal events, such as the Sheep and Wool Showcase in the spring, and festive winter events in December, as well as large holiday celebrations for Independence Day and Halloween.

Throughout the year, a variety of seasonal workshops are offered for children, families, and adults, focusing on an array of changing topics including arts and crafts, cooking, nature, performing arts, and literacy. Ongoing programs at Clermont include tours of the mansion and specialty tours of the grounds, trails, and historic gardens.

Table 2 - Clermont Attendance 2019-2022

NYS Fiscal Year	# of Visitors
2019-20	107,458
2020-21	171,262
2021-22	117,818
2022-23	194,816

Visitation

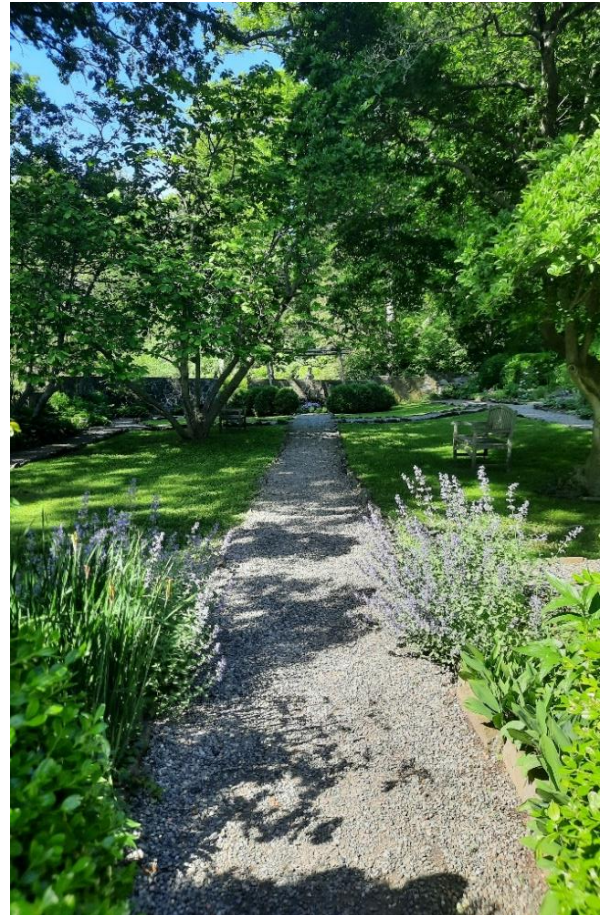
Yearly attendance has grown steadily at Clermont over the years. Between 2019-2021, however, visitor numbers rose significantly (see Table 2). This jump in visitation occurred during the Covid-19 Pandemic when schools, restaurants, gyms, museums, sports venues, and other indoor recreational activities were closed, and people sought safe access to public open space. This period also saw more people moving upstate from the greater NYC metropolitan area.

Recreational Need

Determining demand for recreation in the state occurs when OPRHP develops the *NY Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* (SCORP) every five years. The Relative Index of Need (RIN) is a method for comparing the demand for a particular recreation activity within a service area to the actual supply of that activity. The RIN is expressed on a numerical scale, with 10 being the highest level of need and 1 being the lowest.

The RIN for each NYS county was determined using a statewide survey.⁵⁹ The primary service area for Clermont has been identified as

Columbia, Dutchess, Putnam, and Ulster Counties. The availability of outdoor recreation types available at the Site (e.g., walking, relaxing in the park) was largely indicated as adequate in the most recent RIN study.



A path within the formal gardens

Operations and Infrastructure

Seasons and Hours

Clermont's grounds are open year-round from 8:30 a.m. to sunset. The Visitor Center is open Thursday to Sunday and Monday holidays year-round, from 10:30am-4:00pm. Mansion tours are offered year-round, from Thursday-Sunday and Monday holidays from 11:00am-4:00pm on the hour. Tickets are purchased at the Visitor Center.

Clermont's Visitor Center, operated by OPRHP staff, offers permanent and rotating educational exhibits, restrooms, an orientation video, and is also used for lectures and family programming.

There is a \$5 vehicle use fee in effect Saturday, Sunday and Monday holidays between April 1 to October 31, using the on-site pay stations in the main parking area.

Maintenance Area

Maintenance tasks includes mowing, weeding, snow plowing and hazardous tree monitoring and removal. Staff is also responsible for upkeep and repair of Site infrastructure, including fences, as well as maintenance and service of all Site equipment.

The Site's maintenance facility is situated about a one-half mile from the mansion and Visitor's Center, accessed by a short gravel drive east of Woods Rd. The maintenance area includes two buildings – one main structure with a two-bay garage on the east side and a small office, and a staff kitchen area and bathroom on the west side – and an outbuilding used for storage.

The maintenance building houses the Site's trucks, tractors, utility vehicles and riding mowers. The maintenance area also includes a shop for repairs and other Site projects. Tools and equipment are stored in the garage in tool benches, a storage/utility room, and closets. There is a loft used for storage above the west side space and accessed by stairs.

The maintenance building has water supplied by a well. Electric service and communications lines comes to the area by overhead power lines from County Route 6 to the east. While there is basic phone service through Germantown Telephone at this location, there

is no internet access at this time. Heat for the maintenance center is provided by an oil-fired furnace.

The maintenance facility has above-ground gas pumps that supply Regular gasoline.

Emergency Plans and Services

Clermont has an All-Hazard Emergency Action Plan (AHEAP) in place which establishes procedures for emergency preparedness, response, and recovery for severe weather, building evacuation, and medical emergencies. The AHEAP describes staff roles and responsibilities, protocols, and responses to emergencies. A copy is on file at the Clermont Fire Department, U.S. 9, Germantown, NY 12526. Clermont has been assessed for the potential of emergency situations related to all hazards.

Medical Emergencies

In a medical emergency, a call is placed to 911 or local emergency number. While waiting for EMS to arrive, Park Police, the park office and/or park manager are contacted, and, if applicable, stations of incoming emergency vehicles are informed.

Fire

The Clermont Fire Dept. will respond to and assume command of any reports of fire at the Site. Park maintenance and administration staff, along with Park Police, will ensure the building and/or area of the fire is evacuated and assist in directing the Fire Department to the location of the fire.

Severe Weather and Natural Disasters

Severe weather events include thunderstorms, tornados, floods, hurricanes, and blizzards. Emergencies that occur during a severe weather event should be reported to 9-1-1 and Park Police. Loss of power is a potential impact of severe weather and occurs periodically at Clermont. If the entire facility is impacted, the Facility

Manager is notified, and Regional Maintenance, the Regional Office, and/or electric provider (National Grid) are contacted to report the outage.

Evacuation

All OPRHP facilities have written evacuation procedures for each occupied building. In an emergency the evacuation of part or all of a facility may be necessary. In an evacuation, Site staff must immediately notify Park Police and Regional Administration. If assistance is needed from the local Fire Department, EMS and/or local police, Park staff will contact 9-1-1 or the local emergency number. Emergency shelter areas within the park:

1. Clermont Cottage (87 Clermont Ave, Germantown NY, 12526)
2. Clermont Visitors Center (416 Woods Road, Germantown NY, 12526)
3. Clermont Mansion (1 Clermont Ave, Germantown NY, 12526)
4. Clermont Maintenance Shop (431 Woods Road, Germantown, NY 12526)
5. Sylvan Cottage/Educational Gardens (172 Clermont Avenue, Germantown, NY 12526)

Evacuation routes:

1. Leave main parking lot, turn left to go north onto County Route 6 and follow to intersection with Route 9G (north or south).
2. Leave main parking lot, turn right to go south on County Route 6 into the town of Tivoli. Turn left onto Main St. and follow to Route 9G (north or south)

Animal Encounters

Any direct physical contact with an unknown animal, especially if it results in a bite or scratch, may have serious health consequences. Wild animals, alive or dead, can spread disease and pose potential physical health hazards. In the event of direct physical contact:

1. If necessary, provide first aid care and seek medical treatment immediately by calling 9-1-1.
2. If encounter includes a wild animal, contact Park Police and animal control.
3. If encounter includes any species known to carry rabies (typically bats, skunks, raccoons, and foxes), the local health department may need to be notified.

Operations

Clermont's buildings, landscape, and infrastructure are maintained by Site staff and regional maintenance crews. In addition to grounds maintenance, staff perform day-to-day activities related to ensuring safe public access. The front gate is opened daily, and the entry booth is staffed during major special events. The flagpole near the entrance is adjusted according to agency directives; otherwise, the flag remains up and is lighted at night.

Utilities

There is no available municipal water system at Clermont, and the facility's water supply comes from five on-site wells. One provides potable water to the mansion, Visitor Center, and the public restroom. This well and a water treatment building (pump house) were installed in 2006. A separate well provides potable water to Clermont Cottage and a water treatment system was installed in the cottage's basement in 2012. Water from the maintenance area well is unchlorinated and not suitable for drinking. Additional wells at Sylvan Cottage and near the gardens provide water for irrigation.

The facility is serviced for electric by National Grid. There are two separate utility feeds entering the Site: one from the north, which feeds the majority of buildings, and a separate connection to the maintenance area coming in from the east.

Upgrades to the HVAC Bunker (climate control systems), adjacent to the mansion, are planned.

Circulation

Vehicular

A paved entrance road leads to the Site's main parking area, which visitors may use to access the Visitor Center, the mansion, Arryl House Ruins, walking trails and picnic areas. A separate road enters the Site to the north of the main entrance, primarily for use by staff and authorized vehicles.

Parking

The main parking lot at Clermont is approximately one-quarter acre paved area near the Site's western border, adjacent to the picnic area and Visitor Center. Smaller parking areas, primarily for accessible parking, staff parking or visitor drop-offs, are located adjacent to the mansion, Visitor Center, and Clermont Cottage.

The main parking lot is generally sufficient for the typical volume of visitors. Overflow parking is not often necessary but, if needed during large events, it may be allowed on the lawns north or south of the main parking area. There are also several areas at the facility to park smaller groups of cars and an open lawn east of the Red Barn that can be used for program parking.

A vehicle counting device at the main entrance helps document the quantity of vehicles/visitors.

Pedestrian Facilities

Surfaces are quite variable throughout the Site and many lack the firm and stable surfaces required for accessibility. Defined pedestrian paths at Clermont are largely limited to areas around the mansion and Visitor Center. Paved asphalt paths lead from the parking lot to the Visitor Center, and along the Lilac Walk to the mansion. There is a short, paved path from the parking lot to the public restroom. Not all routes are accessible. Compacted gravel paths are found adjacent to and, in some cases, within the gardens, and flagstone paths are found at the mansion's east entrance. In front of the mansion's west façade is a large flagstone patio intermixed with areas of lawn and gravel.

Visitors use the gravel carriage roads, the natural-surface trail system, or walk across mowed lawn area to reach elements outside of the Site's historic core. Paths leading from the parking area to the Arryl House are a combination of gravel and mowed lawn. The lawn area to the south of the parking lot is important for events and overflow parking. The path leading to this area is often wet and/or eroded.

Chapter 2 – Development of Alternatives

Exploring the alternatives that will shape a future facility is one of the most creative steps in master planning. This collaborative process begins with a full range of alternatives and ideas, which are narrowed down to those that will best realize the goals and vision for a Site. The planning group has an opportunity to think “outside the box,” and not solely from an economic or financial perspective. This chapter describes and analyzes the range of options that resulted from these discussions.



Options in all subject areas are evaluated by considering what will best address the facility’s needs in the future, anticipating shifts in visitor preferences and recreation trends. The pros and cons of proposed actions are considered, along with the possible consequences of their implementation. Actions are always compared with the option of taking no action, or maintaining the status quo.

Actions in this chapter are the product of months of work by a diverse group of people, each bringing specialized knowledge and skills. Clermont’s Site Manager, maintenance and operations, regional stewardship staff, and the Site’s historian all brought years of collective experience. A park planner, environmental analyst, and staff from OPRHP’s Division of Historic Preservation and the Bureau of Historic Sites brought their experience and knowledge to the planning effort.

Proposed actions are also informed by public feedback from visitor surveys and multiple outreach meetings that ensured the plan reflected ideas and opinions of nearby residents, regional elected officials, interest groups, and other stakeholders. The Friends of Clermont group contributed their expertise from years of active engagement with the Site.

The alternatives in this chapter have been evaluated for their potential impacts—both positive and negative. Those found to be reasonable, beneficial, and that will best accommodate facility needs and short- and long-term goals are identified. The final master plan is comprised of the selected, or “preferred,” alternatives. Recommendations for future actions at Clermont are organized within the broad resource categories, as shown below.



Natural Resource Protection – Alternatives that focus on strategies for environmental stewardship, study, and interpretation of the Site’s natural resources.

Cultural Resource Protection – Alternatives that will protect and expand understanding of the Site’s archeological, architectural, and historical/cultural resources.

Interpretation and Education – Alternatives related to enhancement of interpretative materials, public programs, and other educational offerings at the Site.

Recreational Resource Development – Alternatives that consider recreational trends and how best to accommodate them at the Site, including built facilities and new types of recreation appropriate to a historic site.

Operations, Infrastructure, and Facilities – Alternatives for improving park function and management practices that support the operation and maintenance of the Site.

Natural Resources at Clermont

Background

While Clermont is perhaps best-known for its historic mansion and pastoral Hudson River Valley setting, nearly two-thirds of the Site is classified by the agency as “natural.” The Site’s meadows, woodlands, and wetlands support a wide variety of wildlife, including aquatic habitats such as vernal pools, important for amphibian and reptile development. Clermont’s location on the Hudson River also makes it an important natural resource for the state. In addition to the facility’s property along the shoreline, Clermont’s lands include over 80 underwater acres. The Site therefore has an opportunity to be part of larger efforts to protect and improve the Hudson River estuary.

A thriving estuary system requires a healthy contributing watershed, with intact riparian corridors, floodplains, wetland complexes, and forests. The Hudson River’s tributaries contribute essential freshwater and nutrients to this aquatic system. Many stressors can affect the watershed – pollutants carried by runoff from roads, discharges from farms, residential fertilizer use, outdated wastewater systems, and a loss of vegetative cover to absorb rainfall. As the region sees more intense weather, stream health may also be impacted. Periods of intense flooding increase sediment loads to waterbodies, and extended heat or drought can reduce aquifer recharge, impacting fresh water supplies.⁶⁰

The actions selected for Clermont’s natural resources, therefore, have the potential to impact a valuable and unique ecosystem. Planning appropriate action to protect and improve the Site’s natural elements will help protect regional water quality, wildlife habitats, and plant and animal species.

The alternatives considered in this plan will be implemented with full consideration of and commitment to following these natural resource protection strategies:

- Minimizing future development in natural areas and establishing buffer zones for special habitat types
- Increasing public knowledge of how to protect natural elements
- Utilizing site elements and conditions to illustrate real-world impacts of climate change
- Limiting public access to sensitive ecological communities and known habitats for rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species
- Effectively managing the spread of harmful species
- Partnering with external groups and adjacent landowners to enhance habitat and provide a variety of environmental education activities



Clermont’s woodlands support a wide variety of flora.

Natural Resource Stewardship

The OPRHP is tasked with enhancing biodiversity at its facilities, an important factor in ecosystem health. Historic properties present the additional challenge of balancing the sometimes-competing needs of natural, historic, and recreational elements. Identifying priorities in all three categories helps determine where benefits can be realized and where compromises, if needed, are best made.

Clermont is characterized by former agricultural lands that have mostly reverted to successional woodlands or meadow. Wooded areas and grasslands provide habitat and food sources for native species, as do planted trees and shrubs. Significant natural resources include a NYS DEC mapped wetland and important plant communities. Seasonal (vernal) pools, wet meadows, unnamed streams, and the Hudson River all provide habitat for a variety of species. A few old-growth trees—important habitat for some species—can also still be found, both in the woods and planted specimens.

Addressing Invasive and Nuisance Species

Seasonal shifts occurring as a result of climate change may favor some invasive plants and threaten beneficial native species. As spring arrives earlier, and the region sees shorter, drier winters, some southern species may move north. If native understory plants decline, aggressive shrubs such as Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) can move in to take their place. Changes to the composition of native plant communities and microhabitats with specific requirements for temperature, light, and moisture may seriously affect birds, mammals, and water-dependent species.

Invasive vines can damage significant buildings, foundations and walls, or compete with cultivated plants. Climbing species can girdle trees, threatening mature



specimens which may have historic significance. Historic sites may have the additional challenge of managing introduced plants that are part of historic gardens, but which may be destructive if not contained. Early detection and active management of invasive species is important for protecting natural and historic features for the future. Because of the extent of invasive species at Clermont, management strategies will first target impacted areas around high-quality habitats, such as wetlands, and those threatening historic infrastructure or views.

As part of Master Plan development, the first-ever comprehensive assessment of the Site’s natural resources was completed. In June 2022, a group comprised of biologists, invasive species program staff, and other natural resource specialists came to the Site for a one-day “BioBlitz,” with the goal of identifying as many plant and animal species as possible within an eight-hour window. Participants’ field notes, photographs, and postings on iNaturalist, a citizen science-based website, resulted in a wealth of data that was then available to inform planning of future actions. NYS Natural Heritage Program (NHP) staff surveys also identified a previously unknown significant natural community that is now listed in the NHP database.

Woodland management at Clermont has largely been limited to trails maintenance. However, invasive species staff and NHP have identified harmful species at the Site that are affecting woodland health. The Friends of Clermont group has implemented projects to address some areas with species that have gained a foothold.

Actions for Natural Resources

All OPRHP facilities are required to maintain an approved plan that documents, addresses, and sustains the reduction of mowing, and Clermont has reduced regular mowing in areas where lawn is not a historic feature. Allowing previously mowed areas to develop into managed grasslands improves habitat for wildlife and pollinators, as well as reducing carbon emissions from fuel consumption. Fewer hours spent mowing also significantly lowers the labor hours needed to maintain lawns and allows maintenance staff to focus on other priority needs. Meadows at Clermont are mowed minimally, and the large open fields near the Red Barn and Clermont Cottage are brush-hogged annually in the fall to limit the growth of woody plants.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: No improvements or changes related to natural resources.

Considerations:

- Without planned strategies for protection, the Site may lose important habitats, historic trees, and the ecological integrity of some specialized natural communities, including wetlands
- The Site's woodlands, fields, waterbodies, and historic elements in the landscape will continue to be impacted by stressors from climate change, visitor use, and invasive species
- There will be no plan to manage or prevent the introduction of new invasive species and invasive plants and pests may expand to impact larger areas
- A healthy natural environment contributes to a positive visitor experience
- Current staffing and funding levels are insufficient to address some issues identified in the Site's natural areas

Alternative 2 – Develop long-range planning recommendations to protect the Site's natural elements from future climate change impacts, based on current data and modeling techniques.

Considerations:

- Clermont is already seeing impacts from climate change, including damage from more frequent intense storms, flooding, and erosion
- It is important to create a reality-based plan now that considers projected climate change impacts to build resiliency into future natural resource management
- A plan will identify the native plants and animals most likely to be impacted, as well as anticipate impacts from new harmful species that may move into the area
- Will inform decisions regarding new plantings, focusing on native plant species identified as resilient to climatic shifts
- A proactive approach to managing impacts to natural resources from longer drought periods, more intense flooding, or more sustained periods with standing water
- Provides recommendations based on agency policies, directives, and priorities
- Developing a plan based on current climate change projections and data may require contracting with a consultant
- Recommendations for natural resource management best practices in the context of climate change can offer a model with strategies specific to historic sites

Alternative 3 – Define and prioritize regular invasive species (IS) management tasks Site-wide.

Considerations:

- IS are found in many parts of the Site and targeted strategies are needed for their management in sensitive natural communities and for protecting historic infrastructure
- Determining priority IS actions will indicate where management efforts are best focused (e.g., at the Site's DEC-regulated wetland)
- Staff will be better informed on IS identification and management
- Provides an actionable approach to IS management specific to historic properties
- Improved management of IS will increase the presence of native flora/fauna, enhancing forest health and wildlife habitat
- Volunteers can be recruited and trained to assist an IS crew
- Will include how to manage exotic species in historic gardens that may need to be contained
- Implementing proactive IS management strategies can increase the facility's resilience to future climate change impacts
- Successful management of some IS requires outreach/coordination with landowners beyond the Site's boundaries

Alternative 4 – Identify and implement protections for old-growth native trees (150-year-old range) within Clermont’s woodlands and historical/cultural landscape.

Considerations:

- Without identification and protection, the Site may lose historically important trees
- Older trees are important to a diversified landscape since some species use different stages of trees or rely on old-growth trees as habitat
- Identifies the Site’s significant trees to ensure they will be protected from development, mowing, new plantings, or overflow parking
- Some mature trees are integral to the cultural landscape, including planted black walnuts and black locust
- The historic significance of old growth/heritage trees adds to a meaningful visitor experience
- There can be an emotional component of experiencing old trees
- Trees have interpretive and educational value as living witnesses to the history that happened here
- Core samples taken from significant tree trunks to establish their age can provide information to use in educational content
- More frequent severe storms may cause increased damage to fragile older trees
- Trees have a lifespan and Site managers need to balance safety against historical significance

Alternative 5 – Identify and evaluate mapped and unmapped water resources at the Site and determine priority actions for their protection.

Considerations:

- The Site has an abundance of unmapped water resources that include unclassified streams, vernal pools, and unmapped wetlands, and protecting them contributes to overall ecosystem health
- Offers the opportunity to develop new partnerships with colleges, schools, and/or nonprofit organizations
- It is important to know locations of water resources with diverse plants to prevent damage when developing trails, installing signage, or any new development
- Protective actions such as riparian stabilization and right-sizing culverts will help to protect water quality and reduce erosion
- A comprehensive assessment of the Site’s waterbodies may require a consultant

Alternative 6 – Protect the Hudson River and other waterbodies from Site runoff by incorporating green infrastructure (GI), where feasible, in retrofits and new infrastructure.

Considerations:

- Replacing pavements and other impervious areas with permeable surfaces reduces runoff, filters sediments and pollutants, and allows stormwater to infiltrate back into the ground, keeping it out of local waterbodies
- Green stormwater practices that capture and slow stormwater will reduce erosion and standing water, which are significant issues at the Site
- GI used in public areas offers educational opportunities and increases knowledge and understanding of the benefits of these practices

Alternative 7 – Implement pollinator support strategies including reduced mowing, invasive species management, and strategic planting of important food species.

Considerations:

- Open fields and meadows provide valuable habitat and food sources for declining pollinator species
- Various stages of plant succession are beneficial (e.g., meadows, shrublands, forests)

- New plantings must conform with OPRHP’s native plant policy and OPRHP Directive NR-SOP-022, Reduced Mowing in State Parks and Historic Sites
- Targeted invasive species management supports biodiversity for key ecosystems
- Will improve management specific to the Site’s fields and meadows, an important aspect of the Site’s cultural landscape and character
- Fields need to be mowed at least every other year to prevent establishment of woody vegetation (shrubs and tree saplings)
- Include protocols for mowing outside of peak bird nesting periods for species that depend on field/meadow habitat (e.g., after August 15, or if spring mowing is necessary, prior to May 1).
- If not historically significant, additional areas can be allowed to revert to shrubland or forest

Alternative 8 – Improve habitat connectivity by fostering relationships and increasing outreach to adjacent landowners.

Considerations:

- Educating neighboring homeowners about how to appropriately manage adjoining woodlands (e.g., not to cut down native trees; using locally native plants, curtailing the spread of invasives) will promote habitat connectivity and reduce forest fragmentation
- Outreach can inform neighbors about reducing pesticides/herbicides use and their impacts (e.g., decline of pollinators, water quality impact)
- May reduce potential barriers to wildlife movement along property lines and mitigate obstructions where feasible (e.g., right-sizing culverts, etc.)
- May include opportunities to encourage reduced mowing on adjacent properties to improve connectivity and increase field habitat
- Education and outreach may result in new opportunities for conservation easements

Alternative 9 – Identify and implement best management strategies for addressing nuisance animal species at the Site.

Considerations:

- Strategies will align with the OPRHP Directive NR-PRO-006, Wildlife Management in State Parks and Historic Sites
- Coyotes are moving closer to human activity areas at Clermont
- Education may be the best option for addressing some species
- Management may require contracting with a wildlife control operator (e.g., groundhog activity is damaging historic structures)
- Animals are entering and damaging some historic buildings (e.g., Sylvan Cottage)
- Ongoing issues are difficult to address at current staff and funding levels
- An expanded hunting program can be considered as part of a deer management program (e.g., consider educational opportunities related to deer hunting as a historical practice)

Preferred Alternatives: 2-9

A healthy natural environment is integral to a high-quality visitor experience. Clermont’s woodlands, meadows, and terrain are scenic and characteristic of the region, providing an important visual context for historic and cultural elements. Fostering a range of natural ecosystems provides diverse habitat while offering a glimpse into the Site’s evolution, including its pre-development condition.

Some portions of the property have been largely unmanaged allowing them to evolve from cropland and pasture into woods and grasslands. This has protected some areas and resulted in the deterioration of others. The master plan provided an opportunity to identify significant natural elements and issues and ensure that appropriate protections are put in place. These actions will provide Clermont staff with an informed and forward-thinking approach to natural resources management at the Site.

