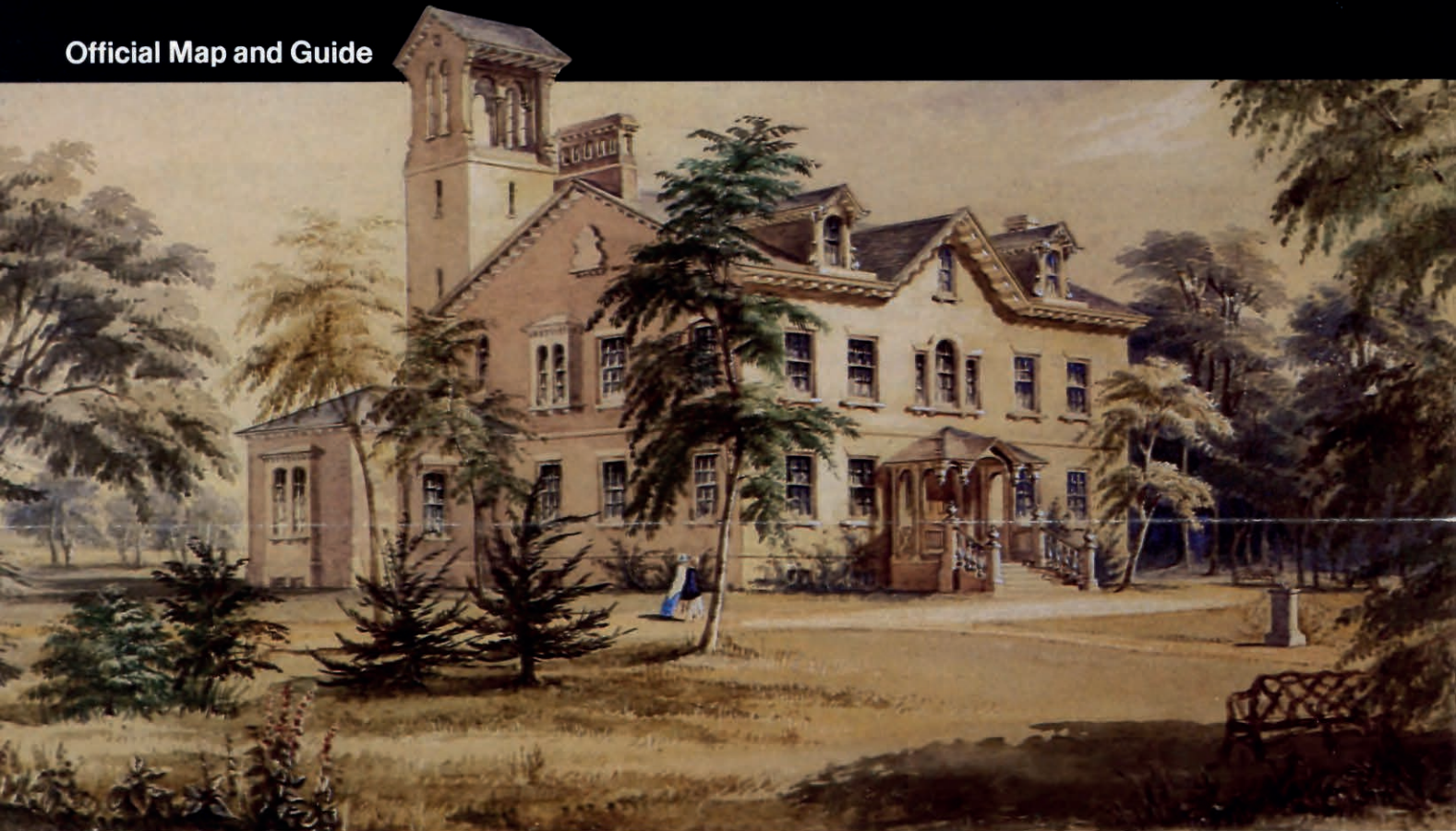


Martin Van Buren

National Historic Site
New York

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide



The Lindenwald estate, shown here in Richard Upjohn's early 1850s watercolor, was Martin Van Buren's home for the final 21 years of his life. Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University

"Ex-President Van Buren returned to the place of his nativity on Saturday last . . . after the lapse of a long series of years, spent in the service of his country, he has returned to the home of his youth, probably to spend the evening of his days among those who have long appreciated the splendor of his genius and admired his virtues."

