

Sarah Gichan  
Professor Myra Young Armstead  
The Window at Montgomery Place  
September 26, 2017

### **Reaction to the Three Tours**

In order to grasp an understanding of the history that surrounds Montgomery Place, our class went on three tours. Given that I joined the class late the first tour I went on was the canoe tour with Susan Rogers. Next, was the tour of Montgomery Place and finally, was the field trip with Chris Lindner that began by at the end of Cruger Island Rd. First, I am going to reflect on the canoe trip whereby I was impacted by the Richard H. Gassan's "The Revolution of Seeing" in *The Birth of Tourism: New York, The Hudson Valley, and American Culture* in relation to the scenery we were faced with upon the tour. In his writings he discusses the three basic modes of perceiving nature especially from the perspective as an artist. The three modes he identifies are beautiful, sublime, and picturesque which have a direct impact on the art that is created. However, during the tour I believe his description of the sublime most aligns with the way I felt in relation to the lighting juxtaposed with the sight of the train riding by as we were on the vast open water. He said, "a viewer could reach an ecstatic state while witnessing the raw power of nature through a combination of imagination, artistic taste, and judgment."<sup>1</sup>. Upon setting out on the canoes, it was during sunset at a perfectly warm temperature which heightened the overall surrounding experience of the mountains and valleys in which we were amongst. The sun setting on the water and the vastness of it personally gave way to a moment of reflection which encompassed imagination and also the pure beauty of it is something that I believe a photograph

---

<sup>1</sup> Gassan, Richard. H (2008). *The Revolution of Seeing Tourism and the Founding of the Hudson River School. The Birth of American Tourism: New York, the Hudson Valley, and American Culture, 1790-1830.* (pp 54). Amherst Massachusetts. University of Massachusetts Press.

or a painting would not be able to do justice. Aside from the pure beauty of this trip there was something obscure that brought about many questions. A green swampy invasive coated majority of the river, called water chestnuts. This invasive made the water especially hard to paddle through as it was significantly thicker than the small patches where there were no water chestnuts. Moreover, when the paddle was lifted out of the water it would pick up the some remnants of the invasive, giving that much more arm work to the paddling experience. When we would arrive at the small patches, the canoe would almost glide right over it and the paddle work was less necessary. The small patches were also interesting because of how clear the water actually was. The water chestnuts coated the water making it so you cannot see what was below it however there were a lot of creatures living on top like spiders and insects that were clearly visible. Questions asked were whether the water chestnuts were seasonal or if they were there long term as well as if they are actually harming the area or helping. After doing a little research on them, I found that they are an aquatic annual herb that die back at the end of each growing season and that they in fact have a negative environmental impact specifically in Hudson, Connecticut, and Potomac Rivers. The plants grow mats of vegetation as I have mentioned previously that coat the water. The mats have a negative impact as they have the ability to limit light penetration into the water which then reduces the growth of native aquatic plants beneath them. Therefore, the reduced plant growth along with the decomposition of the water chestnut that die back each year can result in reduced levels of dissolved oxygen within the water which ultimately leads to killing fish.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the clear sections gave a sense of liberation not only for reducing the arm work but also because you were able to see fish and tadpoles under the

---

<sup>2</sup> "Water Chestnut (*Trapa Natans L.*)." NYIS, Cornell University Cooperative Extension, Wevb. September 24, 2017

water and the most sublime section in my opinion, was at the far edge of the island where there were no water chestnuts. This was because the trees overhung the water and the clearness of it reflected so much where the water looked like glass or a mirror reflection. This to me, was the most memorable of the canoe tour.

The tour at Montgomery Place emphasized the beauty circled around America's changing relationship with land over the century through its landscape and the architecture both on the interior and the exterior. First what fascinated me was the intimate connection of the landscape and those who owned it. The property today encompasses over three hundred acres with orchards, woodland trails, gardens, outlook of the Catskill Mountains, and a fully furnished interior that are all emblems of the specific past owners who added their distinct touch over time proving how the property previously acted as a productive estate and advanced to a decorative landscape that people still visit/tour today. Walking around allowed my imagination to soar, picturing its land use, building patterns, how one used to spend their time, and how one decorated their own property. The first owner was Janet Montgomery who purchased the property in 1802 and finished designing it in 1805. Her mansion, farm, and fruit tree business were a tribute to her husband, General Richard Montgomery which in it of itself is the first example of the intimacy attached to the property. Not only did she buy land as a homage for her husband but she also used it to interact and help those that surrounded in the Hudson Valley by opening a tree nursery to supply orchard stock to farmers. The initial design of the mansion was regarded as a simple and elegant federal style building that was French inspired. It was planted with rows of locust trees near the home and along the drive for beauty, protection, and shade which is an example of the artistry and functionality attached to the design. Next, in 1836,

Louise Livingston inherited the property. Over Five decades, she and her daughter transformed the farm into a stylish summer estate giving it its recognition for its architecture and gardens. This is what really caught my attention, the amazing design that they received from one of the leading designers of the time, Alexander Jackson Davis and Andrew Jackson Downing. The architects enhanced the mansions design with the addition of porches and a coach house. The intimate connection in terms of the porch was that it was designed in a classical style and inspired by nature's gorgeous patterns which proves how the home has a close relationship with the environment. One of my favorite parts outside of the mansion was the architect's design of the coach house which was Swiss style. It integrates art along with a function which is shown through the wooden cupola crown as it provides necessary ventilation for horse stables. This is a characteristic of the entire property as not only is it stunning in design but it also was remarkably functional as a lucrative business was put to use. Finally, in 1921, Montgomery Place was inherited by Violetta White Delafield and her husband, John Ross Delafield where they added a garden, Japanese style flower arrangements, and features that promoted exercise such as a tennis court. Their addition adds to America's changing relationship with land over the centuries as it began with a beautiful farm field and developed into an active environment for those that live there. Overall, what captured my interested on this tour was as previously stated, the intimate addition that each owner placed within the home. From Janet Montgomery's homage to her husband, to hiring the best architects of the time made possible by Louise Livingston, to giving the property a leisure function done by the Delafields, every addition serves an important purpose that integrates art, nature, and function. When describing the landscape, Andrew Downing said, "I think that I have imagination enough--being able to carry ten or twenty years of

future growth in my mind when seeing a plant only 1 ft. high... to be able to comprehend and enjoy it."<sup>3</sup> His beautiful statement regarding how we interpret what we see has influenced my thought on an artist's imagination which has impacted others well beyond his lifetime. Before touring the picturesque Montgomery Place, I never thought of the level of intimacy that it is attached with.

Finally, the trip led by Chris Lindner was interesting for his knowledge in the Native American life that was once in the exact area we were walking on. He showed found objects such as spears and arrowheads and explained the extensive detail that went into their designs that were used at least 5,000 years ago. What amazed me was he told us to keep our eye out as it was possible to find on the path we were walking on more objects used by the Lenape Indians. Something that also interested me along the walk was a particular herbal leaf that he pointed out that could be used as incense. Given that we began this trip rather late and most people left at 6:00, we were unable to finish the tour. Nonetheless Chris Lindner's knowledge on the Native Americans and the objects shown were unforgettable and something I would like to learn more about.

---

<sup>3</sup> Text for *Arboretum*, Andrew Jackson Downing. 24, September. 2017. Montgomery Place. Red Hook, New York