Cultural Resource Protection and Preservation

Cultural resources are elements that past human activity has left behind. These may be buildings or other built structures, historic or prehistoric objects, designed landscapes, earthworks, or refuse piles. This material provides a basis for understanding the human past. They are irreplaceable and nonrenewable.⁶¹

The planning team identified the following issues as essential to protecting and interpreting the Site's cultural resources:

- **Staffing** – Having a sufficient workforce is paramount to making any successful changes in management, programming, or adaptive re-use of the Site's cultural elements.
- **Interpretation** – Clermont is committed to creating a comprehensive picture of the site's history and convey a more complete story of all its former occupants.
- **Funding** – The region will need to explore alternative sources and identify priority projects for use of existing funds.
- **Partnerships** – Developing new partnerships and collaborations will enable the Site to further explore, identify and understand Clermont's cultural resources.
- **Sustainability** – All implemented actions must include a clear plan for management and maintenance needs to ensure success once implemented.

Background

As previously noted, Clermont's past is deeply embedded in its physical landscape. While the importance of preserving and protecting a historic site's cultural elements cannot be overstated, these facilities must also be appropriately maintained for safe public use. A goal of this Master Plan is to balance the need to maintain the Site's historic use in the context of a contemporary public space.

The most pressing issues identified related to Clermont's historic structures were stabilizing the Arryl House ruins, and Sylvan Cottage, and addressing deterioration of the Red Barn. Clermont Cottage is functional and actively used but needs additional interior work. Remnant structures found throughout the facility also serve to chronicle, in part, the Site's long history. Many are unprotected and subject to continued deterioration.

In addition to functioning as a museum, the mansion houses staff offices, is used as an events venue, and stores a portion of Clermont's object and archival collection. Adaptations for these variable uses

have been implemented piecemeal over the years, and there is a need to assess its overall

condition and how well it functions for these different purposes. An important capital project renovated the exterior of the mansion in 2022. Stucco and masonry walls and architectural wood components were repaired and restored, and new storm windows installed. A stone terrace and wall on the mansion's west side were also restored, and a faulty roof drainage system that had been causing some damage to the building's interior was replaced. Hazardous building materials were identified and remediated as part of the work.





Actions for Cultural Resources

Mansion

The mansion's interior has been in continuous active use since the state's acquisition of the property. Addressing operational issues, including outdated HVAC, plumbing, and electric systems, insufficient insulation, and damage from animals, is an ongoing challenge. Preserving historic materials and finishes, potential structural issues, and repair work beyond day-to-day maintenance are also of concern.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: Continue current maintenance practices for the mansion's interior and do not address ongoing issues.

Considerations:

- The mansion is the Site's most significant historic element and important to NYS history
- Stop-gap maintenance and repair will eventually threaten the building's historic integrity
- Deterioration of some historic interior finishes and materials will continue and may lead to the loss of irreplaceable, original items
- Climate control issues may impact historic items stored in the mansion
- The visitor experience will not be improved and may instead decline
- Safety issues may emerge as the mansion continues to deteriorate
- Staff offices in the mansion will continue to need renovation
- Needed repairs and renovation will become more extensive and costly

Alternative 2 – Develop and implement a comprehensive Historic Structures Report and Conditions Study to appropriately protect and preserve the mansion.

Considerations::

- An appropriate plan will address known issues and may identify others
- Will ensure the preservation of a significant element from New York history
- Meets the agency's mission to be responsible stewards of our state's cultural resources
- Will prioritize repairs and restoration work needed to appropriately preserve the mansion
- The visitor experience will be improved and enhanced
- Working conditions for staff using offices in the mansion will be improved
- The Plan will include assessment and recommendations for HVAC, code issues, fire suppression, security system appropriate to a historic property
- A consultant will be needed to develop a comprehensive restoration plan
- Implementation will require significant cost
- Without meeting the environmental qualifications of potential lending institutions, Clermont will not be able to obtain loans for special exhibits

Preferred Alternative: 2

The mansion is Clermont's most significant historic structure and its predominant visitor destination. As an irreplaceable element of New York's history, the agency is tasked with preserving the house and its contents. The mansion's protected status also requires that appropriate materials and approaches be used for repairs and restoration. Any work must be reviewed from a preservation perspective and approved by DHP staff. The extent and types of work needed in the mansion's interior require expertise outside the scope of the Site's maintenance staff. This action will ensure that the mansion will be assessed appropriately and that an appropriate plan for needed work and preservation will be in place.



Actions for Sylvan Cottage

The state acquired Sylvan Cottage and its associated 10 acres in December 2000, and in 2001 began preliminary documentation and inventory of its contents. At that time the cottage was clean, livable, and in apparently stable condition. A proposal to rehabilitate it as a seasonal rental at that time was never advanced, primarily due to a lack of funding.⁶²

Background

Leaking roofs on the cottage's north side were replaced in 2010, and in 2014 plans were initiated to rehabilitate the cottage as on-site housing for the Site Manager. Soon after, Regional Maintenance Crew began interior demolition work on a portion of the north wing and installed temporary shoring to support the second-floor porch and its roof. A lack of funding for full rehabilitation again halted improvements and, since then, the Cottage has deteriorated significantly. A 2020 report on the structure's condition cites concerns about the cottage's stability and the integrity of the overall building envelope. The Cottage's poor overall condition has been exacerbated by animal activity. Stabilizing the cottage has been identified as a high priority for the Site.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: Take no action to stabilize, restore, or retrofit Sylvan Cottage.

Considerations:

- The Cottage is a historically significant building at Clermont and tells an important piece of the Livingston family story
- The Cottage will remain vacant and subject to continued deterioration
- Deteriorated buildings are damaging to public perceptions
- The Cottage's continued rapid deterioration will result in the loss of the structure
- Rehabilitation costs will continue to increase as long as the Cottage's condition is not addressed
- Safety issues will not be addressed
- Will not meet a key master plan goal of activating the Site's north section
- A missed opportunity to provide the Site with a valuable resource that can help meet multiple identified needs (e.g., program support, housing, storage, office space)

Alternative 2 – Stabilize Sylvan Cottage and make repairs necessary to prevent further deterioration.

Considerations:

- Addressing the deterioration of this key historic building is a priority for the Site
- Improves aesthetic and safety issues
- Helps protect and preserve an important historic resource
- Will not address infrastructure needs for active programming at this location
- Cottage will remain unused and does not meet the plan goal to activate this part of the Site
- Costs will be moderate; however, expenditures will not result in new programming opportunities or support the Site's functionality
- The Cottage will continue to be vacant and will need to be maintained

Alternative 3 – Rehabilitate and retrofit Sylvan Cottage as an accessible, multi-use education center with classrooms, a kitchen, restrooms, and defined parking area.

Considerations:

- Resolves safety, security, and public perception issues caused by the Cottage’s deteriorated condition
- An important historic structure will be protected
- Supports current and future/expanded programming
- Provides an indoor space during cold or wet weather for feeding and teaching children and staff participating in Harvesting History program
- A restroom is needed for students and staff working in the nearby garden
- Providing kitchen facilities that meet county codes/requirements will offer program participants an opportunity to try cooking
- Helps widen visitor focus beyond the mansion
- Realizes a plan goal to activate the north section of the Site
- Parking has been identified as a need for this part of the Site
- Accessibility will need to be addressed (for building and parking)
- Costs will be significant but justifiable given added programmatic opportunities, preservation concerns, public safety, and visual considerations
- Can be evaluated as a potential location for installing a heat pump system

Alternative 4 – Renovate Sylvan Cottage as staff housing.

Considerations:

- There is currently no on-site staff housing, and the Cottage is in a convenient location with potential to provide staff with a comfortable residence
- Cottage will be stabilized, rehabilitated, and appropriately maintained
- Provides an amenity that can be offered to future staff, or used for staff office space or for storage when vacant
- Will not activate the Site or provide a public asset
- Does not address need for program support at this location
- Aesthetics, safety, and security at the Site will improve
- Maintains the original function of the structure (i.e., housing)
- Significant rehabilitation is needed, including upgrades for electric/plumbing/internet
- Cost will be significant but will result in multiple benefits
- Accessibility issues will need to be addressed

Preferred Alternative: 3

Sylvan Cottage is a historically significant building at Clermont. Its setting, location in the north section of the Site, and charming design offer potential for activating this underutilized area. Located along a popular walking route, the vacant and deteriorated structure does not convey a positive image for the Site. If the Cottage becomes irreparable, the State will lose an important historical feature, and the Site will no longer have an opportunity to utilize it as a usable and much-needed workspace that can support staff and popular public programs.

Rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of Sylvan Cottage will address its condition while providing a much-needed resource for nearby programs and activities. This action builds on other proposed improvements as part of a comprehensive Master Plan strategy to activate the Site’s northern section.



Actions for the Red Barn

The “Red” or “McVitty” Barn represents an important era in the Site’s agricultural history. Currently in good overall condition, the barn is structurally sound, and a new roof was installed in 2019. The barn is not weather-tight, however, and openings in the walls and windows make it vulnerable to the elements and animal activity.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: No modifications to or adaptive re-use of the Red Barn.

Considerations:

- The structure is an important component of Clermont’s historic and cultural landscape
- Damage from animals and water will continue and the barn will deteriorate
- Vacant and/or un-utilized buildings are damaging to public perceptions of parks
- The barn’s interior is in generally good condition, but without needed repairs it will continue to deteriorate
- Barn will continue to be underutilized with lost potential for a new revenue source and alternative program space
- The barn’s architecture is appealing and a visual marker of the Site’s agricultural history
- Does not help realize a master plan goal of activating the north section of the Site
- Rehabilitation costs will only increase over time

Alternative 2 – Improve weather-tightness of the barn and implement repairs necessary to ensure its long-term protection.

Considerations:

- The barn is structurally sound and has potential to be useful to Site operations
- The barn’s upper levels can be used for storage (e.g., Christmas decorations, etc.)
- Will prevent continued damage from weather and animals
- Building is not currently serviced with electric, sewer or water
- Interpretation can highlight the barn as an extant element of the Site’s agrarian past
- The barn will be protected, but does not contribute to goal of activating the Site’s north section

Alternative 3 – Adapt the interior of the barn as a seasonal indoor venue for group events (e.g., weddings, reunions, parties, group programs, etc.).

Considerations:

- Will allow the Site to offer a protected, indoor option for smaller group events
- The barn is not large enough to accommodate all necessary supporting functions (e.g., food/beverage preparation areas, dressing rooms, restrooms, storage)
- Electric, sewer, and water service would need to be provided
- The interior layout will not accommodate group seating without extensive modifications that would compromise its historic character
- The barn could be used by staff for programming, lectures, and children’s crafts
- Most wedding parties prefer Hudson River views
- Offers the option for wedding ceremonies to be held near the River and use the Barn for receptions
- Will help to activate the north portion of the Site, a master plan goal

Alternative 4 – Develop an area adjacent to the barn to serve as a seasonal outdoor events venue.

Considerations:

- The barn and its environs offer a picturesque backdrop for outdoor events
- Exterior area to the east offers a dry, level area for a tent, seating, etc. and has been previously disturbed (site of former farm structures)
- Archaeological elements, including remnants of agricultural structures located near the barn, would need to be evaluated for potential impacts
- Location must be evaluated to ensure it will not impact wetlands or other natural resources
- Avoids significant alterations to the barn’s interior while retaining the structure’s character-defining elements (e.g., wood framing, finishes, exterior cladding)
- Provides shelter and dry space for vendors at outdoor programs (e.g., Sheep & Wool Festival)
- Must be done in conjunction with Alternatives 2 and 5

Alternative 5 – Build a small addition at rear of the barn to house a public restroom, changing area, storage, and a warming kitchen.

Considerations:

- Building an adjacent addition to house restrooms, electric service, kitchen with running water, and/or changing rooms for events will avoid the need to install them in the Barn
- Will need to provide a new septic system, water, and electric service
- Provides a new venue to support visitor events and programming (e.g., school programs, kids’ crafts, lectures, smaller gatherings)
- An addition is more cost effective than retrofitting the Barn for these services
- Will offer shelter for vulnerable materials during programs (e.g., for Sheep and Wool Festival)
- Addition will need to be sensitive to context (SHPO review under 14.09 will be required)
- Must be done in conjunction with Alternatives 2 and 4

Alternative 6 – Rehabilitate the interior of the Red Barn to accommodate three-season use, such as exhibits, while preserving character-defining elements.

Considerations:

- Must be done in conjunction with alternatives 2,4,5
- Expands the Site’s seasonal events capacity (e.g., can be used as shelter for outdoor events during inclement weather)
- Upstairs space can be used for storage without extensive layout changes
- Design will need to be sensitive to context and use appropriate architectural materials; SHPO review under 14.09 will be required

Preferred Alternatives: 2, 4, 5, and 6

The Red Barn is an underutilized resource at the Site. Its history, craftsmanship, and pastoral setting offer opportunities to provide Clermont with a valuable resource that supports programming and events. Its rustic design is a natural draw for visitors, offering the potential to raise awareness of broader aspects of the Site’s history, as well as more contemporary themes. Repairs and weatherizing are crucial to protecting the structure from further deterioration and for preservation. Repurposing it for public use will also help re-activate this part of the Site. Because of its historic status, adapting the Barn for four-season use (insulating, etc.) was not selected. The structure is not large enough to serve as an indoor venue for weddings or larger group events, and adding restrooms and a kitchen to the interior would further limit usable space. An adjacent structure with these elements will allow a range of uses without the cost and impact of a full renovation or retrofit. Relatively minor layout alterations will allow its use for some programs, and these actions will allow Clermont to expand its offerings.



Actions for Clermont Cottage

The oldest section of Clermont Cottage was built in the 1790s to provide housing for the Livingston Family service community. Today, the Cottage houses the Friends of Clermont offices, and is used for program and event space, and for Site staff meetings. In addition to work areas, there is a kitchen, restrooms, meeting/conference room and office spaces.

Background

Much of the Cottage's first floor level interior has been renovated and is in active use. Historic wood plank floors and a fireplace in the older section on the east side of the first floor need to be evaluated for condition and any need for improvements. Repairs or modifications made must both preserve historic fabric while ensuring it can accommodate current use of the space. The second floor is accessed by a narrow staircase, which limits its function. The second floor is not properly insulated, and mildew and mold remediation is underway. Once remediated and properly insulated, this space could be used for much-needed storage. Widening or otherwise improving the existing staircase to improve access would require significant alterations that would impact the Cottage's historic character. Therefore, using the second level for staff offices or workspace for volunteers is not a viable option.

The Cottage's basement has two sections: one part has been modernized and houses utilities; the other space, on the Cottage's south side, has the original dirt floor. This unfinished section needs to be evaluated for condition and to recommend strategies for addressing its long-term maintenance. attending programs and events at Clermont Cottage usually park at the main visitor parking lot and walk the significant distance up the road to the Cottage. Although the parking area and gravel walks at Clermont Cottage were originally designed as accessible, parking spaces are no longer clearly defined. The Cottage has parking for about three cars, and visitors and staff need to walk on lawn and deteriorated gravel paths to access the entrance. Consequently, Clermont Cottage is generally not used for larger group events, despite having space to accommodate groups up to 45.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1: Status Quo – Continue existing maintenance at Clermont Cottage with no actions to address identified issues.

Considerations:

- The Cottage is in active use as office space and for public programming
- Mildew and mold present health issues and will worsen if not remediated and insulated
- This significant historic building will not be preserved and protected
- The Site needs climate-controlled storage space and none is available at the Cottage
- The Cottage will not be universally accessible
- Parking area is undefined and the walkway will continue to deteriorate
- The Cottage will not be able to meet its potential to accommodate larger public programs

Alternative 2: Provide accessible parking, walkways, and entrance at Clermont Cottage.

Considerations:

- The Cottage is in active use and to be fully functional for both staff and visitors, needs to provide accessible offices, parking, and event space
- Facilities that serve the public are required to be accessible
- The Cottage’s functional needs have evolved, and additional parking capacity is required
- Cost for modifications will not be significant
- The Cottage’s immediate surroundings will be improved with upgraded pavement and clearly delineated parking
- Addressing accessibility at the existing parking area will require regrading and paving

Alternative 3: Fully remediate Clermont Cottage for mold and mildew and install appropriate insulation.

Considerations:

- Mold/mildew present health risks to the public and staff
- The building is not properly insulated and if not addressed conditions will worsen
- Will create usable storage space on the upper floor/half-story area
- Protects and preserves one of the Site’s significant historic structures
- Relatively minor cost to implement
- Some roof repair may be required as part of a remediation project

Preferred Alternatives: 2 and 3

Clermont Cottage is an important component of both the Site’s history and the facility’s functional infrastructure. The structure houses office space for Clermont’s very active Friends Group and is used as a venue for public workshops, lectures, and other events. Appropriately maintaining and updating the Cottage will also contribute to realizing the Master Plan goal of activating the north section of the Site.

Some work on improving the pathways and entrance, as well as mold/mildew remediation was initiated in 2023.



Actions for the Icehouse and Root Cellar

A common feature of 18th and 19th century households, icehouses held blocks of ice cut from lakes or rivers and packed with straw or sawdust for insulation. The structure stored ice for household use and preserved food during the warmer months. The remains of an icehouse used by the Livingston household is found near the mansion. The frame superstructure is now gone; an excavated opening lined with stone masonry remains. Now surrounded by a wood safety railing, vegetation has grown up around the perimeter, largely obscuring the view down into the structure.



Remains of a root cellar’s stone masonry walls are also found within the mansion complex. As with the icehouse, its walls were originally covered with a roof structure. Both structures have interpretive signs that describe their function and history, but are not easily found, due to overgrown plants and less-traveled location.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1: Status Quo – No repairs or modifications to the icehouse and root cellar structures and maintenance continues with no changes.

Considerations:

- The icehouse and root cellar are deteriorating from continued exposure to the elements and damage from vegetation
- Both structures have historic value and represent a window into early lifestyles and to commercial ice harvesting on the Hudson River, and a common link to similar structures throughout the region
- Both offer an opportunity to tell a more complete story about people who lived and worked at Clermont
- The icehouse structure is deep and the safety railing is damaged and overgrown, presenting a potential safety hazard
- Staff report that maintaining the areas around the structures is an ongoing challenge
- Both structures are difficult to identify in the landscape and interpretive signs are partially blocked by vegetation

Alternative 2: Stabilize the icehouse and root cellar; remove vegetation, replace safety railing, and add gravel with weed barrier around the perimeter.

Considerations:

- Protects and preserves these historically significant outbuildings
- Reduces time required for staff to maintain the structures
- Improves aesthetics
- Expands interpretive opportunities, supporting the goals to tell a more complete story of the Site's history
- Will be low cost to implement
- Will make these structures more visible and provide safer access to interpretive signs

Preferred Alternative: 2

As representatives of a bygone era the icehouse and root cellar can offer visitors a real-world understanding of what life was like for the families and workers living in previous centuries. Implementing this action will help protect these small but significant pieces of the Site's history.

This action will raise the visibility of these structures, stabilize their masonry, address safety hazards, and ease maintenance tasks for staff.



Actions for Other Site Structures

Remnants of earlier structures exist throughout the Site, among them foundations of farmhouses, barns, a greenhouse, rubble stone walls, and other vestiges of the Site’s agricultural past. Many of these elements are in poor condition, overgrown with vegetation and damaged from fallen trees or exposure to weather. Staffing at the Site is currently insufficient to ensure active maintenance of these elements; if more active protection or restoration is deemed appropriate, these will require technical assessment and the application of specialized stabilization techniques. The planning team worked with Division for Historic Preservation staff to complete an informal site assessment of these items, and some were designated for specific actions that are included in this Plan. For the remainder, this section was created to address a need for general cleaning and maintenance.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: Continue current approach to the management of remnant historic structures at the Site.

Considerations:

- Many structures are subject to deterioration from weather, animal activity, and inadvertent damage by visitors
- Some structures may present safety hazards (e.g., cellar cavities, rubble, uneven ground)
- These represent a lost opportunity for interpretive/educational content that can help convey a more complete picture of the Site’s history
- Does not meet Agency mission to protect and preserve the state’s historic resources
- Public perception of the agency is negatively impacted by deteriorating elements
- Cost to stabilize and/or clean up some elements may be significant
- Some structures may require specialized assessments and/or treatments

Alternative 2: Work with Division for Historic Preservation staff to stabilize selected remnant historic structures identified at the facility.

Considerations:

- Many elements found at the Site are part of the Livingston Family’s, or earlier occupants’ history and may have potential for portraying a the Site’s larger story with new interpretation and/or programming
- OPRHP Division for Historic Preservation staff can help to identify Best Management Practices for protecting and preserving these elements and/or appropriate methods for stabilization
- Maintenance staff levels will need to be expanded to effectively address more of these elements
- Deterioration from weather and plants will be assessed and, in some cases, remediated
- Addressing more visible elements will improve Site aesthetics
- Once a course of action is determined and issues addressed, maintenance may be reduced

Preferred Alternative: 2

The landscape at Clermont holds the vestiges of many centuries of human occupation, some as yet undiscovered. These remaining elements have historic significance, and some may offer opportunities for expanding interpretation on the Livingston Family’s staff and workers, as well as for providing a broader understanding of a larger, regional history.

Old cellars and collapsed walls hidden under vegetation in the landscape can also present safety issues. Addressing the entirety of a large facility like Clermont, with its many layers of history, is beyond the capability of the operational staff. Comprehensive assessment of these elements from specialized staff is an important next step to addressing their care.



Actions for Archaeological Resources

Background

There are always unknown elements at historic properties, and Clermont is no exception. For this Plan, agency staff worked with the Division of Historic Preservation to develop a map that identifies known archaeological elements and excavation sites at Clermont. Many known resources at Clermont have incomplete data or require further research to fill in gaps in the Site’s knowledge of these elements.

Some of interest include:

- A building foundation known to exist under the pavement of the main visitor parking lot. While the agency has accurate location data and has examined archaeological deposits from the periphery of this feature, its identity and function are not known. A more in-depth analysis of the overall site associated with the building (e.g., Phase II investigation) would be beneficial. In the meantime, it may be possible to obtain imaging when the parking lot is redeveloped.
- The remains of an earthen dock on the Site’s Hudson River shoreline offers exciting potential for interpretation. Archaeological sampling has been done at the dock, and some limited data is available. More comprehensive information would be useful for developing interpretative material. The history of the dock is integral to the Livingston Family’s story, and a closer look at how it was used has potential to shed light on the Livingston staff and others who worked on the river when the dock was in active use. A faint track can still be seen upland of the dock, traces of a former access road leading down to the waterfront, and an existing stone wall or rubble exists along the dock’s exterior border. This structure is vulnerable to erosion, flooding, and sea level rise.
- A structure identified underneath the southwestern corner of the mansion pre-dated the Livingstons’ arrival in 1730 and may no longer be intact.

The Clermont Site and overall region are sensitive for pre-contact (i.e., pre-historic) elements, and there is a high likelihood there is an intact pre-contact site here. Clermont’s collections include pre-contact material, including details of projectile points from the Late Archaic period (3000-1000 BC) that were found onsite. An archaeologically sensitive area is found on the hillside west of the mansion, where the Livingston family discarded its rubbish. Further investigation may be of interest here.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: No further investigation of the Site’s archaeological resources.

Considerations:

- Clermont’s archaeological resources have never been fully assessed
- An earlier Master Plan recommended additional investigation/documentation
- Documentation of known archaeological elements and previous investigations was completed for this plan
- OPRHP is working toward developing more complete archaeological data for its historic sites
- Protections are already in place and archaeological resources will continue to be preserved and protected under current project review guidelines and procedures

Alternative 2 – Conduct a Phase I archaeological survey and develop a comprehensive archaeological report and sensitivity analysis for the entire Site.

Considerations:

- Will provide a comprehensive informational resource to inform future development
- Can potentially expand interpretation opportunities for underrepresented themes regarding the site’s previous inhabitants, including enslaved and indigenous people
- Implementing a Phase I Survey will require considerable time
- Will need to contract a consultant
- Field work may temporarily take areas of the Site out of operation during survey
- Will identify unknown archaeological elements at the Site
- Will identify areas without resources, helping to inform future development
- Underwater acres at the facility have not been investigated and will be included in the survey
- Compiling and mapping existing archaeological documentation was completed for this plan but more work is needed to fully assess the Site

Alternative 3 – Develop an archaeological research program with goals for the Site that can be used to bring in researchers to examine existing archaeological data.

Considerations:

- A wide variety of data available from previous digs has been catalogued, but not researched
- Will expand understanding of the Site’s history and help inform interpretation development
- Agency staff does not have the capacity to undertake research
- Provides a program with specific goals to provide to potential partners (e.g., volunteers, graduate students, funding sources)
- Will require staff time to coordinate

Preferred Alternative: 2

OPRHP’s archaeological staff identified a need for a more comprehensive investigation of all the agency’s sites. In general, unless demonstrated otherwise, the entire facility is considered sensitive at historically significant properties. A “Reconnaissance,” or Phase I, archaeological survey determines the presence or absence of cultural resources within a defined area. While much progress was made during Master Plan development on archaeological sensitivity mapping, a site-wide Phase I archaeological survey has not been completed for Clermont. and a comprehensive understanding of the Site’s archaeological resources requires further investigation.

This action will expand knowledge of historic and cultural resources. It will facilitate future project planning and identify any need for additional investigation. A more complete understanding of Clermont’s archaeological resources may also provide material for new approaches to interpretation and opportunities for adding material to the Site’s collections.

While developing an archaeological research program was considered for its potential to foster interesting collaborations and data development, implementation of this action would require significant staff time, and therefore it was not selected.



Actions for the Collections

Background

Clermont’s collections are housed at multiple locations: at the mansion, Olana, John Jay State Historic Site, and at OPRHP’s Peebles Island Collections Care Center. The collection includes a research library, 184,864 archaeological collections, and 19,541 historic collection objects. When not on display, objects in the mansion are placed in archival boxes, and kept in storage spaces on the mansion’s second and third floors, and at basement level.

Parameters for the Site’s collections are identified in its Collections Policy, which defines the scope of material. New acquisitions to the Site’s collections must be selected based on the Policy, and only Site staff, in coordination with BHS Collections Committee, may acquire new artifacts.

Improper storage conditions leaves many objects and materials in Clermont’s collections vulnerable to damage from climatic conditions and other possible sources of deterioration. The planning team identified a need to evaluate storage practices for the Collections, as well as to improve access and better realize the educational potential of the material.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: No changes in management, scope, or policy for the Site’s Collections.

Considerations:

- Clermont’s collections are irreplaceable and current storage practices may not provide appropriate conditions for sensitive resources
- Overcrowding in storage areas leads to management challenges (e.g., accessing them can be hazardous; staff can’t check easily their condition)
- Lack of storage space available for new acquisitions limits collections capacity to expand
- Peebles Island is investigating options for accommodating overflow storage
- Climate control for items stored on-site is not consistent and may result in damage
- Having no curatorial position at site hampers collections management
- Current collections policy scope limits interpretative content (e.g., adding materials related to servants and other underrepresented stories)

Alternative 2 – Work with the Bureau of Historic Sites to develop a Furnishing Plan.

Considerations:

- A furnishing plan will include researching and documenting objects at the Site as they existed historically and provide information on how best to interpret them
- Collections on the mansion’s tour floor are subject to movement without historical basis, which can dilute interpretive message or accuracy
- The Site formerly provided binders in the mansion rooms that provided descriptions of how materials were historically placed, but these have not been updated
- Important for interpretive consistency and institutional memory when staff changes
- Developing a furnishing plan is a large-scale and time-consuming process which requires curation staff and likely need a consultant
- Today’s exhibits should reflect the mansion’s 1931 conditions (some currently may be representative of later years, e.g., from 1944)
- A furnishing plan will enable staff to provide accurate interpretation and to make conscious, informed decisions about content
- A goal of the Bureau of Historic Sites is to have a furnishing plan for all historic sites.
- Any deviations in the accuracy of how the rooms are set up need to be deliberate and justified

Alternative 3 – With the Bureau of Historic Sites, re-evaluate Clermont’s Collections Policy; review its parameters and the scope of collections.

Considerations:

- The existing collections policy has been in place since the Historic Site was established and should be reviewed periodically
- Revisions to a collections policy must be coordinated with Bureau of Historic Sites
- Some interpretative and educational content is based on, or supported by, objects in the collections and these should reflect the Site’s goals for expanding its relevance for contemporary and future audiences
- Updating the policy would better acknowledge underrepresented groups (e.g., adding items related to enslaved peoples, Palatine German tenants, tenant farmers, indigenous cultures)
- Policy will reflect changes in regional interest, visitor demographics, and museum curation goals
- The policy review and revision process will place demands on staff time

Alternative 4 – Develop a “virtual wing” to provide online access to Clermont’s collections and enable wider, more active use by staff, the academic community, and the general public.

Considerations:

- Original objects and materials in Clermont’s collections are unique and wide-ranging, and the potential for their programming use is relatively untapped
- BHS is getting new software that will allow public, researchers, etc., to have digital access to collections and allow for crowdsourcing
- Collections belong to people of NYS and access is important
- Some collections are too fragile to physically exhibit
- May need additional funding/comprehensive plan to implement
- Important to keep up with current museum practices
- Need a platform to host – BHS does not currently have website
- The collections comprise an important repository and record of NYS history
- Photo documentation/digitizing of some collection items is underway
- Volunteers, if supervised by professional staff, could help implement
- No agency-wide efforts are currently in place
- Collections are underutilized
- Essential to document collections that may be affected by climate change in the future

Alternative 5 – Evaluate storage conditions for object collections held in the mansion and make recommendations for improvements.

Considerations:

- Original objects and materials need storage conditions that control temperature and humidity
- Typical of older, uninsulated houses, it is difficult for the mansion to provide appropriate climate control and humidity control has been an issue
- If not addressed, conditions pose a real threat to Clermont’s object collections
- Will require collaboration with DHP to determine best practices

Preferred Alternatives: 2, 3, 4, and 5

Historical object collections are a treasure trove for scholars, students, genealogists, filmmakers, journalists, and educators, and OPRHP’s historic sites are tasked with protecting and preserving these legacy items. An object collection is not static; material may be added, or its scope changed. Holdings can evolve to reflect new data, changes in archival methods, or emerging trends in public interest. Each historic site’s “Scope of Collections Statement” defines the types of objects collected and why they are included. It is therefore essential that it is periodically reviewed and may be revised to reflect current considerations.

A furnishing plan provides documentation for all known material related to the rooms of a historic building. Based on an analysis of photographs, inventories, receipts, and written accounts, the plan provides justification for choices made for the house, including its furniture, floor coverings, paint colors, or wallpaper. A furnishing plan becomes the institutional memory for the agency. As staff retire or move on, the plan can help train new staff in the care and maintenance of a historic property’s interior s. As with the collections, these are living documents that is updated when new research comes to light.

Assessing conditions for collections items stored in the mansion will need to be a component of any office renovations.



Peebles Island Resource Center, at Peebles Island State Park, is headquarters for the Bureau of Historic Sites (BHS) which provides preservation assistance and interpretive support to 38 state historic sites and 193 state parks, including preserves, marinas, golf courses, and recreation areas.

Cultural Landscape

Most historic properties also have historic landscape components—the context for the main structures—that are integral to the significance of the site. The U.S. National Park Service defines a cultural landscape as “a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources... associated with a historic event, activity, or person...”⁶³

The land can offer a narrative of its history through centuries of use. A cultural landscape may include cemeteries, walls, foundations, evidence of indigenous habitation, historic trees, designed views – any of several character-defining features

which contribute to the landscape's physical appearance as it has evolved over time. Vegetation and topography, ponds and streams may also be important elements, as well as human-built features, such as fountains, roads, paths, steps, walls, fences, benches, lights, and sculptural objects.

The multidisciplinary quality of these landscapes may create management challenges, as different disciplines are often called into play when making decisions related to their preservation, maintenance, and even interpretation. To successfully integrate preservation of these cultural resources alongside ecological concerns, for instance, a broader array of disciplines and interests must be considered.

Background

The landscape visitors experience at Clermont today is largely representative of the Site's 1930s era. However, vestiges of many different time periods co-exist at the Site. Evidence of the Site's prehistorical and indigenous inhabitants is assumed to be present, but is largely theoretical, based on regional knowledge. Remnants of buildings, roads, walls, plantings, and agricultural use remain from inhabitants of more recent time periods. Some elements overlap or are built on top of each other.

The extant landscape at Clermont offers the opportunity to understand the full range of its past inhabitants, from prehistory to the present. Previous planning documents developed for Clermont have focused on buildings from the Livingston era: the mansion, cottages, and agricultural buildings. Consideration of the larger context of these elements, within the landscape, has generally been limited to the historic gardens and plantings. A 1979 OPRHP landscape report, for instance, provided detailed descriptions of the formal gardens, the Lilac Walk, and the Arryl House Ruins, with detailed species lists and maps showing plant locations.

This Master Plan identifies known Site elements that are considered to have historical and cultural value and makes recommendations for their care, preservation, use, and educational potential. In the long term, this inventory is valuable for the agency's institutional memory, while helping to inform decisions about the Site's physical setting and notable features.

The planning team identified the following factors as crucial to identifying, protecting, documenting, and interpreting Clermont's physical landscape:

- **Staffing** – A sufficient workforce is essential to the successful preservation and maintenance of any proposed changes to elements in Clermont's landscape.
- **Sustainability** - Any proposed changes need to be accompanied by a clear plan for their successful operation and maintenance.
- **Education** – Interpretative content and programs can be developed to help visitors become more aware of these elements as well as to provide a more comprehensive picture of human experience at the Site.
- **Funding** – Additional and alternative resources may need to be identified to support proposed enhancements to Clermont's cultural/historical landscape.
- **Partnerships** – In addition to the Friends of Clermont, collaborations with new partners, such as regional colleges and schools, may be called upon to help with activities related to cultural landscape resources.

Actions for the Cultural Landscape

The rich and layered landscape at Clermont therefore holds new opportunities to develop a more complete story of the Site’s past. Untapped elements related to the servants, laborers, tenant farmers, and indigenous communities that lived and worked here offer material for new interpretative content.

The Livingston Family developed the grounds according to the trends and tastes of their times. As these changed, gardens, walks, walls, and outbuildings were added, removed, abandoned, or re-imagined. New trees and shrubs were planted. While some images of earlier landscape conditions are available, how best to maintain or restore earlier conditions is often a perennial question.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: No changes in management or protections for Clermont’s historical and cultural landscape elements.

Considerations:

- Historic landscape elements including stone retaining walls southeast of the mansion and other walls throughout the site are subject to deterioration from weather, animal activity, and inadvertent damage if visitors are unaware of their significance
- Without active protective measures, historic landscape elements are subject to damage from hurricanes and other storm events, which are increasing in frequency and intensity
- Trees, an integral component of the historic setting, will continue to be lost, including the pine allée on Pine Road, a black walnut in Cutting Garden, the locust allée, a walnut at the corner of mansion)
- Important Site elements will not be available for expanded interpretative and educational activities as the Site develops a more complete picture of the Site’s history
- Roads, walkways, and older trees in the landscape may present safety hazards, which will be exacerbated if not addressed
- Does not meet Agency mission to protect and preserve the state’s historic resources
- Site aesthetics are impacted by deteriorating elements
- Cost may be high to stabilize and clear some elements
- Some structures may require specialized treatments to address condition

Alternative 2 – Work with Division for Historic Preservation staff to survey remnant historic structures at the facility to evaluate their condition, significance, and to address any needs.

Considerations:

- Many historic landscape elements at the facility have been left untouched for decades and need to be documented and evaluated
- Remnant historic structures will be professionally assessed and priorities for stabilization and/or restoration identified
- Will inform decisions regarding future management/maintenance of remnant Site elements
- Landscape elements offer new opportunities for expanded interpretation and programs (e.g., lives of tenant farming families, scenic viewshed/historic vs. current views, land use changes)
- Will include a plan for documenting and replacing significant trees, plantings, and other natural elements that have been lost or are failing
- May require the assistance of a consultant
- Will include how to address/adapt to climate change impacts for items in the cultural landscape
- Will include an assessment of structures and other elements in historic gardens

Alternative 3 – Develop a management/maintenance program for historic remnant elements in the landscape, with tasks clearly spelled out.

Considerations:

- Will help preserve landscape elements that are irreplaceable components of the state’s history
- Will help protect these elements from future climate change impacts (e.g., increased storm frequency and severity, damage from wind/fallen trees)
- May require additional and/or specialized staffing to implement repairs or rehabilitation
- May need to contract some work out
- In the past, the agency employed specialized tradespeople to execute work and emergency repairs on sensitive elements
- Requires consultation with Division for Historic Preservation under 14.09
- Includes strategies for addressing issues in historic gardens, a popular visitor destination
- Will provide information on historic materials for special management/maintenance needs
- Historic site infrastructure (e.g., walls, pavings, carriage roads, agricultural remnants) will be appropriately protected and maintained

Alternative 4 – Restore the historic Locust Tree allée parallel to the main visitor parking lot.

Considerations:

- Restores an important landscape feature installed by the Livingston Family
- Will be a key visual element for the proposed accessible route from Arryl House to the north part of the Site
- Contributes to visitors’ interpretive experience and historic sense of place
- To include an assessment of historic trees that may be failing and/or hazardous
- Some existing picnic tables need to be relocated away from route to restore the historic location

Preferred Alternatives: 2, 3, 4

Past consideration of Clermont’s cultural landscape has largely focused on elements related to the Livingston Family’s legacy. Remnants of a range of other inhabitants exist throughout at the property, and their stories and experiences are now incorporated into the Site’s interpretation and programs. The significance of these legacy elements needs to be assessed to determine their value to the state’s history, along with recommendations for actions that will ensure appropriate future care.



Actions for the Arryl House Ruins

The Arryl House’s remaining walls and foundations are an important element of Clermont’s cultural landscape. Framed by mature trees, the structure’s masonry walls—some still with ornamental pilasters—are a reminder of the former residence’s elegant ornamentation. Less evident are vestiges of the estate’s associated roads and outbuildings, including a root cellar and outhouse. A low stone wall runs along the hill above the ruins, and the foundations and cellars of early tenant farm cottages can be found in the nearby woods.

Letters from Clermont’s collections indicate there were gardens at Arryl House but few details are known. A 1796 sketch shows what may be garden plots on the rise to the east of the house, and family tradition holds that this is where Margaret Livingston had her garden. Pine and locust trees planted in the late 18th to early 19th centuries surround the ruins; some in fragile condition. Some stabilization work on the Arryl House was previously completed by the Excelsior Corps, but the ruins remain highly vulnerable to further damage and loss.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: No action to address the condition of the Arryl House Ruins.

Considerations:

- The Ruins are an important element of New York’s history and a significant part of the Livingston Family story
- The walls are structurally unstable and not protected from weather
- The Ruins will be lost if not appropriately stabilized and protected
- Arryl House is identified as an underutilized resource
- Visitors are naturally curious about the ruins, and they should be developed as a significant Site element
- While there are interpretive signs at the Ruins, education staff noted a need to develop new and more comprehensive content
- Managing vegetative growth will continue to be labor-intensive and time-consuming for staff
- The house had a progressive design for its time, contributing to its interpretive potential

Alternative 2 – Develop and implement a comprehensive plan to stabilize the Arryl House Ruins and adjacent historic elements.

Considerations:

- A 1979 landscape report included recommendations for stabilization of the Ruins, but it is significantly out of date and no implementable stabilization plan currently exists
- Condition of the Ruins needs to be evaluated by a specialist
- An informed plan of action is needed to address the remaining portions of Arryl House and adjacent area, rather than stop-gap maintenance
- Maintenance of the area may require less staff time

Alternative 3 – Redevelop the Arryl House as an events venue.

Considerations:

- Appropriately stabilizing the ruins is a required project component of this alternative
- Historic preservation considerations and/or archaeological constraints may limit the scope of redevelopment
- The original house design offers the opportunity to create a compelling event space
- Interpretative materials can be incorporated for an educational component
- Will provide a source of revenue for the Site
- Location is near the visitor parking lot, which can accommodate large groups
- Weddings currently take place near the Ruins and this could create a unique venue
- Accessibility issues will need to be addressed

Preferred Alternative: 2

Arryl House is an important and compelling historic element at Clermont, and integral to the Livingston Family history. Remaining walls and foundations are not appropriately stabilized or protected from damage from weather and plant growth and are extremely fragile. With severe storms, and other climate change impacts increasing, the ruins will become more vulnerable to further deterioration and eventual loss. While the option to redevelop the Arryl House as an events venue was given significant consideration, this alternative was ultimately not chosen for implementation. The proposed adaptive re-use of the Red Barn will meet the need for a large events venue at a lower cost.

Education, Interpretation, and Outreach

Background

A visitor survey also showed that a majority of Clermont’s visitors represent an older demographic. To some extent this is reflective of the region; however, it may also be that minority groups, young people, and others do not see themselves represented in the more traditional history-telling that has characterized much of the Site’s programming and interpretation. Culturally specific events, for instance, such as Halloween or Christmas, are popular but some visitors may feel excluded from these holidays. Efforts are underway to provide opportunities for new voices to be heard, and the Site has seen a corresponding shift in visitor demographics.

An important factor that shaped education efforts and programming at Clermont was the Covid-19 Pandemic between 2020-2022. During that time, despite the mansion being closed, the Site saw a one-hundred percent increase in visitorship. Programs—of necessity —were moved outdoors. Some programs developed during that time are still active, and visitorship has remained strong.

Alternatives developed in the following section seek to capitalize on this momentum by providing more meaningful experiences to all visitors.

Ongoing research into under-represented groups and collaborating with scholars helps staff create new types of programming opportunities. This approach aligns with the agency’s “Our Whole History” initiative, which aims to include the experience of indigenous, black, LGBTQ+, women, and other people who have not traditionally been included in historic narratives. “Our Whole History” seeks to bring a more balanced historic narrative to public awareness and create an environment more reflective of our multicultural past. Clermont has engaged with Germantown and Clermont town historians to help inform content development. OPRHP’s educators incorporate what is known about the enslaved people, servants, tenant farmers and immigrants, and the region’s original indigenous inhabitants into existing programs, events, and tours.



A yarn art event at Clermont included installations across the Site.

Programming

Clermont offers seasonal activities throughout the year which include tours, special events, and programs. The Friends of Clermont group also develops programs and workshops for much of the year and publicizes activities.

Programming offered in recent years is bringing new and different groups to Clermont. The Harvesting History program brings children from schools throughout Columbia, Greene, and Ulster counties to harvest vegetables from the teaching garden. A younger audience brings in new energy while building future visitorship. Clermont’s educators will continue to create content that will resonate with visitors of all ages and backgrounds and provide them with fresh ways of engaging with the Site.

Public programs offered recently have included “Clermont and Construction” and “Pedal Pusher Story Hour,” both designed to appeal to different ages and interests.

Actions for Education, Interpretation and Outreach

Changes in education, programming, and interpretation are beginning to shift the focus at Clermont beyond the experience of the Livingston Family and drawing more diverse audiences. A milestone was reached in 2022, when after 35 years, the old Visitor Center exhibit was replaced with content that reflects this new direction. Entitled “Spero Meliora: Life In The Land of Livingston,” it uses text, images, and artifacts to explore the lives of both the Livingston family, and the enslaved people, indigenous communities, servants, and tenant farmers who lived and worked at the Site between the 17th to the 20th centuries. The exhibit includes a new children’s area where younger visitors can try on period clothing, listen to stories about Clermont’s workers, or explore a book. Programming for the mansion to complement the Visitor Center exhibit is also under development. Text, graphics, and other information will depict the full range of people who lived at Clermont. The content will be launched along with the reopening of the mansion, which has been closed since the start of the Pandemic in 2020.

The OPRHP interpretation unit is also developing content related to Revolutionary War history for the “NYS State Celebration, 2025-2033,” with new material that will help visitors better understand events that occurred at the state’s historic sites during that era.

A public survey completed for this plan found that the most common way that visitors discovered Clermont was through “local knowledge” (64%). A smaller number learned about the Site through word of mouth (15%), and the remainder through the internet (7%). Staff indicated that a more comprehensive approach to outreach is needed to get the word out about the Site’s new programs and events. Strategies that will reach new audiences and groups are especially important to support the Site’s more inclusive approach to programming and education.

A common thread running throughout this plan is a desire to redirect visitor attention beyond the Site’s historic core and raise awareness of the Site’s less visible elements. Planned improvements in the north part of the facility, to the Red Barn, the Ice Pond, Clermont Cottage, and Sylvan Cottage, will be accompanied by fresh programming and, where needed, updated interpretative material.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: Continue the current approach to content development for programming and interpretation.

Considerations:

- The Site may not reflect evolving contemporary interests and new trends in interpretation
- Programming will not be in line with the agency’s Our Whole History initiative
- Older material will become outdated and, without fresh content, may lose some visitors
- The Site may not attract new visitors with different backgrounds and demographics
- Education staff have developed and launched some new content and will continue to do so

Alternative 2 – With the support of the Bureau of Historic Sites, develop educational content that conveys the experience of enslaved people, indigenous communities, Palatines, servants, and tenant farmers, using both the collections and content-driven approaches.

Considerations:

- Storytelling about historical objects can help visitors understand the Site’s diverse history (e.g., straight pins can illustrate mending/sewing tasks done by servants or enslaved people)
- Will require working with the agency archaeologists (i.e., to utilize objects from off-site)

- Collections are extensive and there is much opportunity for new programs and interpretation
- There is a need for programming related to indigenous communities that formerly lived in the region
- The Collections Policy is proposed to be modified and there will be an opportunity to include items that reflect a more diverse history
- There may be no objects available related to the Site's enslaved people (e.g., livery that enslaved 9- to 10-year-old boys are known to have worn is no longer extant)
- May need to re-interpret existing items to better reflect evolving approaches to content development
- There is high interest in hyper-regional topics, such as Palatine history, which attracts large audiences
- Some content about the Livingston's enslaved people is included in the Visitor Center exhibit
- Themed content related to historical objects may attract new audiences
- Exhibits are trending away from object-driven to content-driven approaches
- Many objects were lost when the house burned and therefore the collections do not tell a complete story
- Much of Clermont's history is not represented by objects or artifacts but it is important to convey

Alternative 3 – Implement special programs related to as-yet untold aspects of the Site's history.

Considerations:

- Reflects a contemporary approach to interpretation that focuses on civilian experiences rather than military history (e.g., for Rev War 250, offer portrayals of people who lived through the war, not just of soldiers or battles)
- Specialists may be needed to develop some content and may require funding
- Some special programs have been implemented (e.g., on experimental agriculture)
- Content may take various forms (lectures, live performances, first-person interpretation)
- Historical reenactments may reflect a more limited demographic and not attract as diverse an audience
- Clermont is interested in developing content that appeals to younger people (e.g., a comic-based exhibit in the Visitor Center has been very popular)

Alternative 4 – Partner with community educators to develop educational resources that will engage local schools and offer programs and curricula for a range of grade levels.

Considerations:

- The educators would like to increase in-school program material (e.g., tours about local and American history with age-appropriate content for 4th and 7th grade students)
- Clermont's mission includes engaging and collaborating with local schools
- Seeing a real-world historical setting can help expand students' understanding of history
- Staff are developing curricula but need additional support to revise all curricula to reflect Our Whole History
- To be useful to schools, content must align with classroom curriculum
- School group visits and after-school programs have been very successful
- School trips are not as common as in the past (due to need for busing, cost to schools, scheduling issues)
- Engaging schools brings in a younger demographic and kids who have a positive experience at the Site often bring their parents to visit
- Would like to develop more relatable material for children and youth at the Visitor Center
- Curricula is available from Harvesting History (kits are given to each student to be taken home or done with a teacher)

- The Site is interested in developing downloadable curricula (e.g., John Jay offers content that can be purchased)
- Staff have worked with the Friends group on ideas for education curricula, but funding is limited

Alternative 5 – Cultivate funding sources for developing an annual exhibit in the mansion gallery.

Considerations:

- Opportunity to partner with Peebles Island staff (funding is available for e.g., content related to women, communities of color, African American, and indigenous people)
- Requires partnering with the Friends group to obtain grants
- Staff have enough internal capacity to develop an annual mansion exhibit and a companion to Visitor Center exhibit in the mansion is changed annually

Preferred Alternatives: 2, 3, and 5

A fundamental change in Clermont’s approach to developing programming and educational content is well underway at Clermont. Significant progress in expanding the Site’s content to foster a more diverse audience has been accomplished with limited staffing and funding constraints. Implementing these actions will support educators’ current efforts and build upon those proposed in the Master Plan, which include engaging new partners, developing volunteer forces, and creating a staffing plan that will ensure support for these efforts in the future.



Actions for Interpretation

Background

Interpretative content for historic properties has begun to shift from a focus on static vehicles such as sign panels or infrequently changing exhibits, to include electronic publications, tours and on-site installations, interactive programs, lectures, and community events. With the twin goals of both informing and engaging visitors, effective interpretation helps visitors understand more aspects of a Site, placing it in a regional context, looking at its natural resources, and moving beyond traditional, text book-style historic narratives. The Site's shift to more engaging and inclusive content is underway, but the process is still in its early stages.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: Continue the Site's current approach to interpretation.

Considerations:

- Interpretative materials developed at Clermont over the past few years have expanded the Site's approach and narrative but there is much more to be done
- Content may not adequately reflect contemporary interests or trends or attract new visitors from different backgrounds or demographics
- Existing interpretive signage needs to be reviewed and updated, where needed
- Without fresh content the Site is less likely to attract repeat visitation
- There will be no additional expansion of existing interpretive themes/techniques
- Interpretation is a dynamic process, as new information, approaches, and research emerge

Alternative 2 – With support from the Bureau of Historic Sites, revise and update Clermont's Interpretative Statement.

Considerations:

- Clermont's interpretive statement was last revised in 1993
- The approach and narrative for interpreting the Site's history is evolving and the interpretive statement needs to reflect this new direction
- Revisions can be implemented in-house
- Important for the Site's Statement to incorporate new approaches to interpretation as they evolve

Alternative 3 – Develop interpretative content for the Site's underutilized resources.

Considerations:

- Important elements, including the historic dock and the Arryl House and Englekirk ruins, have been identified as underutilized and have potential to inform the Site's more inclusive narrative
- With planned assessments of the historic landscape the Site will continue to identify additional potential subjects
- Content for underutilized elements may appeal to contemporary audiences and new material may draw repeat visitors
- Staff time is limited these elements may continue to be a lower priority and additional support is required to develop appropriate interpretive content

Alternative 4 – With support from the Bureau of Historic Sites, update Clermont’s interpretation program/plan to define new content goals, presentation methods, and ensure a cohesive message.

Considerations:

- Must be completed along with Alternative 2
- To ensure a cohesive message, interpretation at Clermont will be driven by historic content that relate to contemporary issues (e.g., using John Henry’s approach to power generation to discuss clean energy development today)
- OPRHP signage guidance has been released since the plan was created
- Will include exploring new themes and content areas that better reflect contemporary or evolving visitor interests
- The focus of future content will change over time and regular review of material is important
- The mission and narrative for interpretation are being reevaluated by the Site and Agency and interpretation should reflect any changes
- The Site’s interpretation plan will be consistent with any revisions in the Collections Policy
- Without an updated plan there are no parameters or a road map for future interpretation
- The current approach to content development is narrower in focus than desired and the message needs to be more clearly defined in a cohesive plan
- The process will be time-consuming

Alternative 5 – Strengthen the role of Clermont’s Advisory Committee to guide future interpretive development.

Considerations:

- Communication can be improved by meeting multiple times per year
- Increasing the size and make-up of the group will bring fresh, different ideas and new approaches
- Focus on including representatives from underserved populations (e.g., English Language learners/limited English proficiency, limited mobility)
- Improve connections in the local community (Red Hook, Clermont, Germantown)
- Bring in educators to participate
- Will require a significant time investment by the group to maintain a higher level of communication

Preferred Alternatives: 2, 3, 4, and 5

Clermont’s educators actively develop interpretative content that features topics of interest to wide-ranging audiences. Programs, tours, exhibits, and activities that are informed by new research and characterized by a thoughtful and diverse approach will ensure that the Site will offer content that may resonate with more people.

Actions for Outreach and Marketing

Background

Online outreach is Clermont’s primary method of publicizing its programs and events, and the Site maintains an active presence on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Clermont’s Blog). Other methods include print advertisements, press releases to local media, and working with county tourism offices. The Friends of Clermont sends out a weekly e-blast to the over 2000 recipients on their mailing list, and the regional public relations staff provide other parks and sites in the region with a monthly events calendar. Flyers with QR codes for information about upcoming events are posted around the Site and

at local businesses, and a marquis on Route 9G is also used to publicize events or seasonal changes. New outreach and an additional part-time staff have been brought on and are available to assist.

Visitorship numbers that rose markedly during the Pandemic have largely been sustained. A new exhibit at the Visitor Center has generated interest, and bicycle groups from the Empire State Trail are stopping at the Site. Higher visitor numbers and the energy from different groups offer the potential for new audiences for the Site’s expanded programming.

Clermont competes with the many other historic destinations in the region, and its location is not accessible by public transportation. While the Site has unique qualities that can be promoted to help it stand out against other historic attractions—including access to expansive views across the Hudson River—staff time is limited, and developing outreach content is labor- and time-intensive. Outreach methods have also evolved. Printed brochures and fliers are no longer widely used. Hard copy materials are costly and can be environmentally wasteful, and most visitors are accustomed to digital resources. Signage with QR codes can provide more information, and content is easily updated. These are already used on some signage at the Site.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status quo: Clermont will continue existing outreach approaches and levels to publicize programs and events.

Considerations:

- The region and Site would like to grow and diversify attendance
- Visitor attendance will remain static
- A targeted marketing approach with new outreach material is required to appropriately widely roll-out the Site’s new direction in programming and education
- More comprehensive outreach strategies would more effectively reach new audiences
- At existing staff levels only the current scope of outreach can be sustained
- Alternative/untapped outreach methods would allow the Site to cast a wider net
- Revolutionary War 250 programs will likely bring more attention to Clermont



The Robinson family, photographed at the turn of the 20th century, lived in Germantown. While their specific history is unknown, many Black families in the Hudson Valley at the time could trace their ancestry to the first generation of freedmen after legal enslavement ended in New York in 1827.

Alternative 2 – Expand outreach and marketing strategies to foster more visibility and awareness about Clermont and what it has to offer.

Considerations:

- Staff would like to reach new audiences and increase awareness of new content approaches
- Local tourism bureaus and regional entities can help distribute information
- International interest in Clermont is evident on social media and the Site would like to respond
- Need to better tap into the greater online community and pursue new approaches (e.g., podcasts, targeted radio spots)
- Clermont does not have dedicated marketing staff to develop and implement outreach
- Regular visitor surveys and online reservation systems can help inform where improvements in outreach can be made (e.g., “Where did you hear about Clermont?”)
- Staffing levels limits the scope and type of outreach that can be developed and implemented
- More visitors will result in more demands on staff and require more program development
- Clermont can be more widely promoted as a stop along the Empire State Trail
- Can be marketed as part of a statewide/national/international destination on a heritage tourism tour (e.g., included on Gilded Age Estate tour itineraries)
- QR codes can be incorporated on interpretive/wayfinding signage

Preferred Alternative: 2

Site staff emphasized the importance of broadening its reach to publicize the Site’s expanded educational and interpretative content. The established range of outreach strategies for programs, events, educational activities, and other offerings may not reach all audiences that the Site hopes to engage. Broadening the scope with a targeted and comprehensive approach will help to reach untapped communities and bring in new groups and individuals who have not yet discovered Clermont or are unaware of its latest offerings.

The planning team identified the elements that draw people to Clermont, even within the context of the region’s bountiful menu of historic resources. Access to the Hudson River viewshed, its important and intact historic landscape, a trail system and open space that provides access to quiet, natural areas, and its “off-the-beaten-path” sensibility all contribute to Clermont’s individuality. Tapping into a larger network of potential visitors, such as “heritage” tourists, cyclists, birders, artists, and outdoor recreation groups, will contribute to the overall vitality of the Site.

Actions for Recreational Resources

Although outdoor recreation is not generally the focus of historic properties, a public survey completed for this plan indicated that about one-fourth of Clermont visitors come for activities unrelated to the Site’s historic significance. While 27% of respondents said they came for elements related to the Site’s history or to attend special programs, concerts, or festivals and 16% for mansion tours, 25% came to hike, bike, walk their dogs, or bird watch. Staff noted also that a significant number of people come to Clermont regularly for solo or small group activities, such as exploring the Site on foot or horseback, snowshoeing, picnicking, watching a sunset, or just relaxing outdoors.

Recreation use at Clermont is generally passive. The planning group felt that more active recreation infrastructure, such as ball fields, tennis courts, or playgrounds, would not be appropriate to this setting. Other parks in the region meet demand for these activities.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1– Status Quo: No changes to recreation offerings at the Site.

Considerations:

- Some aspects of the Site are underutilized and offer the opportunity to expand recreation amenities
- Adding or improving passive recreational amenities may attract a wider range of visitors
- Current recreational offerings may not appeal to a broader demographic, limiting visitorship
- Some people come to the Site exclusively for passive recreation and access to the outdoors, rather than for its historic significance
- There will be no additional maintenance requirements
- Will not promote an active lifestyle

Alternative 2 – Assess the feasibility of providing public access to the Site’s holdings and remnants of a historic dock along the Hudson River shoreline.

Considerations:

- An active rail line prevents safe access to this area on foot from the landward side of the facility
- Costs to install a footbridge would be prohibitive and the state may not be able to secure permissions/permits for public access
- Little of the original dock structure remains and would need to be rebuilt to accommodate any boating activity (e.g., non-motorized canoes/kayaks)
- Safety issues, including water depths and currents, would need to be evaluated to determine whether the dock location is appropriate for boating access
- People are known to drive over the train tracks to fish at the dock (unofficially), a safety concern
- No feasible option has been identified to provide safe access to the dock area
- The dock and riverfront have been identified as an underutilized part of the Site, and an important part of its historic use
- Interpretative content can increase awareness and education regarding this part of the park without the need to provide physical access
- Some interpretation about the Site’s maritime history is available at the Visitor Center
- The state is working to activate the Hudson River waterfront for public recreational use (e.g., Hudson Eagles Initiative)
- Any move toward legitimizing public access to this area needs to be developed in conjunction with the Agency (e.g., would need to be formally developed and assessed)
- Providing some type of access to the riverfront could be beneficial to the Site, potentially increasing attendance

Alternative 3 – Investigate the possibility of offering special outdoor events to encourage new groups to come to the site (e.g., temporary overnight camping for youth or bicycle groups).

Considerations:

- Day visitation from bicycle groups has increased since the EST was opened and there may be increased interest in this type of event
- Will increase security and maintenance needs, requiring overnight staffing; trash management
- Location needs to be adjacent to the public restroom
- The area is historically and archaeologically sensitive
- The only appropriate sites would be far from the public restroom
- Many other places to camp already exist in the region
- Other historic sites have had mixed results with these types of events
- Will be a relatively high cost and effort to implement and not feasible with current staffing levels
- Would require bringing in concessionaire
- Camping can change the dynamic of a public facility and more study is needed to determine whether overnight camping makes sense at Clermont

Alternative 4 – Maintain connections with equestrian community by developing special events that highlight equestrian use as a historic recreation activity at the Site.

Considerations:

- Equestrian use already exists at the facility
- The Livingston Family was very interested in horses and active with their various uses
- Horses must be trailered to the Site (there are no connections with regional equestrian trails)
- The Site’s trails are appropriate for small volumes of equestrian use, but the facility doesn’t have the infrastructure or staffing to support significantly more activity
- Horse activity is harder on trails than foot traffic and more equestrian use will increase trail maintenance and cleanup, which can be time consuming and would require additional staffing
- If demand for equestrian facilities increases, users may request groomed trails, which would add to maintenance tasks and expenses
- Would need to consider a permit system, increasing administration demands (e.g., at RSPP requires permits for horses at the Site and trails are groomed for equestrian use with work contracted out)
- May attract volunteers to help maintain trails
- No way to limit where people ride and may result in use conflicts (pedestrians, kids, dogs), and the Site does not want to encourage visitors to ride on carriage roads or lawns
- One-time special events can bring in equestrians and increase awareness of other available resources at Clermont
- Potential for invasive species to be brought in by horse activity

Preferred Alternatives: 2, 3, 4

Planning discussions focused on strategies for developing appropriate recreational opportunities that would bring a wider range of people to enjoy the grounds and engage in activities that help promote a healthy lifestyle. As Clermont staff works to broaden its appeal to new and expanded visitor interests, backgrounds, ages, and abilities, developing new kinds of events and programs was deemed the preferred way to reach beyond those traditionally offered.

Over the years the agency has considered the possibility of offering public access to Clermont’s shoreline property. This part of the Site is not contiguous with, or accessible from, the upland portion, and the presence of an active rail line further complicates access. Clermont staff had at one time applied (unsuccessfully) for a DOT grant that would allow river access via a bridge with an elevator. The cost was high, and the structure would have had significant visual impacts. The agency currently has no plans for developing public access to this area.

Actions for Picnic Facilities

ADA standards require that, to be accessible, picnic facilities must be level, accessed by paths with a firm and stable surface, and provide accessible routes to handicapped parking stalls and restrooms.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: The Site’s picnic area remains in its existing location and will not provide accessible surfaces and furnishings.

Considerations:

- Picnicking is a popular activity at Clermont
- Public facilities must offer equitable/accessible options
- Existing picnic area does not meet OPRHP or facility goals to provide access to all

- Picnic tables are on lawn, not an appropriate (firm and stable) surface for accessibility
- Current picnic area location is convenient, adjacent to parking lot and restrooms, tables are shaded and offer Hudson River views
- A restored Locust Allée parallel to the parking lot may not be compatible with the current picnic area location

Alternative 2 – Create accessible picnic facilities within the existing area.

Considerations:

- The existing picnic area does not meet OPRHP or facility goals to provide access to all
- Not all tables need to be accessible – some can remain in their current locations
- Visual impacts/intrusions and the historic/cultural landscape will need to be considered in locating and designing the picnic facilities
- Design will require DHP review for materials, paving, and appearance
- To be equitable, the Site should offer Hudson River or similar views for accessible picnic facilities
- There may not be appropriate locations for accessible picnic tables within the existing area (e.g., need to maintain a clear, level lawn area for weddings in this part of the Site)
- The southern end of the parking lot may offer a potential location for accessible picnic tables
- There are opportunities to provide accessible picnic facilities elsewhere at the Site

Alternative 3 – Create accessible picnic facilities in a location separate from existing picnic area.

Considerations:

- Accessible picnic facilities require a level area with nearby access to accessible parking and restrooms
- Must have appropriate materials, paving, design
- Historic preservation considerations must be evaluated, including cultural landscape intrusion
- To be equitable, the area should offer a comparable setting to the Site’s other picnic facilities
- All tables can be designed as accessible

Alternative 4 – Provide a historically sensitive picnic pavilion at the Site.

Considerations:

- Will visually impact the landscape and intrusion considerations must be evaluated
- Must be sited to avoid environmentally sensitive areas and historic elements
- Design (appearance) needs to be sensitive to historic landscape
- Will require DHP review/approval for location and design
- A previously disturbed area can be considered for locating a pavilion (e.g., on footprint of former cow barn adjacent to the Red Barn)
- Silhouette can approximate an original structure (e.g., the cow barn)
- Must be accessible and provide adjacent parking
- A new parking lot proposed in the Site’s north section may serve an accessible picnic pavilion
- May require electric, water, restrooms
- An existing structure, such as the Red Barn, can be retrofitted as a rental/events venue instead
- Will generate revenue
- Trash collection/other maintenance issues will need to be considered

Alternative 5 – Create a new picnic area adjacent to the Ice Pond.

Considerations:

- Will offer visitors an option to the area near a proposed new parking lot for picnicking at the Site
- Can function as overflow when other areas are full
- This location offers a quiet, pastoral setting with views across the pond
- Adding a second picnic area offers visitors an option away from the central activity area

- Restroom facilities and water are not available nearby
- Siting and screening with vegetation can mitigate visual impacts from other parts of the Site

Preferred Alternatives: 2 and 5

The existing picnic area is well-located, with views of the Hudson River and near accessible parking spaces in the visitor lot and a public restroom. The tables and grills are set in lawn, however, which is not considered a universally accessible surface, and most tables are not designed to accommodate wheelchairs. Options for creating new, accessible picnic facilities in a different location were evaluated, but no appropriate location was identified that could offer the same or equal amenities, and incorporating accessible picnic tables into the existing area was selected as the best option. This location also works well for integrating the accessible tables with the proposed multi-use path and accessible viewing platform to be installed nearby.

A place to create a new picnic area was also evaluated. The meadow setting of the Ice Pond is centrally located, and mowed paths lead to the pond's east end where picnickers will have views across the pond, rolling terrain, and open fields. Picnic tables at this location will not cause significant visual impacts to the landscape.

Providing a pavilion for seasonal outdoor events was given serious consideration but, a lack of appropriate siting options and historic preservation considerations made this option untenable. Proposed improvements to the Red Barn will address this function in this part of the Site.



Actions for Trails

Background

Clermont's trails are part of the Hudson River Greenway system, and the Empire State Trail now passes through the Site along Woods Road (County Route 35).

The OPRHP Statewide Trails Planner, Regional Trails Coordinator, and other staff walked Clermont's existing trail network to assess its overall condition and identify steep grades, wet areas, and other maintenance priorities as well as update the Site's trail map. Sections in need of repair, re-routing, or closure were identified and documented (see Appendices 11, 11a, 11b).

Accessible Trail Design

The Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) and the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) establish maximum and average running slope percentages and other standards for accessible trail segments and access routes. OPRHP staff trained in the Universal Trail Assessment Process performed a preliminary review of pathways near the mansion, cottages, and other interpretive destinations. This information was provided to the planning team as background for potential accessible trail improvements. An initial assessment for accessibility at Clermont found the following:

- Grades along the existing paved trail from the visitor parking area to the lawn behind the mansion are very close to meeting the accessible standards; the pavement is deteriorated, however, and minor grade adjustments are needed in one section to meet ADA standards.
- The average running slope from the Arryl House Ruins to the visitor parking area are reasonable and can accommodate an accessible trail without significant earthwork.
- The area around the mansion’s perimeter needs additional site work to create and connect accessible segments and meet ADA standards.
- Proposed accessible trails and walkways will require further analysis and design in order to create construction plans and cost estimates.
- Surfacing materials for existing and future paths and trails need to be considered; gravel or stone dust can erode or subside and needs ongoing maintenance to ensure continued accessibility. Grass and dirt are not considered accessible due to their variability in firmness and stability over the seasons.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: No changes or improvements to Clermont’s trail system.

Considerations:

- Some trails have deteriorated or eroded areas and may present safety or user experience issues
- Hiking and walking are popular activities in the state and region
- The main visitor parking area does not provide any information on the Site’s trails or how to access them
- Does not develop connections with the Empire State Trail, which passes through the Site’s east section
- Does not help realize a master plan goal to activate the full Site
- Most existing trail segments are not accessible and do not provide this amenity to visitors with mobility issues

Alternative 2 – Improve the existing trail system at Clermont by addressing portions of trails with erosion, wetness, or steep grades.

Considerations:

- Poor trail conditions do not provide a positive user experience
- Facility goals include making its trails more user-friendly
- Trail establishment was not reflective of modern trail standards
- Chronic water-related trail issues such as erosion or muddy areas will increase if not addressed over time
- Trail issues can impact visitor safety, damage natural resources, and discourage trail use
- Clermont’s trail system is not extensive, and changes could be achieved with reasonable investment of resources
- Trails are a priority for the Friends Group

Alternative 3 – Close unused trail sections or trails in sensitive areas, re-route chronically wet trail segments, and install or replace trail bridges and culverts where needed.

Considerations:

- Many informal or legacy trail corridors exist at the Site; some are used, and others are not.
- Some existing trail segments are unclear and may cause confusion or safety issues
- Closed trails can be allowed to revert to natural state, potentially expanding habitat
- Trails that are closed and no longer maintained in environmentally sensitive areas may be subject to unchecked spread of invasive species
- Closing some trail segments will reduce maintenance needs in those areas
- Repair and replacement of bridges and water management devices is critical to the user experience as well as for natural resource protection.

Alternative 4 – Formalize trail access points at the Site and encourage connections with the Empire State Trail, adding informational signage, maps, safety information and, where appropriate, bicycle racks, picnic tables, and/or parking.

Considerations:

- The Site's trails do not have clear entry points and their routes and connections are not evident
- The visitor parking area does not provide trail maps, formal trailheads, or general Site information
- Will establish a trailhead in the main parking lot with informational maps, natural resource information and regulations
- Formal trail access points provide wayfinding and general Site information for new visitors
- Will promote a greater awareness and sense of connection with the Empire State Trail
- Improves visitor safety and benefits the overall user experience
- Informational signage provides an opportunity to communicate Site messaging related to accessibility, environmental protection, and connections to Site amenities
- May reduce impacts to natural areas
- Shows reinvestment in the Site's resources
- Informal parking along the roadway and on lawn areas is an ongoing maintenance issue
- Will help to address security issues at informal entry points, such as entering the Site after hours
- May require additional signage and blocking at undesirable/problematic informal parking areas

Alternative 5 – Establish a formal trailhead and expanded parking at the informal access point where visitors park to access the trail on-site near the flagpole.

Considerations:

- Visitors regularly park on the side of the road at this location to access trails
- Parking on an active roadway may lead to unsafe conditions and/or ticketing
- Formalizing this access point may attract more trail-focused users to the Site
- Safe parking is limited in this location
- Parking area could potentially be reconfigured to accommodate 10-12 cars and could be expanded in the future if needed
- Horse trailer parking may be possible at this location
- Can consider adding a pay station

Alternative 6 – Finalize, map, and implement improvements for the trail system.

Considerations:

- Ensures a cohesive, well thought out trail system
- Will reflect closed or rerouted trail segments
- Protects environmentally sensitive areas
- Meets Site goals to improve and develop a more legible trail system
- Identifies informal spurs or segments not indicated on existing maps

- Trails will be labeled with names and color-coded blazes
- Will help identify interpretive opportunities

Alternative 7 – Develop a trail signage plan based on a final trail layout to include trailhead kiosks, intersectional signage, and trail marking blazes.

Considerations:

- Creating a cohesive, legible, and formalized trail network improves the user experience and safety at the Site
- A lack of direction upon arrival in the main visitor parking area does not encourage trail use
- Aids navigation and informs visitors about the entire trail network, including trail connections
- May improve Site management and reduce security issues
- Helps delineate use types, such as for equine, and keeps these uses from other areas

Alternative 8 – Develop an accessible interpretive trail near the mansion.

Considerations:

- New signs will move visitors of all abilities through an interpretive storyline
- The trail will be part of a larger accessible trail network proposed at the Site
- An accessible trail will provide greater mobility to Site's trending demographic
- Content will align with the Site's new exhibits and provide inclusive educational content
- Existing sign panels can be retained and incorporated into the narrative
- Needs to be sensitively designed to avoid visual "clutter" or intrusions into the historic landscape
- Requires significant staff time for planning and implementation
- The Site may opt to use its resources for higher priority projects

Alternative 9 – Develop an accessible trail that incorporates elements and features for different senses (aural, tactile, smell). *Considerations:* Would expand accessibility at the Site. A trail designed for autistic individuals at Letchworth State Park has been extremely successful

- Can include an educational component that links to the Site's history (e.g., Livingston family members who had hearing impairments)
- An existing trail segment could be used
- Maintenance demands may increase
- Trail maps, brochures, and signage can be developed to guide use
- A small-scale approach could be implemented for low cost
- May bring in a different/new audience
- Offers opportunities for new partnerships

Alternative 10 – Develop selected trails for mountain biking.

Considerations:

- A loop specific to mountain biking could be developed on existing trails
- Signage, education, and/or "meet and greet/fat tire" events can help mitigate conflicts on trails (pedestrians, equestrians)
- Will attract a new demographic with younger visitors
- Needs sufficient length to be appealing (could connect with the EST)
- Trail maintenance will increase
- This activity may not be appropriate for a historic site
- Could be located away from mansion and other historic elements
- Use level can be determined by trail design (speed/elements)
- Would promote more winter use of Site

Preferred Alternatives: 2-8

An important part of Clermont’s recreation infrastructure, the trail system was identified by the region as an underutilized resource. The existing trail network winds through scenic meadows, woodlands, near streams and scenic outcroppings. Most trails are unmarked and all lack dedicated trailheads with maps, safety information, or route layout. When visitors arrive at the main visitor parking area there is no information on the Site’s trails or how to access them. Sections of some trails are in poor condition, and some are routed through sensitive natural areas. People also enter trails at unauthorized locations, sometimes after hours, which presents security and management issues for staff.

These actions will improve the trails network and better protect the Site’s natural resources. Improvements in the condition and legibility of Clermont’s will make this system more accessible and sustainable and encourage healthy outdoor activities.

Popular active recreation options, including mountain biking, were determined to be inappropriate for Clermont.



Actions for Facilities, Infrastructure, and Operations

The OPRHP is responsible for preserving the integrity many of the state’s historic resources. To prevent—or significantly reduce—deterioration and protect the integrity of the historic element, original materials and workmanship need to be appropriately maintained. Maintaining all elements in their original form, however, is not always easy, or possible.

Operating and maintaining a historic site so the facility can perform its function as a public resource is an additional challenge. Day-to-day procedures, equipment, materials, and recommended maintenance routines for modern materials are not always appropriate for historic structures.⁶⁴ Caring for historic elements also requires the ability to identify significant and character-defining features, being aware of past treatments, and understanding the best practices for preserving these resources.⁶⁵

Underlying these operational decisions is the need to develop more resilient, lower-impact facilities, both overarching goals for the agency. Each park or site must do its part to help meet state goals for reducing carbon emissions. The Master Plan considered these directives when selecting actions for Clermont, whenever possible.

Background

Clermont staff have taken steps toward more efficient operations, replacing all lightbulbs with LEDs and reducing the use of equipment that use fossil fuel, such as mowers. Eventually agency and Site will transition to all-electric equipment, including EVs. In addition, the proposed adaptive reuse of several existing buildings has the environmental benefit of avoiding carbon emissions that occur in new construction when materials are mined, harvested, manufactured, transported, and assembled.⁶⁶

The actions developed in this Plan will help the Site take more proactive steps toward resilience, particularly in anticipation of growing impacts from climate change. Increases in extreme weather are already affecting the Site. Power outages are becoming more frequent, and flooding, damage to trees, infrastructure and other elements have led to discussions about installing generators as back-up power and the feasibility of adding solar at the Site.

Infrastructure

The functional infrastructure at Clermont – its roadways, sidewalks, trails, walls, parking lots, culverts, utilities, and other working parts of the facility – are aging and in variable condition. Safety issues can arise when pavements and other walkway surfaces deteriorate, or trails become eroded. The historic materials and character of much of the Site’s infrastructure also requires an added level of care.

Utilities

The electric infrastructure that connects Clermont to the power grid is outdated, which contributes to the frequency of outages. Staff identified the need for new and updated utility infrastructure within the facility as well, particularly the electric wiring and distribution systems. The mansion needs updated climate control systems to protect historic items housed there which are placed at risk when the power fails. A backup source for electric power is increasingly important for their protection.

As a wedding and event venue, Clermont needs sufficient capacity to provide supplemental electric service. Charging stations for Electric Vehicles (EVs), new uses for currently vacant buildings, and planned work are anticipated future energy needs.

Drainage and Stormwater Management Systems

As Site infrastructure ages, more frequent periods of heavy rainfall is impacting surfaces that do not readily absorb or manage runoff, which adds to maintenance workloads. Recurring erosion along the gravel carriage roads requires ongoing attention and, causes chronically wet or muddy spots and standing water in the historic gardens. Incorporating green infrastructure elements—bioswales, permeable pavements, and tree islands—when redeveloping the visitor parking lot, is planned to help address these issues. Throughout the Site, deteriorated or undersized culverts and bridges can no longer accommodate the increasing volumes of stormwater runoff.

Maintenance

Staff, equipment, and maintenance resources are shared between Clermont and Olana, under the supervision of a Park Manager. Storage space is at a premium and covered or indoor storage is available for only around half of the equipment. The maintenance shop location works well for the Site but staffing levels are insufficient for appropriate maintenance of the facility.

Accessibility

Historic infrastructure often presents a host of challenges to providing universal access. Uneven walkways, cobblestone roads, and steps at building entrances are common. When adapting a historic facility for accessibility a further challenge is maintaining the character as completely as possible while providing accessibility as unobtrusively as possible.⁶⁷ Historic properties that are open to the public are nonetheless expected to follow standards established by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). While there are exceptions, to the greatest extent possible, historical buildings and walks must be as accessible as non-historical elements.

An important goal for Clermont is to ensure that people of all abilities can comfortably experience the Site's significant features. Pedestrian routes from parking lots to major historic elements should have a smooth and level surface and all visitors will be provided a welcoming and equitable experience throughout the facility. Access challenges identified at the Site include:

- Mansion – The primary entrance has steep steps and visitors with mobility challenges must enter using an exterior lift on the building's north side. The lift is in poor condition and provides access to the second floor only. The parking area adjacent to the mansion is deteriorated, with uneven pavement.
- Visitor Center – A paved route from the main parking lot and accessible parking spaces are available, with a drop-off location for wheelchairs and a ramp to the entrance. An accessible restroom is available inside. This is generally the first stop for people interested in getting tickets for mansion tours. It also houses exhibits and has public program space. Once tour tickets have been purchased, there is no accessible route to the mansion. Visitors must return to their cars and drive around the Site to the mansion's north side to access a lift. Staff report that people sometimes lose their way on the drive over to the mansion.
- Clermont Cottage – Visitors attending programs or events at the Cottage must drive to the north part of the Site. The gravel surface of the accessible entry path has subsided, causing uneven surfaces and a lip at the front door. The parking area is undefined and does not have delineated handicap spaces.
- Lilac Walk – A paved path leads from the main visitor lot to the mansion through this historic planted area, but steeper sections and rough areas prevent it from being fully accessible.
- Public Restroom – Accessibility needs to be assessed.
- Gardens – Touring Clermont's historic gardens is a popular activity. Most of the area is fairly level and there are some accessible paths. The gardens are mostly surrounded with lawn, however, and there are often wet or muddy areas that limit access for some visitors.
- Carriage Road – A popular walking route along a carriage road takes visitors past historic elements of interest including Clermont Cottage, the Red Barn, Sylvan Cottage, and the Ice Pond. The gravel road is eroded, uneven, and has steep sections, limiting universal access to this part of the Site. During inclement weather, walking the distances required to reach this section can deter most visitors.
- Weddings/other group events – Often held on the lawn adjacent to the Arryl House Ruins; this area does not currently meet ADA guidelines for accessibility.

Actions for Pedestrian Infrastructure

Background

Clermont’s pedestrian facilities include asphalt or concrete pathways, gravel carriage roads, flagstone paths and terraces, and natural surface foot trails. The Master Plan alternatives developed below seek to address identified accessibility challenges, where possible, focusing on providing access in key areas with variable surfaces and deteriorated materials.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1: Status Quo – No changes to pedestrian infrastructure at the Site.

Considerations:

- Pedestrian routes to many Site elements have deteriorated pavements, loose gravel, erosion, lawn, and/or steep sections
- Limits the ability of both visitors and staff to fully experience and enjoy the site’s resources, amenities, and activities
- Does not address significant limitations to universal access at the Site
- Does not meet a Master Plan goal to make the Site more relevant and inclusive
- The condition of some existing infrastructure could lead to injury
- Access to elements in the Site’s north section will continue to be limited
- Some programs and events will not be fully accessible
- Public facilities are required to be accessible to the extent practicable

Alternative 2: Conduct a comprehensive study to evaluate accessibility sitewide and make recommendations for addressing issues.

Considerations:

- A full accessibility assessment is necessary to determine the feasibility of addressing issues and identifying best approaches
- Will include a slope assessment to determine areas where access can be provided
- The study must be developed with SHPO input and approval
- A professional study will require contracting with a consultant

Alternative 3: Develop an accessible multi-use path from the Arryl House Ruins to Clermont Cottage, with connections to the mansion and other points of interest at the Site.

Considerations:

- Integrates pedestrian facilities throughout the Site and provides an accessible route to the major historic elements in the Site’s underutilized north section
- Some existing trail segments are appropriate to be utilized as part of an accessible route
- Meets Site goals to make the Site more accessible and activate the north section
- An accessible trail will provide greater mobility to the region’s trending demographic
- Can promote the path as accessible, potentially attracting new and different visitors
- Will be integrated with other accessible elements proposed in the Plan, including a viewing platform, picnic facilities, and interpretive route
- Topography may present access challenges in some sections, but slopes along this route are generally within accessible limits
- Areas with new pavement will require SHPO/archaeological review, and materials and design will need DHP review and approval
- Can include an evaluation of a need for lighting along paths from the parking lot to elements within the Site’s historic core

Alternative 4: Improve access to Hudson River views by constructing an accessible viewing platform.

Considerations:

- This location is popular for viewing sunsets and river vistas
- Location is adjacent to handicap parking and will be connected to the proposed accessible path
- Will utilize the footprint of existing restroom, which is planned to be relocated
- The platform offers a meeting point for groups and outdoor programs
- Will offer a vantage for viewing the Waterfowl Concentration Area in the Hudson River
- Platform can incorporate an accessible picnic table and/or bench seating
- Materials and design will need SHPO approval
- Design must consider visual impact from riverside views from the west

Preferred Alternatives: 2, 3, and 4

These improvements to Clermont’s pedestrian infrastructure will open the Site to more visitors of different abilities ages, and interests. Installing a smooth and level walking route through much of the Site and installing an accessible viewing platform will enable more visitors to enjoy more of Clermont’s features.

Determining appropriate methods for addressing accessibility at the overall Site requires a professional study. A sitewide assessment will identify the full range of accessibility feasible at the Site within the constraints of historic preservation.

Actions for the Mansion (Accessibility)



Background

The historic Livingston residence at Clermont now serves multiple purposes: it is a museum, filled with fragile, original artifacts. It is open for guided public tours and used as an events venue. Behind the scenes, the mansion has staff offices and meeting spaces as well as storage for a portion of the Site’s extensive object collection.

The mansion’s historic significance allows little flexibility for layout modifications to accommodate universal access. Inside, its basement and upper floors are accessed by stairs.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: No changes to improve accessibility at the mansion.

Considerations:

- The mansion is the most significant historic structure at the Site and the primary focus for many visitors
- Visitors and staff who are unable to use the steps to enter the house will continue to use an outdated lift
- The accessible entrance with a lift is on the side of the building and does not offer an equitable entrance experience

- Addressing accessibility at the mansion needs to minimize visual intrusions to the historic character of the building, landscape, and viewshed
- Does not meet agency and Master Plan goals to make the Site relevant and accessible to all
- Programs and events will be limited to the first floor
- The mansion will not meet its full potential as a vehicle for education
- Access to staff offices in the mansion will continue, which may restrict the applicant pool

Alternative 2 – In coordination with the Division for Historic Preservation, develop a study to determine approaches to providing universal access to the mansion’s entrance, restrooms, exhibits, and staff offices.

Considerations:

- Study will need to identify feasible locations and consider historic preservation considerations and an analysis of footprint requirements to accommodate proposed functions
- Will require contracting a consultant specialized in accessibility
- Will provide a better entry experience to the mansion for visitors with mobility challenges
- Historic/cultural landscape will be significantly altered
- Staff offices would remain at preferred location at mansion
- Will identify multiple options for making the mansion more functional and accessible
- Implementation will require appropriate SHPO involvement and design approval
- Mansion interior would require fewer alterations while addressing multiple identified needs
- Providing universal access to the mansion may involve more than one strategy or approach
- Addresses access issues related to the mansion’s restrooms
- While the new addition would meet NYS building, fire, or safety codes, existing code compliance issues within the mansion would still exist
- SHPO review and approval would be required for design
- Cost would be substantial

Alternative 3 – Build a ramp to provide universal access to the mansion.

Considerations:

- The mansion’s interior layout and usage limit options for entering via an exterior ramp
- The most feasible ramp entry location has a significant elevation rise and would require a long ramp, and significant visual impacts to the mansion and setting
- Will improve functionality and accessibility at the mansion
- Will provide only main floor access (no second-floor access provided)
- Historic preservation considerations will be significant
- A more gradual landform ramp could be considered (fill/cultural landscape considerations)

Preferred Alternative: 2

The mansion presents multiple challenges to accessibility, and options to address these were discussed at length. Considerations include undesirable visual impacts from exterior structures, such as ramps and lifts, and the possibly excessive modification to both the exterior and interior of the building that would be required to ensure equitable access. Variables to consider are technical and complex, and a more formal study by a professional is the recommended next step.

Actions for Staff Offices

Background

Office space for most staff is in rooms on the mansion's third floor, and the basement kitchen is used for group meetings. The existing wheelchair lift services only the second floor, and therefore staff workspaces are not universally accessible. Options that could potentially provide accessible office and meeting space were evaluated.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: Staff office spaces will remain at their current locations with no renovations or upgrades.

Considerations:

- Staff report that the location of existing offices at mansion and maintenance area generally works well
- Offices on the mansion's third floor are not universally accessible
- There is no alternative/second egress for offices in the mansion
- In their current location, offices do not meet requirements for accessibility
- Office location limits future staffing options
- The restroom used by staff and the public in the mansion is not accessible and its location is not optimal
- The basement kitchen meeting space is not accessible and able to accommodate only smaller groups (10-12 people)
- Mansion offices need significant updating and renovation (e.g., older carpets, paint, electric)
- Maintenance Center offices need internet connectivity, potable water, and updated restrooms

Alternative 2 – Keep staff offices in the mansion and renovate them.

Considerations:

- Offices in the mansion need renovation
- Universal access may not be feasible for some parts of the mansion
- Mansion offices are well-located for current staff needs
- The basement meeting space needs an accessible restroom
- Existing office space needs to be evaluated for compliance with building and safety codes; may need to be retrofitted to meet codes
- Code-compliant restrooms require a more space and may impact the mansion's historic interior
- Views from the mansion's offices are enjoyable

Alternative 3 – Retrofit an existing building at the Site for staff offices (e.g., Red Barn; Sylvan Cottage, or the Visitor Center).

Considerations:

- No existing buildings have been identified as appropriate in location or type to function appropriately as staff offices
- The Park Manager must be close to activities in the mansion and needs a more efficient office layout
- If offices were moved, staff would need a radio system to maintain necessary contact

Alternative 4 – Construct a new, ADA-accessible building with staff office space at another location at the Site.

Considerations:

- Offices located away from the mansion are not optimal for staff
- Staff offices and meeting spaces would be universally accessible
- There are many challenges to building a new structure at the Site (historical, archaeological, natural resource, visual considerations)
- A new building would need to be sited and designed to ensure there will be no impacts to cultural resources
- The mansion’s third floor originally housed servants’ bedrooms; if staff offices were moved elsewhere, this area could be added to the house tour, or used for storage
- A new structure could be designed to include space for year-round programs and larger events
- A radio system would be needed to allow staff to maintain contact

Preferred Alternative: 2

Determining how to best provide accessible staff workspace at the mansion proved complex. Preservation requirements and staff use patterns and needs limit the options for both modification of infrastructure and office location. Staff need to be based close to the mansion, where most activities take place. No existing buildings were found to be appropriate for adaptive reuse as offices, and constructing a new structure elsewhere on the property was not considered practicable. A new building would be costly and no appropriate location could be identified without creating a significant visual intrusion to the historic landscape.

Keeping staff offices in their present location in the mansion, with minor upgrades, was determined the best option. Once the proposed Site-wide accessibility study is completed, other possibilities will be evaluated.



Actions for the Visitor Center

Clermont’s Visitor Center is in overall good condition. Housed in a renovated, historic barn, it is operationally well-sited, within a short walk of the parking lot and mansion. The interior’s pleasant rooms feature original woodwork and hardware, as well as an exhibit space with fresh new content.

Background

While the location works well, the Visitor Center is not easy to identify from the main parking area. No direct route leads from the parking lot, and signage does not clearly indicate its location. The building also has no exterior sign, and function is difficult to determine. The point of entry is unclear unless the front door is open. Walkways to the Visitor from the parking lot are deteriorated and uneven, with variable materials.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: The Visitor Center remains at its current location with no upgrades.

Considerations:

- The location works well for most visitation activity (e.g., mansion tour tickets, Site orientation, drop-off for bus tours, etc.)
- The building is close to staff offices in the mansion with convenient access when holding events, or managing and supervising groups
- The Visitor Center needs to provide a more comfortable, welcoming, and accessible entry experience
- The building lacks clear identification
- Will not address access issues on paths or lack of Visitor Center visibility from parking lot

Alternative 2: Improve access to the Visitor Center by providing a fully accessible route from the parking lot with clear signage, entry improvements (e.g., a portico and paved entryway), and improve interior restrooms.

Considerations:

- An identifying sign on the Visitor Center and directional signs from the parking area will increase its visibility and improve wayfinding
- Grades on existing paths from the parking lot to the Visitor Center are within accessible parameters
- Adding an accessible route from the parking lot and a paved, covered entryway increases visitor comfort and facility functionality
- Visibility for this key building is important for visitors as they enter the Site
- New signage, pavements, and lighting will require SHPO review and approval
- A paved entrance landing will be easier to maintain than existing lawn, compacted soil
- Restrooms in Visitor Center are aging and need to be expanded and updated

Alternative 3: Relocate the Visitor Center to another part of the Site.

Considerations:

- Its location near the parking lot works well for visitors and it is well-situated for staff
- The existing visitor center is accessible
- Siting a new building at the Site is challenging and no existing buildings or sites were identified as preferable as a Visitor Center location
- No existing buildings at the Site were identified as suitable for adaptive reuse as a visitor center
- Constructing a new facility is not cost-effective

Preferred Alternative: 2

While the interior of the Visitor Center is in generally good condition and the facility functions well for both staff and public use, improvements in the building's visibility and access are needed. Implementing this alternative will better support the Visitor Center's important function as a central resource for Site information, ticketing for tours, and other and activities.

Actions for Vehicular Infrastructure

Background

Visitors enter the Clermont Site from a winding, two-way road (Woods Road/County Route 35). The entrance was constructed in 1967, during the first phase of the facility’s development. The location was selected prior to the state’s acquisition of the facility’s northern parcel when options for the route were limited. A 1979 landscape report noted that “The entrance road... bisects earlier carriage drives and interrupts some of the natural drainage.”⁶⁸

Clermont’s primary visitor entrance has several drawbacks. Its location on a sloped curve makes it difficult for drivers to see the turn-off, particularly when approaching from the north. Cars entering or exiting have limited sight distance in both directions, and a lack of clear signage on the road makes the entrance a challenge to spot. Neither is there a sense of arrival or a “gateway” experience and, once visitors enter, there are no signs along the road directing them to the main parking area or Visitor Center.

Clermont’s internal road system is also in need of improvement. Drainage issues lead to erosion and washouts, which will increase as severe storms become a more frequent occurrence. Maintaining the Site’s road system places ongoing and increasing demand on staff time.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo – No changes to the Site’s existing vehicular circulation system.

Considerations:

- The Site’s primary entrance will continue to be unclear and hazardous, with poor visibility and limited sight lines
- Drainage issues and erosion on the facility’s internal roads will not improve and they will continue to deteriorate
- Maintaining the north carriage road will continue to take significant staff time, as gravel continually erodes and needs to be replaced
- The cobblestone road under existing dirt road, an archaeological resource, will continue to be exposed by erosion and may deteriorate
- The existing roadway configuration does not provide adequate emergency access to the mansion if the north road is blocked

Alternative 2 – Relocate Clermont’s main visitor entrance to the old, gated entrance at the north end of the facility.

Considerations:

- This is a more visible location and when driving south visitors naturally want to turn in here
- Provides a safer location for visitors to enter the Site
- Reflects historic circulation patterns
- Existing roadway does not have a large enough turning radius to accommodate buses or trucks
- Historic stone walls/piers at this location provide a gateway experience but would need to be modified to accommodate buses and trucks
- Will require a sharp turn immediately after entry
- Will help activate the Site’s north section, a Master Plan goal
- The current entrance can be used as a service road and alternative route for emergency access

Alternative 3 – Relocate the existing main entrance and construct a new entry location on Woods Road.

Considerations:

- Entrance will be safer and more visible, with improved signage and clear sight lines
- Will provide a distinct gateway experience for visitors
- Will be engineered to accommodate larger vehicles (e.g., buses bringing in groups)
- Route will utilize a portion of the existing entry road
- Better signage and amenities may encourage cyclists on the Empire State Trail to enter the Site

Alternative 4 – Improve emergency access from the visitor parking lot to the mansion by installing a route with firm, stable surface materials.

Considerations:

- Would be used as an alternative to the northern emergency access route if access is blocked
- Improves safety at the Site by ensuring that emergency vehicles have an alternative access route
- Appropriate materials will need to be approved by Historic Preservation
- May improve accessibility for the Visitor Center and mansion
- Required design will impact the appearance of the Site's landscape in this area
- Drainage issues and steep grades along this route will need to be addressed
- Stabilized gravel surface is preferred for appearance, but lasts only around one year
- The route will need to be evaluated for safety issues

Alt. 5 – Improve access to north section of the Site by re-paving the north carriage road and improving drainage infrastructure.

Considerations:

- The north carriage road is deteriorated from regular erosion and difficult to maintain
- Providing benches along the route will increase comfort for visitors with mobility issues
- This route is used by the public to access programs at Clermont Cottage
- Public facilities are required to be accessible
- Cobblestones under north road should not present an issue for repaving the road (DHP)
- Will need to identify historically appropriate materials (e.g., chip seal)

Preferred Alternatives: 3, 4, and 5

The Livingston Family entered the site from the north end of their property, where impressive stone walls and piers still mark the threshold to their estate. This entrance is now used primarily by staff and visitors attending programs at Clermont Cottage, but drivers frequently mistake this for the main entrance and turn in here. Relocating the main entrance was determined to be desirable for improved visitor orientation, safety and to provide an appropriate gateway into the Site.

Actions for Parking Facilities

Background

Regional staff reported that the visitor lot is adequate in size for most purposes. If capacity is exceeded during large events, overflow parking can be accommodated on lawns or other open areas. The visitor lot pavement is in poor condition, however, and lacks markings for stalls, drive aisles, and pedestrian lanes. Most park activities and events are accessed from this lot, and in its current condition it does not offer visitors a positive first experience at the Site.

Parking for the remainder of the Site is generally inadequate. The mansion's small parking area is used by staff or for drop-offs, or to access the lift, and the pavement is deteriorated. At Clermont Cottage, which is used for public programs, the parking lot is not well-defined and markings for handicap spaces are no longer visible. Proposed new development in the Site's north section will need to accommodate larger group events and meeting the demand for additional parking in this part of the Site is important.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1: Status Quo – No changes or additions to parking facilities at the Site.

Considerations:

- The visitor lot location and size works well for most site activities (e.g., access to Visitor Center, mansion, picnic areas, trails)
- The pavement is deteriorated, uneven and has minimal painted markings
- The Site will continue to offer sufficient parking for most events with access to Hudson River views
- When the main lot fills up, lawn areas used for overflow are sometimes damaged
- Parking for public events at Clermont Cottage is limited and visitors must park at the main lot and walk to the cottage, which some are unable to do, especially during inclement weather
- Accessibility to the north section of the Site will remain limited to those able to walk unassisted
- Limiting visitor parking to the main lot keeps the focus on the southern section of the Site
- A redeveloped parking lot offers the opportunity to incorporate sustainable materials
- If elements in the north section of the park are redeveloped (e.g., Red Barn, Sylvan Cottage) no public parking will be available to accommodate activities at these locations
- Accessibility issues in the existing lot will not be addressed

Alternative 2: Redevelop the visitor parking lot with green stormwater management elements, pedestrian paths, signage, and clear pavement markings.

Considerations:

- Will improve stormwater runoff management and mitigate some drainage issues in this area
- Improves visitor comfort, safety, and overall aesthetics
- Incorporating green elements reduces stormwater runoff and improves water quality
- Assessing soil conditions/percolation testing will need to be done to ensure that green infrastructure can function effectively
- Pedestrian safety and vehicular circulation will be improved
- Can be designed to accommodate overflow event parking
- Will need to design the new facility to ensure archaeological elements under the lot are appropriately protected

Alternative 3: Improve existing parking lots at the mansion, Sylvan and Clermont Cottages, and the Red Barn to ensure accessibility and to meet future demand.

Considerations:

- Improves access to these elements and allows more visitors to attend events in this section of the Site during inclement weather
- Will help to activate the northern section of the site, a Master Plan goal
- Will include appropriate handicapped parking spaces and accessible routes to entrances
- Visitors currently park along the roads to attend events or to use the trails, causing unsafe conditions
- Improved parking is essential to support the re-use of Sylvan Cottage and the Red Barn
- If the Site entrance is moved to the north, parking will be needed in this section
- Some improvements will require additional maintenance

Alternative 4: Develop a parking area in the north section of the Site with green infrastructure.

Considerations:

- An well-drained, mowed field was identified between Red Barn and Clermont Cottage that will provide ample parking for events and by visitors to the Red Barn, the proposed Ice Pond picnic area, and events held at Clermont Cottage
- Green infrastructure elements such as porous pavements, tree islands, and bioswales will be evaluated for inclusion in the parking lot design
- Will require appropriate archaeological reviews
- A footpath from the lot to the Red Barn can be developed for visitors attending events
- Location is convenient for visitors using the proposed multi-use path

Preferred Alternatives: 2, 3, and 4

Most people arrive at Clermont by car, and the main parking lot is often a visitor’s first experience. Parking issues identified at Clermont include accessibility, overall condition, capacity, poor drainage, and water quality concerns. Incorporating green stormwater elements, where possible, is desired. Well-designed parking facilities are integral to a safe circulation system, proper stormwater management and to allow universal access with smooth transitions. These actions will address multiple issues at the Site so the setting or activity can be the focus of a visit. The selected alternatives also work alongside other proposed circulation improvements in the Master Plan, including the new entrance location and connections with an accessible multi-use path.

Actions for Site Utilities

Background

In 2022, the OPRHP Energy Bureau evaluated the Clermont Site’s potential for developing a solar installation. Energy Bureau staff analyzed the facility’s electric usage and, to ensure an array will be able to accommodate anticipated additional loads, produced a conceptual plan that factored in future planned upgrades that may increase power needs (see Appendix F).

Clermont’s maintenance facility was selected as a promising location for a solar installation. This area has had more disturbance, is not ecologically sensitive, is separated from the main activity areas, and the arrays will not impact historic elements or disrupt views. The preliminary evaluation included a feasible array design that could fully offset the Site’s energy use and decrease the Site’s energy costs. Clermont staff noted a strong need for backup power during outages, which happen regularly in the area and sometimes leave the facility without power for days. In addition to the inconvenience to staff

and facility operations, the frequent outages are of particular concern for sensitive historic items, particularly those housed in the mansion. Extended periods without adequate climate control are potentially damaging to finishes, textiles, books, papers, paintings, and other historic items housed in the mansion. Alternatives below include the analysis of installing on-site solar at Clermont.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1: Status Quo – Do not develop solar power at Clermont.

Considerations:

- Will not support agency goals to provide 100% clean energy at its facilities by 2030
- The facility will continue to carry significant energy costs
- Funding for solar development is available now
- No site disturbance will occur
- Action on climate change is crucial and impacts to the Site are likely to increase
- Will not address the need for backup power to protect objects/collections stored at the mansion
- Power outages in the area are frequent and can affect the Site for days
- Short-sighted planning will not address future issues

Alternative 2: Develop solar power at Clermont as a grid-tied system to offset utility use and decrease costs.

Considerations:

- Preliminary analysis indicates that a solar installation could accommodate sufficient panels to offset a portion of the facility's electric usage
- The maintenance area was identified as a good location for installing solar infrastructure with minimal impacts to the Site
- No site disturbance will be required (e.g., from trenching)
- Solar installation includes panels installed on a proposed pole barn that the region will need to purchase
- Site staff will be trained to do small repairs and regular maintenance tasks on the solar components, but a maintenance contract may be required
- Retrofitting the solar system so that it can provide power for emergency backup can be assessed in the future as technology improves

Alternative 3: Purchase fuel generators to provide emergency backup power for the mansion and the maintenance facility.

Considerations:

- A minimum 48-hour backup capability is needed at the Site, and batteries for solar power can store only up to 8 hours
- Generators will need to be sized for a regional, multi-day outage that can provide power for heat, critical lighting, some offices, and security systems
- A portable generator can be kept at the maintenance area and moved to the mansion prior to severe storms to provide back-up power during outages
- Portable generators will result in temporary visual impacts to the historic setting and installation will need to be evaluated by SHPO for this and other potential impacts
- Buildings will need to be retrofitted to accommodate generator hook-ups (e.g., install transfer switches)
- Generators require regular maintenance to ensure they are functioning (e.g., started up regularly), and can have some operational issues
- New technologies may emerge, and solar infrastructure can be retrofitted to replace generators with a backup system that utilizes solar power generated on-site

Alternative 4: Install solar panels at Clermont with connections to the mansion to provide a backup power source (i.e., trenching to install electric lines).

Considerations:

- Developing solar as emergency power for the mansion would triple installation costs and provide only up to 8 hours of power
- Siting multiple smaller batteries to provide backup power for the mansion would be problematic due to space and historic elements constraints
- Less than 48 hours of emergency backup power is not sufficient to fully protect the mansion and its contents
- Trenching for electric connection from the maintenance area to the mansion will be extensive and may impact historic/cultural and natural resources
- Work will require separate SEQR review

Alternative 5: Develop solar with back-up capability for the maintenance area only (remainder of power generated will offset Site energy costs).

Considerations:

- One part of the Site would be provided with short-term (8-hour) emergency power
- The Site's energy use would be offset, with significant cost savings
- Would not help protect sensitive resources in the mansion (a priority) and items would continue to be subject to damage during outages
- Would be useful for the maintenance center to have backup
- If Alternatives 2 or 3 are selected and implemented, the solar infrastructure could be assessed in 5-10 years and retrofitted to create a back-up system once longer-term battery technology is available and more cost-effective
- Solar installation includes panels installed on a proposed pole barn that needs to be purchased
- The cost for providing backup to the mansion and other site buildings would triple overall costs for solar installation
- Agency has on-going issue of power failures and resources are being affected across the state

Preferred Alternatives: 2 and 3

Climate change impacts were a significant consideration in planning for Clermont's future. Severe storms are impacting the Site more frequently, often causing damage from flooding and downed trees. Power outages in this area can range from two to five days, and there is a great need for emergency backup power to keep climate control systems online to protect historic objects and materials at the mansion. Fluctuations in humidity and temperature extremes that occur during outages can result in interior condensation which can damage irreplaceable items.

The possibility of developing on-site solar power as a backup energy source was evaluated but ultimately not selected. The significant amount of trenching required for electric lines would require tree clearing and evaluation for potential impacts to natural, historical, and archaeological resources. With this option, project costs would also increase an estimated three-fold from a grid-connected solar installation.

Longer-duration batteries are being developed but are not currently available for storing sufficient energy for longer periods. Until battery technology improves, an off-grid energy system with solar-generated backup power is not a feasible option. Therefore, although the use of gas-powered generators does not align with the agency's clean energy goals, the need to protect the Site's irreplaceable resources was determined a priority. Purchasing a trailer-mounted generator that can be moved to the mansion when needed and installing an in-place generator at the maintenance area will help to protect the Site's resources and ensure that the facility can continue to function during power outages.

Actions for Operations, Maintenance, and Management

Ensuring that Clermont’s historic buildings and other infrastructure are maintained appropriately is an ongoing challenge for Site staff. Historic preservation considerations, aging utility infrastructure, and many landscape conditions all contribute to high maintenance demand. In past years the region had a restoration crew to help care for historic elements. Without that technical support, repairs and even minor maintenance tasks for some sensitive elements are now sometimes deferred.



Background

The planning team took a deep dive into how well the site functions from an operational standpoint (e.g., staff workloads, related infrastructure, equipment needs). The most pressing issues related to operations and maintenance of the Site were largely related to staffing. The Site’s maintenance staff describes the current level of upkeep they can manage as “treading water.” With current staffing, the crew can address only immediate needs and basic maintenance. On-going issues related to Site use include wear-and-tear from picnicking, managing large events and outdoor programs, and litter control.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1: Status Quo – No changes in Site maintenance, operations, or staffing.

Considerations:

- Staff levels will continue to be insufficient for maintaining elements and activities, and demands on staff will rise as the Master Plan is implemented
- Technical training and expertise are needed to appropriately protect and preserve Clermont’s historic resources
- The maintenance area needs upgrades (e.g., repair failing pavement, no potable water, lack of Internet connectivity)
- Trucks and other equipment are deteriorating more quickly from a lack of wash facilities and a lack of covered space to protect equipment from the elements

Alternative 2: Install a site-wide security camera system.

Considerations:

- There are no existing security cameras at the Site
- A previous plan for installing cameras at the Site did not move forward due to funding limitations
- Will provide information important during emergencies (e.g., visitor locations, Site activity)
- Enables staff to better monitor vandalism and unauthorized after-hours activity
- Increases the efficiency of Site operations by helping to identify maintenance issues across the facility
- Olana has had positive results from using a security camera system
- Camera systems can be expensive to maintain
- A maintenance contract is needed to ensure the system is appropriately managed
- Other sites have had issues with connectivity, servers go down every few years, and systems need upgrades

Alternative 3: Develop a site-specific plan that identifies current and anticipated future climate change impacts with strategies to protect at-risk elements.

Considerations:

- Historic resources are vulnerable to climate change and may require special protections
- A plan will analyze HVAC demand and identify possible location(s) for back-up generators to protect resources during power outages during storms
- Increasing impacts from more powerful storms, flooding, erosion, damage from fallen trees, and heat waves may lead to accelerated deterioration of Site elements and significant damage, adding to maintenance staff workloads
- Strategies to protect historic gardens and trees from increased damage or impacts from climate changes will be identified

Alternative 4: Improve litter/debris management by implementing new strategies to educate visitors (e.g., social media messaging, Leave No Trace, Don't Feed the Landfills Initiative).

Considerations:

- Staff currently spends significant time every week on trash/litter pick-up and a more effective approach will free staff to address other tasks
- Visitors are not always aware of the Site's carry-in/carry-out policy and many are not compliant
- Dog walkers leave waste in restroom trash cans and around the Site
- Signage is not effective for addressing these ongoing issues and new approaches are needed
- Staff "educators" stationed in high-volume visitation areas may improve overall compliance
- Utilizing volunteers for periodic trash clean-up days can be a cost-effective approach but does not address the ongoing issue
- Composting will be considered to help reduce leaf debris and food waste

Alternative 5: Upgrade the maintenance area by repairing failing pavement, adding drive-through pole barns, a fueling tank, pickup truck, and a wash bay.

Considerations:

- The maintenance area will be more environmentally friendly and functional
- Adding covered storage will protect equipment, potentially prolonging its useful life
- Newer equipment and infrastructure will improve staff safety and efficiency
- Wet areas in the maintenance facility have caused the pavement to deteriorate and trucks have gotten stuck
- Pavement repairs and/or replacement will make deliveries easier
- A wash bay for salt removal from equipment will improve vehicle longevity and reduce staff time and fuel needed to drive equipment to a car wash
- Supports plans for a solar installation at the maintenance facility

Alternative 6: Evaluate the Site's utility infrastructure to ensure it meets both current and future needs and requirements (e.g., distribution, wiring, poles, electric for events).

Considerations:

- As other Site elements are developed or upgraded, the facility will require more reliable systems and additional locations for providing electric during events
- Supplemental electric for events requires the use of extension cords from the mansion's basement and Arryl north
- Water for events near the parking lot is from the base of a water fountain
- All agency facilities will need infrastructure for EVs
- Power issues and outages impact efficient Site operations and maintenance
- Water usage levels need to be evaluated to determine possible leaks in the systems (e.g., between the mansion, public restroom, and pumphouse)

Alternative 7: Upgrade and repair the Site’s drainage infrastructure to address chronically wet areas, erosion, and deteriorating pavements.

Considerations:

- Site-wide drainage issues impact the overall function of facility and require staff time for repairs
- Carriage roads wash out regularly and gravel must be replenished
- Some drainage infrastructure is aging and/or insufficient and in places is unable to manage the volume of stormwater (e.g., culvert along main entrance road)
- To address the overall facility will require a site-wide assessment
- Gardens have chronically wet and muddy areas, and water damage to historic walls is occurring
- Arryl north can become too wet for groups to use, causing events to be relocated
- Poor drainage can impact historic plantings (e.g., in Cutting Garden)
- The path behind the Visitor Center washes out regularly, requiring regular repair

Alternative 8: Implement a phased, prioritized plan to upgrade Internet/WiFi technology at the Site for both staff and public use.

Considerations:

- Internet infrastructure is inadequate; no service in the Visitor Center or Maintenance area
- Visitor Center Internet access is insufficient, which slows down barcode scanning during events
- The main parking lot has some connectivity, but Internet service is sketchy for most of the Site
- Poor connectivity hinders online programming
- Public WiFi would increase self-guided interpretation opportunities, and QR codes may be used for interpretation more frequently in the future
- Maintenance staff needs to travel to get online access (e.g., to complete timecards)
- Purchasing parts and other items needed for maintenance and repairs is more efficient online
- The Internet is a key source of information on up-to-date maintenance tasks

Alternative 9: Choose energy-efficient equipment and materials and adopt lower-impact approaches to Site maintenance and operations.

Considerations:

- Agency is in the process of changing to all electric equipment for maintenance
- OPRHP will transition to 100% electric for its fleet/equipment over the next decade
- Will help meet agency goals for more sustainable facilities and state goals for carbon reduction
- Electric vehicle/equipment charging stations will be installed
- OPRHP is working to eliminate fuel oil for heating by installing heat pump/recovery system, and Clermont’s maintenance facility can be evaluated for potential geothermal system
- Facility has changed over to all LED lighting
- Staff have reduced salt use by applying 30-70 sand/salt
- A “spill kit” is in place for the 500-gallon gas tank

Preferred Alternatives: 2 - 9

Upgrading technology at OPRHP facilities was a priority in the Commissioner’s NY Parks 100 Update on OPRHP Priorities and Strategies. A larger support structure for maintenance and operations is needed for Clermont. Security cameras will improve protection of the Site’s historic elements. While upgrades to Clermont’s HVAC system is in the five-year plan, with the agency’s shift to renewable energy and the planned addition of solar infrastructure, the maintenance area will need to be upgraded and additional evaluation may be needed to meet changing needs.

Some fiber was installed in mansion in 2021, and at Clermont Cottage the Friends installed WiFi in 2022. However, the Site continues to lack sufficient connectivity overall.

Actions for Mansion (Interior)

Background

Historic structures can have inherent conflicts when the changes needed to accommodate contemporary use are met with the need for preservation. This is the case with Clermont’s most significant historic element, the Livingston Family’s former residence. Retrofits to the mansion’s interior have been made to accommodate its multiple functions as a museum, office space, and public venue. A capital project to repair and paint the mansion’s exterior was completed in 2022, however, the interior, including its historic rooms and staff offices, needs moderate, although not extensive, work.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1: Status Quo – No modifications or improvements to the mansion’s interior.

Considerations:

- The mansion is Clermont’s most significant historic element, and the state is responsible for preserving it for future generations
- Continued deterioration and stop-gap repairs may threaten the building’s historic integrity
- The mansion’s interior will continue to deteriorate, leading to loss of irreplaceable elements
- As deterioration increases, repairs and renovation will become more intensive and costly
- The visitor experience will not improve and may decline
- Safety issues may emerge as the mansion continues to deteriorate
- Staff offices housed in the mansion need renovation

Alternative 2: Develop and implement a comprehensive Historic Structures Report and Conditions Study for the mansion that identifies work needed to appropriately protect and preserve the interior and its contents.

Considerations:

- A significant element from New York’s history will be documented and assessed, and a plan to for appropriate preservation will be developed
- Meets Park’s mission to be responsible stewards of our state’s cultural resources
- A comprehensive assessment of conditions in the mansion’s interior will require specialized staff and/or a consultant and may be costly to develop and implement
- Both the visitor experience and conditions for staff working in the mansion will improve
- Identifies priorities for repairs, upgrades, and restoration work
- Addresses code issues and needed upgrades to HVAC, fire suppression mechanisms, and security system
- If the mansion does not meet the environmental requirements of potential lending institutions (i.e., appropriate climate control), the Site will not be able to obtain loans from other collections for special exhibits

Preferred Alternative: 2

A lack of specialized skills, constraints on materials and repair methods, and preservation requirements are some of the challenges staff face when maintaining the mansion. Identifying appropriate approaches to repairs and materials for interior elements is beyond the scope of the Master Plan. A comprehensive Historic Structures Report and Conditions Study developed for the mansion by a historic preservation specialist will ensure that its significant and character-defining features are preserved. The plan will provide operations and maintenance staff with direction regarding appropriate actions they can perform to maintain the structure and make recommendations for preservation skills training.

Actions for Site Operations & Staffing

Clermont operates its 503-acre facility year-round with eight full-time and eight part-time staff. In addition to a full-time Site Manager, staff include:

- Education: (2) full-time and (2) part-time seasonal
- Security: (2) part-time/year-round seasonal
- Wedding/Business: (1) full-time, year-round seasonal
- Maintenance: (4) full-time, (4) seasonal/part-time

The wedding coordinator is shared with Staatsburgh State Historic Site, and maintenance staff are shared with Olana. The Friends of Clermont are a significant source of support, planning and implementing programs and volunteer projects, as well as contributing financially to Site improvements.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: No modifications to operations, procedures, policies, or staffing.

Considerations:

- Staffing levels are insufficient for appropriate management and preservation of the facility
- Demands on staff are high and at existing levels can be overwhelming
- Some positions are difficult to fill, and ongoing vacancies contribute to staff workloads
- Qualified, part-time, seasonal staff are difficult to find due to low pay rates
- Some roles may be partially addressed by volunteers

Alternative 2 – Develop a plan that assesses staff requirements for appropriately supporting existing elements and future development.

Considerations:

- It is important to identify staff levels required to appropriately maintain both existing and future investments in rehabilitated and upgraded Site elements
- New emphasis on cultural landscape features and development of the Site's north section may present management challenges, requiring new approaches and specialized knowledge
- New specialized staff or training for existing staff may be required to appropriately maintain historic elements
- Will identify areas that volunteers can assist with, such as public program support or routine maintenance
- Determining staffing needs for the Site's expanding vision for education, interpretation, and programming will help optimize the Site's potential

Alternative 3 – Improve visitor management by stationing staff or volunteers at key locations on high-volume days to answer FAQs and address ongoing issues, such as litter management.

Considerations:

- This approach has worked well at other OPRHP sites
- Extra support is important on busy weekends and during large events, when demands on staff are high
- Could install a temporary, portable information booth in high-volume areas
- Will improve the visitor experience by increasing knowledge and understanding of the Site
- At current staff levels it may not be the most efficient use of their time
- Managing volunteers can be intensive, and may require a dedicated volunteer coordinator to train, supervise, and direct them.

Preferred Alternatives: 2 and 3

As the actions in the Master Plan are implemented, demands on staff will most likely grow. Developing a staffing plan for the facility will clarify what the Site needs and recommend staffing levels for future conditions. Public access to information and staff availability for visitor needs can in some cases be addressed by volunteers.

Actions for Partnerships & Volunteers

The agency relies on volunteers to support a range of operational and programmatic activities, including assisting with events, trail repairs and clean-ups and invasive species removal projects, as well as caring for the heritage gardens. A strong and well-managed volunteer force can provide invaluable support and therefore has potential to play an important role in supporting activities and functions at a public facility.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – Status Quo: Maintain existing levels of development for partnerships and volunteer forces.

Considerations:

- Developing and maintaining partnerships and volunteer forces requires significant staff time
- Developing an effective volunteer force requires ongoing efforts to foster regional connections and promote the Site as a good neighbor and an integral part of the community
- Fresh collaborations bring in new ideas and lead to a more vibrant and engaged facility
- Clermont already has an active Friend’s group

Alternative 2 – Create a position for a paid volunteer coordinator to develop and manage a strong volunteer force at Clermont.

Considerations:

- A shared volunteer coordinator position between Historic Sites could be a cost-effective option
- The role needs to be professionalized to be successful
- Part-time or seasonal staff may not have qualifications or continuity to maintain important connections
- Volunteer forces are desirable overall but not always straightforward to implement
- Concern that volunteers may replace some paid positions
- Volunteers at a historic site with many sensitive resources may not be aware of protocols, and any work related to historic elements will require more oversight, adding to staff responsibilities
- Volunteers can make an impact but are not a significant source of support for Site maintenance
- If not appropriately trained/supervised volunteers can create new issues

Alternative 3 – Identify new, mutually beneficial partnerships to support a full range of programs and projects (e.g., education/programming/research, special needs community (Hudson Kindness Club) timber framer guilds).

Considerations:

- Trails group partnerships have been beneficial at other facilities and are generally organized, well-trained, needing less supervision (e.g., NY/NJ Trails Conference)
- Clermont could benefit from expanded partnerships with schools, colleges, and universities
- Partnerships with many organizations have the potential to be worthwhile but require staff time and effort and therefore this alternative needs to be implemented along with Alternative 2

Alternative 4 – Strengthen connections with local fire departments, EMS, and police.

Considerations:

- It is important to maintain these relationships as part of the greater community
- Increasing climate change impacts may result in more extreme weather-related emergencies
- Staff have attended trainings for emergency protocols but should formalize these and increase their frequency
- Clermont will be a good neighbor, offering facilities at the Site for the fire department and/or police for events or meetings

Preferred Alternatives: 2, 3, and 4

Historic sites do not exist within vacuum; they are connected to the world around them. Clermont has benefitted from the strong support of its Friends Group, and its community, and has partnered with many others over the years. Collaborations with local municipalities, historic societies, recreation groups, trail planners, and other special interest groups all help connect the Site with its setting and region. Collaboration with national, or even international, entities can provide invaluable sources of ideas, support, and expertise for historic sites.

Local emergency support services are also recognized as invaluable partners that work to ensure public safety. Clermont will continue to grow its relationship with these important community support workers.



Chapter 3 – Selection of the Preferred Alternative

Two alternatives have been considered for this Master Plan. The first is the Status Quo alternative: a compilation of all Status Quo alternatives in Chapter 2. Under the Status Quo, the Site would continue to operate as it does now, with no proposed changes to natural, cultural, or scenic resource protection, or improvements to recreation, management, or infrastructure.

The second alternative is the Master Plan alternative: a compilation of the preferred alternatives developed in Chapter 2. The Master Plan alternative is preferred over the Status Quo because new ideas, strategies, and protections will be implemented that will address known issues. Alternatives developed for this plan are designed to create a more accessible and inclusive facility. Implementing the Master Plan alternative will foster an increased awareness of the Site’s resources and provide greater protections for future generations.

Rationale for Selection

The planning team analyzed the status quo and proposed alternatives for Clermont within the context of the goals and vision determined for the Site. Preferred alternatives were selected that will improve the visitor experience and responsibly steward Clermont’s historic, cultural, and natural resources.

Clermont State Historic Site operates with a high degree of excellence. A visitor survey completed for this Plan found that 88% of total visitors indicated they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied.”

Some changes at Clermont are necessary, however. Throughout the planning process, both regional staff and visitors have noted areas where changes and improvements could be made to better support, and expand upon, its existing resources in the years to come. Preparing for the increasing impacts of climate change, ensuring accessibility for visitors of all abilities, repairing, and upgrading aging infrastructure, are all vital to ensuring the Site will thrive in the future.

Major Master Plan Elements

Before the start of the planning process, the Site had been implementing improvements,

including a capital project to restore the mansion’s exterior and install a new roof on the Red Barn.

Ongoing repair and maintenance are important and not overlooked in the analysis of Plan alternatives. Projects proposed in the plan are designed to support and improve current conditions while identifying unmet needs and providing new opportunities that will benefit the Site’s function.

Cultural Resource Protection

Clermont’s core historical structures—the mansion, cottages, barns—were the initial focus for the planning process. The proposed adaptive re-use and/or stabilization of deteriorating or at-risk historic buildings, including Sylvan Cottage, Arryl House Ruins, and the Red Barn, will ensure they will be active and functional Site components. Less-evident Site elements, such as those evaluated in the cultural landscape, documented foundations of early farmhouses and utilitarian buildings such as the icehouses and root cellar, are also at-risk without appropriate action.

Natural Resource Protection

Actions in the plan will establish important protections for Clermont’s woodlands, wetlands, and other significant natural features. Threats from climate change, invasive species, and visitor use will be planned for and—if possible—mitigated. Trail segments routed near sensitive natural areas will be redirected or closed. Improved stormwater management, including green infrastructure, will be incorporated into parking area retrofits and in new construction to help protect regional water quality.

Recreational Resource Enhancement

Walking and hiking, picnicking, painting, photography, and attending an outdoor event or workshop, are all popular activities at Clermont. Actions in the Plan will support and further develop opportunities for this type of recreation at the Site. The addition of accessible paths, picnic facilities, and a viewing platform will open new sections of the Site to more visitors, and improved parking facilities will facilitate access to new and rehabilitated amenities.

Education and Interpretation

New programs and educational material are developed continually at Clermont, and staff are committed to providing an understanding of the full range of people who have lived at Clermont. However, as state and regional demographics shift and lifestyles evolve, Clermont needs to offer programs and amenities appropriate to a more diverse audience.

Site educators seek to provide more relevant and contemporary programs, events, interpretive material, and exhibits that will appeal to people with different interests, backgrounds, ages, and abilities. An updated interpretive statement will articulate this approach, ensuring that its goals and objectives are clear for both present and future staff.

Infrastructure Improvements

Central to the Master Plan vision is making changes to the Site that will improve accessibility – both pedestrian and vehicular. A significant proposed action is to relocate the Site’s main entrance to provide a safer, more visible access point and a more defined gateway into the Site.

Proposed accessible elements will be interconnected so that more visitors are able to explore more of the Site. The Site’s network of trails will be repaired, and access improved with dedicated trailheads, signage, and blazes. An accessible viewing platform will connect with a paved multi-use path that offers a continuous route from Arryl House in the south to Clermont Cottage in the north. These actions will also help to realize a master plan goal of activating Clermont’s underutilized north section.

In choosing the Master Plan alternative over the status quo, OPRHP is making a commitment to implement these changes and improvements at Clermont over the next 10 to 15 years, subject to available funding. These changes will improve both the experience for Clermont’s visitors and the ability of staff to accomplish goals outlined in this plan.



Chapter 4 – Environmental Impacts and Mitigation

Introduction

This chapter considers the environmental impacts, and mitigation of potential adverse impacts, that may result from the implementation of the Master Plan (Plan). For SEQR compliance, the two documents together (Master Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)) satisfy the requirements for an environmental impact statement as specified in NYCRR §617, the rules and regulations implementing SEQR. A description of the preferred alternative can be found in the Plan document.

This chapter has two primary parts: a summary of environmental impacts associated with the alternatives considered, and a more detailed analysis of impacts associated with implementation of the Plan, including a discussion of mitigation measures.

The environmental setting is discussed in the FEIS Chapter 1. Chapter 2 of this document contains the alternatives analysis and the selection of the preferred alternative.

Environmental Impacts of the Preferred Alternatives

In Chapter 2, alternatives were analyzed and developed for natural resource protection strategies, recreation development and management support at the Site. The Plan consists of the combined preferred alternatives for each identified activity.

The analyses and choice of preferred alternatives are based on:

- Information about existing conditions (FEIS Chapter 1)
- Vision and goals of the Plan
- Consideration of demand for various activities
- Site constraints
- Other considerations as identified in resource analyses for each element.

Status Quo Alternative

This alternative consists of the current facilities, programs and practices at the Site as described in Chapter 1. Under this alternative, current resource protection, operations, and facility management practices would continue. Any increased or changing recreational demand on the Site would not be addressed, nor would existing impacts be mitigated. There would be no opportunity to address resource conservation under recent changes to Environmental Conservation Law or Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation Law.

Although the Status Quo alternative may not result in any immediate additional adverse environmental impacts, the potential exists for long-term indirect adverse environmental impacts. The facility would continue to be

managed with no specific Plan or goals to guide continued use, protection, and development of the Site. If more visitors seek to use the Site, and/or use it in new or unforeseen ways, additional demands will be placed on the natural, cultural, and recreational resources. Without the guidance provided by the Plan—which directs more intensive use and development toward areas with capacity for such use and away from the more sensitive areas in the Site—the potential for adverse impacts on environmental resources will increase. Without the guidance of an overall Plan, which directs more intensive use and development toward areas with capacity for such use and away from the most sensitive areas of the park, the potential for adverse impacts on environmental resources increases.

Issues such as erosion or the introduction of invasive species of plants and wildlife into the Site would be handled on a case-by-case basis as they arose.

Preferred Alternative and the Final Master Plan

The Plan compiles all preferred alternatives for natural resource protection, recreation development, and support facility development elements identified in Chapter 2. These elements were subject to final evaluation and synthesis to assure that there was consistency among the various alternatives. This assessment resulted in the Final Master Plan.

The Plan will provide considerable resource protection and recreational benefits. The Plan/EIS identifies potential adverse impacts, both short and long term, and ways to, if not eliminate, minimize them, to the fullest extent possible, through appropriate mitigation measures. From a long-term perspective, implementation of the Site's Plan will result in a beneficial environmental impact by ensuring that recreation development takes place in areas of the Site that are appropriate and effective while the most sensitive areas of the Site will be identified, monitored, and provided appropriate stewardship. Potential environmental impacts of the Plan are discussed more fully in the rest of this chapter.

Environmental Impacts Associated with Implementation of the Plan and Proposed Mitigation

Most of the physical disturbance proposed in the Master Plan for Clermont State Historic Site will take place in areas that are already developed or otherwise previously disturbed. The Plan seeks to provide improvements to existing natural resource protection strategies and recreation development while providing additional protection of sensitive natural and cultural resources within the Site and new and expanded recreational resources. Planning for new facilities in the park reflects this and the proposed location of new or expanded facilities avoids sensitive resources to the extent practicable. Actions proposed by the Master Plan are:

Natural Resource Actions

- Using current climate change data and modeling techniques, develop long-range planning recommendations to protect the Site's natural elements from future impacts.
- Define and prioritize regular invasive species management tasks Site-wide.
- Identify and implement protections for old-growth native trees (150-year-old range) within Clermont's woodlands and historical/cultural landscape.
- Identify and evaluate mapped and unmapped water resources at the Site and determine priority actions for their protection.
- Protect the Hudson River and other waterbodies from Site runoff by implementing green infrastructure, where feasible, in retrofits and new infrastructure.
- Implement pollinator support strategies including mowing reductions, invasive species management, and strategic planting of important food species.
- Improve habitat connectivity at adjacent properties by fostering relationships and increasing outreach to adjacent landowners.
- Identify and implement best management strategies for addressing nuisance animal species at the Site.

Cultural Resource Actions

Mansion

- Develop and implement a comprehensive Historic Structures Report and Conditions Study to identify repairs, restoration, and other work needed to appropriately protect and preserve the mansion.
- Keep staff offices located in the mansion and renovate them.

Red Barn

- Improve weather-tightness of the Red Barn and implement necessary repairs to ensure its long-term protection (e.g., repair broken windowpanes, close gaps in exterior walls).
- Develop an area adjacent to the Red Barn to serve as a seasonal outdoor events venue.
- Build a small addition at rear of the Red Barn to house a public restroom, changing area, storage, and a warming kitchen.
- Rehabilitate the interior of the Barn to accommodate three-season use such as exhibits, while preserving character-defining elements.

Clermont Cottage

- Provide accessible parking, walkways, and entrance at Clermont Cottage.
- Remediate Clermont Cottage for mold and mildew and install appropriate insulation in needed areas.

Sylvan Cottage

- Rehabilitate and retrofit Sylvan Cottage as an accessible, multi-use education center with classrooms, a kitchen, restrooms, and defined parking area.

Cultural/Historical Landscape

- Develop and implement a comprehensive plan to stabilize the Arryl House Ruins and adjacent historic elements.
- Work with Division for Historic Preservation staff to survey existing remnant historic structures at the facility to evaluate their condition, significance, and needs.
- Implement a Phase I archaeological survey at Clermont and develop a comprehensive archaeological report and sensitivity analysis of the entire Site.
- Stabilize the icehouse and root cellar; remove vegetation, replace safety railing, and add gravel with weed barrier around the perimeter.
- Restore the Locust Tree allée parallel to the main visitor parking lot.

Collections

- Work with the Bureau of Historic Sites to develop a furnishing plan, to research and document objects at the Site as they existed historically.
- With the Bureau of Historic Sites, re-evaluate Clermont's Collections Policy; review its parameters and the scope of collections.
- Improve public access to Clermont's collections by developing a "virtual wing" to provide online access to resources and enable wider and more active use by both staff, the academic community, and the general public.
- Evaluate storage conditions for Clermont's object collections and make recommendations for improvements.

Recreational Resource Actions

- Create a new picnic area adjacent to the Ice Pond.
- Investigate offering special outdoor events that will encourage new groups to come to the site (e.g., temporary overnight camping for youth or bicycle groups).
- Maintain connections with equestrian community by developing special events that highlight equestrian use as a historic recreation activity at the Site.
- Assess the feasibility of providing public access to the Site's holdings along the Hudson River shoreline.
- Foster more visibility for Clermont and awareness of its offerings by increasing outreach and marketing strategies.

Trails

- Establish a formal trailhead and parking area at the existing informal access point near the flagpole where visitors currently park.
- Develop a trail signage plan based on final trail layout and produce and install trailhead kiosks, intersectional, and trail marking blazes and signage.
- Improve the existing trail system at Clermont by addressing portions of trails where erosion, wetness, or steep grades exist.
- Close unused trail sections or trails in sensitive areas, re-route chronically wet trail segments, and install or replace trail bridges and culverts, where needed.
- Formalize trail access points at the Site and encourage connections with the adjacent Empire State Trail by adding informational signage, maps, safety information and, where appropriate, bicycle racks, picnic tables, and/or parking.
- Finalize and implement a preferred layout for the entire trail system.

Infrastructure Improvements

Visitor Center

- Keep the Visitor Center at its current location, with upgrades to include an accessible route from the parking lot, clear signage, and entry improvements (e.g., a portico and paved entryway), and improvements to interior restrooms.
- Improve emergency access from the visitor parking lot to the mansion by installing a route with firm, stable surface materials.

Accessibility

- Conduct a comprehensive analysis to identify accessibility issues site-wide with recommendations for addressing issues where possible.
- In coordination with the Division for Historic Preservation, develop a study to provide an accessible entrance and restrooms at the mansion and include an elevator for universal access to exhibits and staff office space.
- Create accessible picnic facilities within the current picnic area.
- Improve access to Hudson River/Catskill Mountain views by constructing a viewing platform.
- Develop an accessible trail from the Arryl House to the Site's north section, with connections to the mansion, Clermont Cottage, and other key points of interest, utilizing existing trail segments where possible.
- Develop an accessible interpretive trail near the mansion.
- In coordination with the Division for Historic Preservation, develop a study to provide an accessible entrance and restrooms at the mansion and include an elevator for universal access to exhibits and staff office space.

Circulation and Parking

- Relocate the main visitor entrance, adding a new roadway section through an existing open area in the woodlands .
- Redevelop the visitor parking lot with new pavement, green stormwater management elements, pedestrian paths, and clear pavement markings.
- Improve existing parking areas at the mansion, Sylvan and Clermont Cottages, and the Red Barn to ensure accessibility and meet future demand.
- Improve access to north section of the Site by re-paving the north carriage road and improving drainage infrastructure to address erosion.
- Develop a parking area in the north section of the Site with green infrastructure, if determined feasible.
- Upgrade and repair the Site’s drainage infrastructure to address site-wide wet areas, erosion, standing water, and deteriorating pavements.

Utilities

- Develop solar power at Clermont as a grid-tied system to offset utility costs.
- Purchase fuel generators to provide emergency backup power for the mansion and maintenance facility.
- Evaluate the Site’s utility infrastructure to ensure it will meet both current and future needs and requirements (e.g., distribution: wiring, poles, supplemental electric for events).
- Implement a phased, prioritized plan to upgrade Internet/WiFi technology for both staff and public use.

Site Maintenance and Operations Actions

Maintenance Center

- Upgrade the maintenance area facility by adding drive-through pole barns, a fueling tank, pickup truck, wash bay, and repair failing pavement.
- Develop a management/maintenance program for historic landscape elements with tasks clearly spelled out.
- Develop a site-specific plan that identifies current and anticipated future climate change impacts with strategies to address at-risk elements.
- Improve litter/debris management by implementing new strategies to educate visitors (e.g., social media messaging, Leave No Trace, Don’t Feed the Landfills Initiative).
- Install a site-wide security camera system.
- Select energy-efficient equipment, materials, and low-impact, green approaches for Site maintenance and operations.
- Develop a staffing plan to ensure that staffing levels are sufficient to support future development proposed in the master plan.
- Improve visitor management on high-volume days by stationing staff or volunteers at key locations to address FAQs and address ongoing maintenance issues, such as litter.
- Develop a Site-specific plan that identifies current and anticipated future climate change impacts with strategies to address at-risk elements.
- Develop a schedule of rotating wedding tent locations to decrease damage to lawns and reduce soil compaction.
- Install a site-wide security camera system.
- Improve litter/debris management by implementing new strategies to educate visitors (e.g., social media messaging, Leave No Trace, Don’t Feed the Landfills Initiative).
- Purchase fuel generators to provide emergency backup power for the mansion and maintenance facility.

Staffing

- Keep staff offices located in the Mansion and renovate them.
- In coordination with the Division for Historic Preservation, develop a study to provide an accessible entrance and restrooms at the mansion and include an elevator for universal access to exhibits and staff office space.

Partnerships & Volunteers

- Create a paid position for volunteer coordinator.
- Identify mutually beneficial partnerships to help support a range of projects (e.g., education/programming/research, timber framer guilds, special needs community (Hudson Kindness Club) invasive species removal, trail maintenance, etc.).
- Develop stronger connections with local fire department, EMS, and police.

Education & Interpretation

- With support from the Bureau of Historic Sites, develop programs and educational content related to all former inhabitants of the Site based on both the Site's collections and content-driven approaches.
- With support from the Bureau of Historic Sites, develop programs and educational content related to the experiences of enslaved people, indigenous communities, Palatines, servants, and tenant farmers.
- Cultivate funding sources for developing an annual exhibit in the mansion gallery.
- Revise and update Clermont's Interpretative Statement.
- Develop interpretative content for underutilized resources.
- With support from the Bureau of Historic Sites, update the interpretation program/plan for the Site to define new content goals, presentation methods, and ensure a cohesive message.
- Strengthen role of the Clermont's Advisory Committee to guide interpretive development.

General Project Considerations

Stormwater runoff will be increased by the minor addition of impervious surfaces, such as the entrance roadway, mansion addition and solar array. Green design will be used, where feasible, for any new construction to minimize the effects of storm water runoff. Proper drainage design, porous pavement, and vegetated drainage swales will be used where applicable to help mitigate water quality impacts from runoff following storm events. These elements slow the rate by which storm water is conveyed to the Hudson River. Pollutants are filtered by local vegetation and by percolating through the ground before entering groundwater. Careful site-specific design will be applied to all new facilities to minimize the potential for erosion.

An erosion control plan will be prepared for all proposed construction projects that have the potential to disturb park soils or result in erosion. Any projects that will disturb one acre or more will be subject to the State Pollution Discharge Elimination System (SPDES) General Permit process. This process includes the development of a site-specific Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) and sedimentation and erosion control plans. Best Management Practices (BMPs), as described in the New York State Standards and Specifications (NYS DEC, 2016)¹⁰⁶, will be used to reduce impacts to soils on the project sites. Some measures to be used will include minimizing soil disturbance and vegetation removal, installing silt fencing and straw bales, where needed, preserving vegetated buffers, and seeding and mulching disturbed areas as soon as possible following work. New plantings with native species may also be used for aesthetics, shade, and soil stabilization.

Land

The Plan provides a framework for improvements to existing facilities, programs, and access. Implementation of the Plan will result in some physical change to the land, particularly during trail construction, and relocation of the main entrance road. Consideration for the additional protection of the park's sensitive natural resources is reflected in the planning process and the proposed actions.

Overall, most of the Site will remain as it currently is. The following is a discussion of projects and actions proposed in the Plan and their potential impact on the land. Impacts to land will occur where the Plan calls for new or redeveloped facilities. Those proposed in the Plan include upgrades to the electric systems; solar installation; entrance relocation; access to the mansion; public restroom replacement; trailhead parking; existing trail maintenance; Red Barn event area; proposed interpretive trail; proposed multi-use path; and root cellar weed barrier. Proposed redevelopment of these park amenities and infrastructure will require some grading and land disturbance, however, disturbance will be minimized by site specific designs of these facilities to accommodate the existing grade levels and natural drainage where possible. Best management practices will be utilized to prevent impacts to adjacent areas.

Potential impacts on land would also result from the construction of new trails. The net result of these activities will be minimal; however, the length of the proposed accessible trail will be approximately .5 miles and wider than the wet, underutilized trails that will be removed from the trail network. Some trees and shrubland vegetation will need to be removed for trail construction, and there will be a very minor increase in impervious surfaces. The design of the multi-use path will take place at a later date and its surfacing material has yet to be determined. Existing lightly used or wet trails will be closed and left to reclaim

themselves which will reduce impacts to land within the site. Approximately .48 miles of trails will be removed while approximately .25 miles of trail will be rehabilitated (see Figure 12). The impacts of trail construction projects will vary based on the proposed uses, its proposed surfacing, and its location with respect to steep slopes and waterbodies. Stormwater runoff from the additional impervious surfaces is expected to be minor.

Best management practices will be used to minimize movement of sediment from the site during construction and over the life of the trail. Disturbance of land will be limited to the required width of the trail corridor. Trail construction will follow the policies and guidelines for trail building that have been established by recognized trail organizations and government agencies. Adherence to these guidelines will ensure that work is completed in a manner that maximizes protection of resources. Trail alignments will be planned very carefully for grades, accessibility, surfacing, minimum required width to the extent practicable, and providing appropriate viewpoints and access to park resources while protecting highly sensitive areas. Signage may be installed to help educate patrons about the need for protection of resources. Coordination with the region's trail coordinator for trail design will assist in minimizing potential impacts as well.

New solar energy infrastructure at the Site's maintenance facility will be designed and reviewed after the completion of the Plan. As part of this planning process, the most appropriate, least impactful site has been identified in Appendix F. The site has been chosen due to its minimal impact to the land, flora, and fauna. It will be located adjacent to the maintenance area in a mowed area. It is not expected that grading will be required, however, the trenching of electric lines, the installation of the solar array posts and the fencing will require minimal disturbance.

Impact on Pond and Stream Water Quality

No projects in the Master Plan will have a detrimental impact on water quality in any of the wetlands and waterbodies in the park. Actions are proposed that will improve water quality and waterbody function. Erosion and sediment controls will be installed as needed during construction. No new buildings or facilities are proposed in flood-prone areas within the Site.

Increased stormwater runoff can affect surface waters such as streams and ponds by increasing the sediment load and introducing pollutants that are carried by the runoff. Stormwater can also cause erosion and changes to stream habitats. This has a direct effect on the biodiversity of the stream and its corridor. Stormwater runoff is increased by the addition of impervious surfaces such as building roofs, roadways, trails, and parking lots.

New pavement proposed in the Plan includes a small visitor trailhead parking lot and the new entrance roadway. These facilities will be constructed using techniques to reduce runoff such as rain gardens, detention pond, or porous pavement. The surface area of proposed new structures with impervious roofs will include the addition to the mansion, maintenance facility and the replacement of the public restroom. The final design of the red barn area may have a small structure to facilitate patron use of the area. The total maximum acreage of all these new impervious surfaces is small, between 2 and 3.75 acres depending on surfacing, representing approximately .006% of the Site. Green design will be utilized for new construction as much as possible.

Proposed new trails have the potential to impact water resources in the site. Green stormwater management techniques will be utilized wherever possible to remediate these concerns. Proposed trail areas that require more than routine measures will be identified

through the approval process described in the Plan and remedies, such as construction of culverts, bridges, or boardwalks, will be planned in consultation with regional and park staff. Regional staff will review proposals and consult with NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and/or the US Army Corps of Engineers as appropriate. It is not expected that any new or rerouted natural surface trails will have a significant impact on water quality.

When implemented, an erosion control plan will be prepared for new and redevelopment construction projects proposed in the Plan. Any projects that disturb one acre or more will be subject to the [State Pollution Discharge Elimination System \(SPDES\)](#) General Permit process. Best management practices (BMPs) as described in the [New York Standards and Specifications for Erosion and Sediment Control](#) (DEC, 2016 Blue Book) will be used to reduce impacts to soils on the project sites. Some measures which will be used include minimizing soil disturbance and vegetation clearing, the use of silt fencing and straw bales where needed, preservation of vegetated buffers and seeding and mulching of disturbed areas as soon as possible following work.

During field layout of trails, the agency will attempt to minimize stream crossings to the extent possible and retain a buffer between new trails and waterbodies. All new trail work will be designed to control stormwater and minimize erosion.

Impact on Ground Water Quality

Current pavement and impervious surfaces at the site are limited compared to the acreage of the site, consisting mostly of the roadways, parking areas and structures. Additional impervious surfaces from new structures or facilities have the potential to change the way stormwater infiltrates to groundwater. There will be minor increases in impervious surfaces as noted above. These elements are generally sited in previously disturbed areas and the total

Table 3 - Quantity of Park Land Changed

Project or Action	Acres	Impact to land
New Entrance Roadway	2-3 Acres	Moderate
Maintenance Facility Storage	.1 Acres	Moderate
Solar Array	.2 Acres	Moderate
Parking Lot	.05 Acres	Minimal
Red Barn Event Area	.5 Acres	Minimal/Moderate
Interpretive Trail (No design, grass mainly)	.1 Acres (projection)	Minimal
Multi use trail (no design)	.2 Acres (projection)	Moderate
Root cellar weed barrier/gravel	.01	Minimal
Flagpole trailhead parking	.1	Minimal
Accessibility study (may slightly increase totals)	Undetermined	Undetermined
Picnic tables (no disturbance etc.)	Zero to Negligible	Minimal

maximum acreage of new impervious surfaces from structures will not be significant. In all new construction, green design will be used, where possible and appropriate, to help capture and filter stormwater before it enters groundwater.

Wetlands

The park contains two wetland complexes, one is classified as State-regulated freshwater wetland and both are identified in the National Wetland Inventory (NWI). There are also many smaller, unmapped wetland/vernal pool areas which are not classified (see Figure 7 – Water Resources).

Existing measures for protection of the wetlands are already in place and none of the site’s wetlands will be changed or affected by implementation of the Plan. Proposed improvements to natural areas in the Plan will further enhance and protect the park’s existing wetlands. Although none are currently proposed, any new development proposed near these locations in the future would be done in consultation with regional natural resource stewardship biologists and staff from NYNHP to avoid or minimize potential impacts to these sensitive areas.

As part of this planning process, vernal pools have been identified and mapped by stewardship staff. Consideration will be given to protect these areas from impacts from trails such as erosion, invasive species and trampling from patrons and any other development as they provide habitat for Clermont’s diverse wildlife.

Air

Full implementation of the Master Plan will result in increased use of the site. The increased travel to the site to use new amenities are expected to be minor. Air quality impacts from increased traffic, however, are not expected to be significant. Short-term, temporary air quality impacts may occur due to a minor temporary increase in vehicle exhaust during large events such as weddings and some generation of dust during construction. Air quality impacts from construction vehicles will be mitigated by assuring that these vehicles are in good running condition and are not producing excessive exhaust. These will be temporary and localized and will occur over time as the Plan is implemented.

Biological Resources/Ecology

Overall, the Plan will have a positive impact on the natural resources within Clermont. Limited new development is proposed in the Plan, and therefore direct impacts to biological resources are expected to be minimal. Projects have been primarily sited in areas with previous development, limited environmental sensitivity, and placement of proposed facility improvements is in accordance with OPRHP stewardship staff recommendations.

The Site contains habitat for rare and protected species, and the importance of these resources is recognized throughout the development and location of alternatives in this Plan, its strategies, and implementing the specific recommendations that recognize the significance of the resources. Overall, this Plan is expected to have a net positive impact on these resources by developing additional invasive species management strategies, utilizing and repurposing existing buildings, siting most development in previously disturbed areas, addressing stormwater, and implementing design strategies that will reduce impacts to sensitive areas.

Ecological Communities

NYNHP has identified 17 ecological community types in Clermont, including natural and culturally derived types as defined in the NYNHP classification. Almost 85 percent of the site is in a natural community type with Appalachian Oak-Hickory Forest comprising the largest quantity. The Hudson River is a designated Significant Natural Community (tidal river) and will not be adversely impacted by proposed projects.

Master Plan implementation will have some impact on several natural communities. Projects have been sited primarily in areas with previous and recent development/disturbance and general accessibility to, and use of, existing infrastructure and structures. Impacts will be

mitigated by providing on-site design implementation to reduce vegetation loss.

Impact to natural communities from construction of new trails will be mitigated by careful assessment of the trail routes on site before any construction begins. Locations for new trails will be assessed and use sustainable design during layout and construction to minimize impacts to sensitive areas. Construction will be monitored to avoid and minimize any impacts to significant natural communities at or adjacent to the site.

Flora

The construction of new facilities will require removal of some minor quantities of vegetation during construction. For the proposed entrance roadway, solar array, Red Barn event area and other small improvements, vegetation loss will primarily be within previously disturbed areas and mowed lawn. Minor vegetation removal may also be required for trail construction; however, this would have little to no impact on the overall forest community.

Where new trail segments are built, impacts will be mitigated by requiring selection of the most appropriate routes and minimizing removal of existing vegetation. Some vegetation will be trimmed, and signs or blazes will mark trail corridors for trail users. The regional biologist will review the most recent Natural Heritage Program data to report any newly found rare plants prior to any development or new management practices. Consideration for the protection of the park's rare species and sensitive areas will be part of the final planning process when selecting preferred locations of new trail development. Well-designed trails to provide access to a variety of natural features will enhance the visitor experience and help to reduce potential impacts from off-trail and social trail development.

Proposed actions in the Plan to increase management of non-native, invasive plant species will benefit native plants in the park, providing them with more opportunity to flourish. Invasive species/non-native plant removal projects have taken place under supervision of the regional biologist and stewardship staff and will continue.

The Plan has located facilities to help control conflicts with or impacts to rare species and sensitive natural resources, thereby reducing potential impacts of development. During the design of the proposed renovation and redevelopment projects, the regional biologist will be consulted regarding the need for additional rare plant surveys in these areas and regarding any trees to be removed. Areas that will require vegetative restoration or will be part of a design will incorporate the use of native species or regionally appropriate non-invasive species that are indigenous to the area. The regional landscape architect and the regional biologist will be consulted regarding the appropriate species to be used in any planting plans. In addition, facility design and implementation will be consistent with OPRHP's Tree Management and Native Plants policies (OPRHP, 2009 and OPRHP, 2015). This includes providing appropriate buffers to ensure protection of known rare plants and animals.

Fauna

Some positive impacts to animals at the Site may occur due to proposed restoration and expansion of habitat in the Plan. Current wildlife management practices will continue in consultation with NYS DEC and the NYS Natural Heritage Program.

Minimal impacts to fauna are expected due to the small amount of physical change being proposed in the Plan. Consideration of potential impacts on the fauna of the Site was part of the planning process when selecting preferred alternatives and will also be considered during future implementation of pedestrian pathways and new trails. Areas proposed for

improvements through either rehabilitation or new construction are not located near sensitive environmental areas and are not expected to affect wildlife in the area.

Construction in OPRHP facilities is usually planned for the late fall and winter when public use is lower. This timing also minimizes any disturbance to wildlife by avoiding periods of higher biological activity, such as bird breeding seasons and bat roosting. Similarly, any tree removals will be timed to occur between November and December as feasible to minimize disturbance to bats and other wildlife (see Appendix D). Outside of this window, consultation will occur with the regional biologist to minimize impacts to fauna. Site-specific design of new facilities and trails will include surveys for sensitive or rare species or habitats. If needed, proposed facilities or trails will be relocated to avoid or minimize any adverse impacts to wildlife.

Hunting

Clermont's hunting program, largely a recreational activity, will be expanded as part of OPRHP's deer management strategies to reduce impacts to flora. Detailed strategies will be developed with Regional Stewardship staff. (For a map of Clermont's hunting areas, see Appendix G.)

Invasive Species

Forest pests and invasive species are a significant threat to the Site. The Emerald Ash



Japanese barberry can overtake the forest understory

Table 4 - Invasive Species

Common Name	Species Name
Tree-of-Heaven	<i>Ailanthus altissima</i>
Oriental Bittersweet	<i>Celastrus orbiculatus</i>
Emerald Ash Borer	<i>Agrilus planipennis</i>
Multiflora Rose	<i>Rosa multiflora</i>
Wineberry	<i>Rubus phoenicolasius</i>
Black Swallowwort	<i>Cynanchum louiseae</i>
Porcelain Berry/Amur Peppervine	<i>Ampelopsis brevipedunculata</i>
Garlic Mustard	<i>Alliaria petiolata</i>
Japanese Stiltgrass	<i>Microstegium vimineum</i>
Asian Longhorned beetle	Asian Longhorned beetle
Forsythia	<i>Forsythia</i> sp.
Jumping Worms (species unknown)	<i>Amyntas-Metaphire</i> sp.

Borer has been identified at the Site and throughout the region. The Spotted Lanternfly is a growing threat that has not yet been observed at the Site but has potential to impact the region if introduced. Precautions such as surveying and monitoring for such species will be included as part of a more proactive invasive species strategy. Educational information is provided within OPRHP properties, including brochures, posters, and other materials to inform visitors of best management practices related to invasive species.

Park and regional environmental staff are very knowledgeable regarding the impacts of invasive species. Interpretive programs and training will improve their ability to prevent the spread of invasives. Implementation of new and more proactive invasive species strategies at the Site will focus on prevention, identification of invasives, early detection, rapid response, and eradication from sensitive habitat areas.

It is important to implement Best Management Practices to minimize the spread of these invasive species. New construction projects as

well as day-to-day operations can introduce and spread invasives. Trail use, construction, and landscaping management can also facilitate the spread of invasive species. Invasive plant seeds can be inadvertently introduced on construction equipment and through the use of imported mulch, imported soil, straw, gravel, and sod. Proper material disposal and equipment cleaning methods help limit the potential of invasives to establish in new locations both within and beyond a site.

To date, the invasive species shown in Table 4 have been identified within Clermont. There are regional stewardship strategies in place to manage these invasive species through specific projects using staff and volunteer labor. OPRHP has drafted BMPs for invasive species control for park projects and operations. The [NYS DOT](#) has developed useful BMPs and [construction specifications](#) for invasive plant control that can be tailored to agency or park-specific projects and operations. These methods will be implemented at the Site during construction as appropriate.

Cultural Resources

Clermont State Historic Site is listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places. The master plan is not expected to have any significant adverse impacts on cultural or historic resources. All projects proposed in the Plan will be reviewed by OPRHP's Division for Historic Preservation prior to implementation. When repair or alteration of a historic building or site is needed to accommodate contemporary use and/or ADA access, any repairs or alterations should not damage or destroy materials, features, or finishes that are important in defining the building's historic character.

Recognizing these elements as a physical record of their time, place, and use, in general, their modification for new uses should result in minimal changes to their defining characteristics, including their site and context, with a goal of retaining and preserving their historic character. Design modifications should avoid removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize the element. Alterations or modifications to these elements is subject to review by DHP prior to implementation and the guidelines below should be followed:

- Minimal changes to a property's defining characteristics should be made, and the historic character should be retained, preserving as much of the original fabric as possible.
- Changes proposed to the exterior and the interior of historic buildings, the building's site and environment and landscape features, and any attached, adjacent, or related new construction must be reviewed and approved by DHP.
- As much as possible, building elements should be repaired rather than replaced. If an element cannot be repaired, then a replacement should be identical in appearance and material to the original, as practicable.
- If a new work or an addition is to be made, it should be differentiated from the old while keeping with the original structure's architectural features and scale.
- Buildings and their surroundings must not be harmed during the rehabilitation process. This includes the use of harsh surface treatments or irreversible connection methods for new additions.
- Additions that create a conjectured or false history are not to be made, though additions that have been made throughout a building's life should be preserved.



1970s archaeological dig at Clermont

Any projects or activities that require ground disturbance either associated with the Plan or routine operation and maintenance will require review by OPRHP's Division for Historic Preservation to ensure that such resources are not adversely impacted. The Site is within the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area Management Plan and the Clermont Estates Historic District. The implementation of the Clermont State Historic Site Master Plan supports and contributes to both the management plan and associated designations and their efforts to promote historic sites along the Hudson River Valley and educate patrons of the contributing features.

Archaeological Resources

Archeological surveys have been conducted during ground disturbing projects within the Site over the past several decades. These surveys have been documented and identified on site maps to identify known sensitive areas at the Site. To assure that there are no adverse impacts to archaeological resources, any project that could result in ground disturbance and potentially affect cultural resources of the park will require consultation with the Field Services Bureau (FSB) to determine if a site-specific archeological survey is needed.

All projects will follow the OPRHP Intra-Agency Protocol for the Application of Section 14.09 of the NYS Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law. If required, all ground

disturbance should be in consultation with FSB to develop appropriate plans, investigate and document all archeological resources.

Scenic Resources

Implementation of the master Plan will not result in any significant adverse impacts on scenic resources in the park, and recommendations in the Plan for the protection and enhancement of natural, historic, and recreational resources will result in protection of the Site's scenic resources and vistas. The Plan also recommends continued monitoring and maintenance of current, as well as to-be-identified scenic vistas throughout the park, following Agency policy (OPRHP, 2009) and NYNHP recommendations (Ring, 2017).

Similarly, projects proposed at the Site will not have any significant effect on the view from off-site due to the minimal amount of proposed development.

Recreation

Implementation of the Plan will result in significant improvement to all aspects of the Site's recreational facilities. Current recreational

opportunities at Clermont will remain available. The Plan provides for the expansion of the trail system and educational/interpretive opportunities. The existing picnic area will see minor improvements to enhance visitor experience and ADA access. The Red Barn area will be improved to provide a reservable group event area for gatherings which can facilitate recreation within Clermont. The current trail use patterns facilitated the creation of a small, designated parking area.

The trail network will see modifications which will improve patron experiences. Some existing trails will receive modifications to reduce erosion and wet conditions while other trails will be removed and replaced to provide a higher quality, user friendly network. A designated parking area will be created to improve the current undesignated roadside parking which will reduce existing erosion and increase patron safety along the roadside. The accessible trail will enhance opportunities for all abilities at Clermont with minimal physical impacts to the land. During trail planning, regional stewardship staff will inspect the proposed corridors and make recommendations to reduce impacts to flora and fauna. Facility upgrades and other recreational improvements will follow ADA guidelines as required.

Open Space

The 591 acres (504 accessible to the public) of historic public open space at Clermont are an important piece of the county and region's open space system. The Site provides significant open space that will continue to be protected and preserved under the master Plan. OPRHP will evaluate and consider acquisition of fee, title, or easements on adjacent open space areas as they become available. It will also monitor any development proposals that may affect the quality of its scenic and open space resources.

The Plan will result in improved conditions for the Site’s natural resources. Proposed improvements to riparian areas, increased protections for wetlands, reduced mowing and more intensive management of invasive species will benefit wildlife habitat and natural areas.

There will be no adverse impacts to open space resources resulting from the implementation of the Master Plan. If any future acquisition recommendations are implemented, the impact will be positive, including adding open space acreage and improving wildlife habitat in an area with increasing development pressure. All acquisitions will be reviewed separately under SEQ. R.

Circulation, Access, and Traffic

The capacity of the existing road system was examined during the planning process. While changes will be made, it was determined that it generally functions effectively for the current and projected volume of traffic. While full implementation of the Plan may result in some

increased visitation to the facility, and an associated potential increase in traffic, the roadway system should be able to accommodate added use. Implementation of the master plan will result in access improvements with the restoration of the original entrance. The entrance project will positively impact the accessibility, safety and visitor experience at the park while restoring the historic entrance. The current entrance roadway will be retained to support maintenance access and circulation.

Proposed redevelopment of the facility’s entrance road and parking lots will further improve circulation at the Site. Circulation issues can occur during large events, which can be taxing on staff time. The parking area and associated roadways become congested, and cars need to be directed to maintain safe conditions. Implementing the proposed design of the Red Barn area into an event space and parking lot and development of the trailhead parking lot will result in a slight increase in the



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quantity of parking spaces at the facility. It is not anticipated that additional parking areas will increase traffic and congestion but rather address existing impacts to traffic and circulation. During times of large events, cars will be directed to grass overflow parking areas, and clearly delineated Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant parking spots, as required, will be available.

Access to the mansion will be expanded to all floors in the mansion with the construction of an elevator and associated walkway. Plans for this addition and associated circulation system will be developed through a separate planning and design project and require subsequent consultation with DHP and other OPRHP staff.

Public Health and Safety

Public health and safety are important elements in the operation of the Site. New or substantially rehabilitated facilities will be designed and constructed to meet all applicable health and safety codes including compliance with the ADA. Design and rehabilitation of infrastructure systems such as electric, water, and sewer, where needed, will ensure public health protection.

Energy, Noise, Odor and Light

Sustainability principles and energy efficiency will be incorporated into the design of all new park buildings, including the mansion addition, entrance roadway, solar array, parking lot and the public restroom replacement. Plan implementation may result in some minor temporary increases in noise, odor, and energy use during construction. Energy expenditures will be fully offset by installation of the solar array. Proposed sustainable practices include upgraded utilities and LED lights to improve energy efficiency. Lighting at new or rehabilitated site facilities will be designed to be “dark sky” friendly and to minimize impacts on adjoining properties. No significant adverse impacts to the local community or adjacent

landowners are anticipated from projects proposed in the park.

Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

The proposed Plan will result in some unavoidable adverse impacts. There will be some minimal permanent loss of pervious soil surface and vegetative cover as a result of construction of the new parking lot, entrance road and solar array and structural additions. During the design of these elements, staff will use professional judgment, expertise, and standards to minimize or mitigate impacts. After construction, projects will be monitored by park staff and action will be taken, if necessary, to prevent any significant impacts from occurring. In addition to the impacts outlined above, there will also be minimal, temporary adverse air and noise impacts (e.g., fugitive dust, noise from construction equipment and vehicles, etc.) associated with construction of proposed improvements.

Irreversible and Irrecoverable Commitments of Resources

The planning, development, and implementation of this Plan, including construction of the new entrance road, solar array and facility improvements, utility and trail improvements, will involve the irreversible and irretrievable commitment of public resources in the form of time, labor, and materials. It will also require a commitment to the long-term operation and maintenance costs of the Site.

Growth Inducement

Implementation of the Plan may result in some increased recreational use of the Site. This increased recreational use will be carefully managed to support the vision and goals established to maintain the quality of the Site’s important natural, scenic, and historic resources. There will be positive, on-going, economic impacts to communities surrounding the Site in the form of business to gas stations, restaurants, and convenience stores. Tourism-

related expenditures for activities such as special events, and use of rental facilities can be an element in the economic vitality of localities. The following all contribute to regional benefits: new educational and recreational activities; rehabilitated and new trails; open space with significant natural resources and scenic vistas of the Hudson River Valley; and the Site's location near state and county roadways.

Supplemental Environmental Review

Portions of this Plan/EIS are somewhat general or conceptual. Decisions regarding the type and extent of certain actions will be dependent on the findings from specific studies or analyses still to be completed. For example, the specific site designs for the solar array, parking area,

park entrance and some trail projects will require more detailed site analysis. The findings from these site-specific evaluations may identify impacts that were not addressed or known during the development of this Plan/EIS. Under such a circumstance, an additional or supplemental environmental review may be required.

As part of the agency's responsibility under the State Environmental Quality Review Act, OPRHP will review proposed implementation projects with respect to consistency with this Plan/EIS. Projects found by OPRHP to be consistent with the Plan can go forward without any additional review. Other types of proposals may require additional review ranging from completion of an environmental assessment form to perhaps a site-specific environmental impact statement.

To assist in the consistency evaluation, the following types of actions have been identified in 6 NYCRR Part 617 as likely to require additional review under SEQR:

- Any new actions not addressed within this FEIS that do not meet the Type II categories identified in Part 617, the rules and regulations implementing SEQR;
- Any change from the preferred alternatives for natural resource protection, recreational and facility development (including trails) or other elements of the Plan which would result in significant environmental impacts not disclosed in this FEIS;
- Any leases, easements, memoranda of understanding, or other agreements between OPRHP and private entities or other agencies that affect resources in a manner that is not sufficiently addressed in this FEIS;
- Any project determined through review by the OPRHP Division for Historic Preservation to have an Adverse Impact on historic or cultural resources at the Site;
- Any proposals for new trails, trail segments or trail uses not addressed in the Plan that would affect resources in a manner not sufficiently addressed in this FEIS;
- Site design of the solar array and roadway entrance, historic structure modifications/additions, the new parking lot and trailhead, as the scope of work for these projects is not known at this time.

Relationship to Other Programs

Coastal Zone Management Program Consistency

Clermont State Historic Site is located within New York's coastal area, specifically the Hudson River. In accordance with the NY Waterfront Revitalization and Coastal Resources Act (Executive Law Article 42) state agency actions within the coastal area must be evaluated for their consistency with the State's coastal policies. The overall objective of this program is to assure a balance between development and preservation of the State's coastal areas.

A small section of Clermont State Historic Site is located within the boundaries of the Town of Red Hook Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) in Dutchess County. There are currently no actions proposed within this small area of the Site. If future actions are proposed, they will be reviewed under SEQR prior to implementation and will also be reviewed for their consistency with the Town of Red Hook LWRP as appropriate. The actions within the remainder of the Site, which are outside of the boundary of the LWRP, have been reviewed for their consistency with the statewide coastal management policies (NYCRR Title 19, Part 600.5). (See Appendix H, Coastal Assessment Form.)

After a review of all policies (NYCRR Title 19, Part 600.5), OPRHP has determined which policies are applicable to this Master Plan. A State Coastal Assessment Form (CAF) has been completed to assist in the identification of applicable policies. The CAF and discussion of those policies are provided in Appendix H. Policies applicable to the plan include those related to fish and wildlife habitats, scenic quality, public access, recreation, and water resources.

Summary

Based on the coastal policy discussion contained in Appendix H, it is OPRHP’s determination the action will not substantially hinder the achievement of any of the policies and purposes of the State Coastal Policies as described in the New York Coastal Management Program.



View across the Hudson River to the Catskill Mountains, from Germantown, NY

Chapter 5 — Public Comments and Responses

The Clermont State Historic Site has a committed user base, with many nearby residents and others in the broader community having a long history of coming to the Park. The Site also has a large, dedicated Friends Group which is very active in working with park staff to develop programs and special events.

Comments received on the Draft Master Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement from these and other stakeholders are compiled in this chapter, along with the agency's responses. A list of those who provided comments on the Master Plan is included at the end of this chapter. The OPRHP appreciates the time and effort that those interested in Clermont's future have invested in providing comments on the Draft MP/DEIS.

Public Participation

Initial outreach that helped inform Master Plan development was a visitor survey, conducted between October 29, 2021, to November 15, 2021. Distributed to over 1200 contacts via mail and email, and on social media, the survey identified visitor demographics and asked for their thoughts and preferences in the areas of recreation, preservation, access, facilities, activities, and programs. Survey responses provided a good picture of who comes to the Site, how often they visit, and what they like to do while there.

On May 12, 2022, an online public workshop was held at which residents, stakeholders, and interested parties from throughout the region were invited to discuss their experiences at Clermont and offer ideas for the Plan. The planning team was introduced, and staff provided an overview of the master planning process. Participants then had the opportunity engage in small group discussions in their area of interest and provide their ideas for the Site. Comments from the general public could also be submitted in writing at any time during the public comment period, May 5 to May 20, 2022.

Additional public input was solicited during the State Environmental Review (SEQR) Scoping

period. Scoping is a required part of the SEQR process that helps to identify potentially significant adverse environmental impacts related to actions proposed in the master plan and consider possible mitigation measures for any anticipated impacts. On August 3, 2022, a Draft Scoping Document was issued online for public review, and the Scoping Comment Period ended September 3, 2022. The Scoping Document was revised in response to comments received, and a Final Scoping Document was published September 12, 2022.

An additional opportunity for public input occurred when the full Draft Master Plan/DEIS was published on the OPRHP website, April 26, 2023, initiating a public comment period that ended June 8, 2023. On May 3 and May 4, 2023, two virtual public meetings were held, which included a presentation summarizing actions proposed in the Draft Plan, followed by an open discussion. Valuable feedback was received at these meetings from an engaged group of area residents, representatives of local municipalities and other stakeholders. The comments received were considered for any potential impact to Plan content, and revisions and/or additions to the Plan were made accordingly. Substantive comments received during this time appear below, with OPRHP's responses.

Significant Changes to the Master Plan and EIS

No substantive revisions to the Master Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) were made as a result of public comments received.

General Comments of Support

A significant number of people expressed general support for the Master Plan, both at public meetings and in writing. Most noted their positive experiences with the Site and/or encouraged the agency to move forward with implementing the improvements described in the Plan.

Responses to Comments

The following section summarizes the comments and questions received on the Draft Master Plan/DEIS. Comments have been edited for length and clarity and are categorized by subject area. The agency's responses are provided, along with page numbers referring to relevant plan elements.

Natural Resources

Biodiversity

Comment: *Does the Master Plan support biodiverse landscapes at Clermont?*

Response: The agency's mission and policies actively support biodiversity at all its facilities, including prioritizing the use of native plants and addressing invasive species (see <https://parks.ny.gov/documents/inside-our-agency/PolicyOnNativePlantPolicy.pdf>). Implementing actions related to Clermont's natural areas will enhance and protect biodiversity at the Site. (For related content, see FEIS, pp. 33-39.)

Natural Environment

Comment: *Are there environmentally fragile areas at the Clermont site?*

Response: Yes. Clermont is located within the Hudson River Valley estuary, which has unique, natural ecosystems that support important wildlife habitat. The Clermont property includes a wetland designated as a state-rare type as well as other wetlands, streams, and vernal pools. A regionally significant natural community was also identified at the Site. (For more information, see the FEIS, pp. 15-16 and 22).

Climate Change

Comment: *What areas of Clermont are susceptible to climate change?*

Response: Historic Sites can be vulnerable to climate change in many ways. These include damage to irreplaceable historic items from severe weather or exposure to humidity, as well as increasing impacts to woodlands and other natural areas. The Master Plan discusses how climate change is already impacting Clermont, and actions in the Plan have been developed to protect these important resources against future climate impacts. (For related content, see the FEIS pp. 3, 36-37, 59, and 98).

Recreational Resources

Hudson River Shoreline Access

Comment: *Consider providing shoreline access across the train tracks with at-grade crossing infrastructure. Also, reestablishing the historic dock that Robert Fulton visited on his way to Albany is an important historic aspect of the site that has been overlooked.*

Response: The agency agrees that the historic aspects of accessing Clermont from the Hudson River are important and engaging subjects, and Clermont’s educators plan to develop interpretative content that will bring a wider awareness of the Site’s connections to the River (see the FEIS, p. 51). At this time the OPRHP is not in favor of an at-grade crossing across the railroad tracks as it presents too great a danger. The agency has no plans currently to restore the dock.

Bicycle Access

Comment: *I've biked from Tivoli to Clermont, which is a great place to picnic, and other bicyclists would likely also enjoy visiting. Does the Master Plan propose bike racks or sharrows on the entrance road?*

Response: Actions proposed in the Master Plan will make Clermont more bicycle-friendly in multiple ways. Both pedestrian and vehicular circulation will be improved throughout the Site, with the addition of new signage, trailheads, and bike racks. Connections with cyclists on the Empire State Trail will also be encouraged, with a safer, more visible and welcoming entrance. Within the site a proposed accessible, multi-use path and other amenities will make it easier for cyclists to visit the Site’s historic features. (For details on these actions, see the FEIS pp. 73, 78, 85, and 91.)

Cultural Resources

Sylvan Cottage

Comment: *How will the Master Plan address the deteriorated condition of Sylvan Cottage?*

Response: Protecting the historic structures at its facilities is a mandate for the agency and a priority at Clermont. The Master Plan proposes to adaptively re-use Sylvan Cottage to create an education center that will support public programming and help to re-activate the northern part of the Site. (For more information, see pp. 42-43.)

Education, Programming and Interpretation

Interpretative Content

Comment: *What changes are planned for the Site’s interpretation program?*

Response: Educational and interpretive content at Clermont is guided by the agency’s “Our Whole History” initiative. In addition to the history of the Livingston Family, a primary goal of the Site and Master Plan is to portray the experiences of all of the Site’s former inhabitants. Combined with other actions, this approach will help make Clermont a more inclusive destination that will be relevant to a broader audience. (For additional information, see the FEIS pp. 4-5, 51, 54, and 61-63.)

Historic Structures

Comment: *Is there room in the historic interpretation plan to incorporate other structures that are not listed on the historic register? There are other places in the region with rich histories that would play off Clermont well.*

Response: Interpretation at the Site incorporates the regional context related to the Livingstons and others who have occupied the Site. Clermont is always open to partnerships with other cultural entities that interpret history in the area.

Interpretive Timeframe

Comment: *Do properties on the Site represent specific "epochs" or eras?*

Response: Yes. The mansion and grounds are interpreted as they existed in 1931. This interpretive period was chosen so that all the Site's history could be interpreted (see pp. 6 and 54).

Interpretive Content

Comment: *Any thoughts on including a discussion of the Calico Wars / Rent wars?*

Response: Interpretive panels in Clermont's Visitor Center exhibit address both the Calico War and the Rent War.

Indigenous Cultures

Comment: *Consider acknowledging and educating about the ancestral peoples of this river valley and our impact upon these communities.*

Response: Educating the public about the ancestral people—and their descendants —is a priority for both the agency and Clermont's educators. The agency's "Our Whole History" initiative is integral to the Site's overall approach to education, and an exhibit recently installed in the Site's Visitor Center incorporates content related to the region's indigenous history. Actions in the Master Plan include developing educational content that conveys the presence and experience of the Site's original inhabitants. (For more information, see the FEIS, pp. 4-5, 13-14, 54, 57, and 61-64.)

Operations & Management

Visitor Demographics

Comment: *Do many children visit the site?*

Response: Clermont is very interested in engaging young visitors at the Site. Education staff actively develop programming geared toward different age groups, including children and teens. Some of the Site's most successful programs offered are for school groups and exhibits for youth. As a result, the number of younger visitors has increased in recent years. Many actions in the Master Plan work to broaden the Site's reach throughout the community, including creating content that is relevant to a range of ages. (For more information, see the FEIS, pp. 4-8, 21, and 61-63.)

Increased Visitation

Comment: *If visitation does dramatically increase, how does the plan compensate for potential overcrowding and how that may impact Clermont's natural resources? Is there a plan to avoid overcrowding and potential erosion of the trails?*

Response: Visitor numbers at Clermont rose dramatically during the Covid-19 Pandemic, and patron levels have since remained high. Even with increased visitation, it is not anticipated that the park will become crowded. Clermont's visitors generally stay for a few hours, which results in less impact than full-day visitors. Also, some sections of the Site are largely underutilized. A Master Plan goal is to activate these areas with new programs and amenities for underutilized elements that will encourage people to explore the entire Site. Improvements in accessibility, pedestrian circulation, signage, programming, and trails are among Master Plan elements that will help disperse visitors while offering a higher quality overall experience. (For related actions see the FEIS, pp. 4, 44-45, 59, 66, 69, 80-81, 98, and 106.)

Priorities for Implementation

Comment: *How do we know which action items are being prioritized and what projects will be focused on? Is there a rating system?*

Response: The sequence of implementation of actions in the Plan will be determined by need and available funding. The Plan includes an Implementation Priorities Table that indicates the level of need for each action proposed and a timeframe for implementation (see the Final Master Plan, pp. 6-11).

Outreach and Partnerships

Friends of Clermont Group

Comment: *What is the role of the Friends of Clermont group in the planning process?*

Response: The Friends of Clermont are a key partner and have been involved in the master plan since early in the development process. The planning team met with Friends' Board members to keep them updated on progress and seek feedback, and visitor surveys and invitations for multiple public engagement meetings were sent to the entire Friends of Clermont group mailing list. Input received from its members was invaluable and is reflected in the final document.

Partnerships

Comment: *The Town of Clermont would like to know if there are any Master Plan elements that may require coordination with elements of our updated Comprehensive Plan, and potentially Tivoli's Comprehensive Plan? Is there a way to use this partnership to enhance tourism opportunities in the area?*

Response: The Site is committed to keeping the lines of communication open with its neighbors and stakeholders. Clermont staff have attended Town comprehensive planning meetings and would welcome discussions related to the community, such as developing Empire State Trail connections and other regional initiatives. Among other efforts, staff will work with local chambers of commerce, add

Clermont to the Great Estates Trail, collaborate to host Town events, and expand outreach in Town libraries.

Regional Impacts

Comment: *Will any plan elements impact the surrounding area?*

Response: Relocating the Site entrance will improve traffic flow on Woods Road, reducing hazardous conditions where cars enter and exit the Site on local roads. Implementing this action will require coordinating with Columbia County for the changes proposed on Woods Road/County Rte. 35.

Infrastructure

Park Entrance

Comment: *Why is the main entrance being moved? Is this a minor realignment for visibility or a more substantial relocation?*

Response: Clermont’s main entrance is to be relocated to improve visitor safety and accessibility. An exact location for the new entrance has not yet been determined, but it will remain on Woods Road. The new entrance will improve the Site’s legibility and provide a better first experience for visitors. Signage with information about the facility and its amenities will be included at the entrance as well as maps and amenities for bicyclists on the Empire State Trail, which bisects the Clermont property on Woods Road. (For more details see the FEIS, pp. 88-90, and 99.)

Persons/Organizations Who Provided Comments (Alphabetically)

(Listed alphabetically by last name)

Name	Affiliation
Michael Allen	Town of Clermont Comprehensive Plan/Regrowth Planning
Jeff Anzevino	Scenic Hudson
Jude Asphar	
Wendy DeGiglio	
Jonathan Duda	Parks & Trails New York
Matt Hartzog	NY State Assembly Staff Member
Jennifer Hemmerlein	Executive Director, Friends of Clermont
Mary Howard	Town of Clermont Comprehensive Plan
Dean & Laura Livingston	Friends of Clermont
Catherine Mikic	Architectural Interiors , Hudson, NY
Amy Parrella	Bard College
Will Tatum	Dutchess County Historian
Cari Watkins-Bates	Scenic Hudson
Lisa Weilbacker	Columbia County Historical Society

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P. 9 – *Hudson River National Historic Landmark District Marker*. Photographed By Cosmos Mariner, July 4, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=147412>.

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