Kinderhook *Sentinel*, May 1841

The recipient of the *Sentinel's* florid praise did indeed spend the rest of his days in close proximity to the small New York village he always considered home. Martin Van Buren was born in Kinderhook in 1782, soon after a fragile union of states successfully ended its fight for independence. His parents kept a tavern and, like their Dutch predecessors of 150 years, made a moderate living farming in the Hudson Valley. Young Martin, possessed of a fine mind and a strong ambition, embarked on a legal career at 14 with an apprenticeship to a local attorney. In 1804 he joined his half-brother's law practice in their home town. Three years later Van Buren married a distant relative and childhood sweetheart, Hannah Hoes. Meanwhile, he was becoming known as more than a country lawyer. His first appointed post, as a county official, set him on an upward course that led to the highest office in the state—and, eventually, the nation.

Early 19th century politics was a whirlwind of boisterous characters and opposing interest groups where a new party system was taking shape. Van Buren artfully positioned himself in the eye of the storm, persistently advocating the principles of the Jeffersonian Republicans: states' rights, strict constitutional construction, civil liberties. His efforts, along with those of like-minded politicians, brought about an alliance of the "planters of the South and the plain people of the North," the Democratic party. During the administration of the new party's first President, the

enormously popular Andrew Jackson, Van Buren was Old Hickory's top advisor. As eighth President—the first born under the U.S. flag—Martin Van Buren continued the era of Jacksonian Democracy. He faced daunting challenges: The nation suffered a severe and lingering economic depression. The extension of slavery into new states—opposed by Van Buren—divided the nation and his party. Crises with Great Britain, Spain, and Texas required varying degrees of firmness, negotiation, and delay to avoid conflict.

Not until his defeat for the presidency in 1848 did Van Buren give up public life. The 1850 census listed his occupation as "farmer." Once settled at Lindenwald, he resisted all attempts to lure him back into politics. In 1862 Martin Van Buren succumbed to his "old enemy," bronchial asthma. He was buried in Kinderhook, where in life he had always known a beloved home.

A watercolor-on-ivory miniature of the ex-President painted "from life" was Albany artist Daniel Wagner's 1846 contribution to Van Buren's portraiture. Michael Fredericks



A Master Politician's "Magical" Career

"It is said that he is a great magician," wrote Andrew Jackson. "I believe it, but his only wand is good common sense which he uses for the benefit of the country." A long series of elected and appointed posts afforded the "Little Magician" ample opportunity to practice his true craft: cool, competent diplomacy. A discreet, guarded man, Van Buren operated most effectively behind the scenes, where one observer noted, he "rowed to his object with muffled oars." Yet, in his later years Van Buren realized sadly that the wizardry had failed, that the political system he had helped to create would not prevent civil war.

1801

Delegate to the Republican party caucus in Troy, New York; avidly supports Jeffersonian principles for the rest of his life

1808

Surrogate (local judicial officer) of Columbia County

1812-20

State senator; state attorney general; leader of the Jeffersonian Republicans in New York; establishes Albany Regency, first state-wide political machine in the country

1821

Delegate to convention for the revision of the state constitution

1821-28

U.S. Senator; helps form Democratic party; manages Andrew Jackson's 1828 presidential campaign

1829

Governor of New York; in office 71 days, until appointed Secretary of State (1829-31); also President Jackson's chief advisor

1831

Nominated ambassador to Great Britain, highest U.S. diplomatic post; Senate does not confirm appointment

1833-37

Vice-President of U.S. under Andrew Jackson

1837-41

President of the United States; carries on Jacksonian policies; opposes extension of slavery and annexation of Texas; establishes independent treasury; faces worst economic depression in country's short history

1844

Loses Democratic Presidential nomination to James K. Polk

1848

Presidential candidate of Free-Soil party, a group opposing extension of slavery; defeat marks end of political career

"A Beautiful Goblet of White-House Champagne," reads this 1840 pro-Van Buren campaign novelty card. When a tab is pulled, the card depicts the candidate frowning at "An Ugly Mug of Log-Cabin Hard Cider," the trademark of opponent—and ultimate winner—William Henry Harrison. Smithsonian Institution



Van Buren's Lindenwald

Just south of Kinderhook, on land that once belonged to his ancestors, stood a dwelling that Martin Van Buren thought would make a fine home in which to live out his post-White House years. The large, two-story red brick house had been built by wealthy judge Peter Van Ness using local materials and following a simple square plan, which emphasized a Palladian window illuminating the second story hallway. The Georgian style carried over to the inside as well; pilasters and entablatures framed six-panel molded doors, and finely carved cornices edged the



Architect Richard Upjohn's elaborate modifications included a new front porch con-

structed in a popular melding of the Romanesque and Gothic styles. Michael Fredericks

ceilings. Adorning the entrance was a silver-plated doorknocker inscribed with "1797," the year the house was completed.

William Van Ness, Van Buren's lifelong friend and former employer, inherited the house from his father but lost it to creditors in 1824. Fifteen years later, though neglect had rendered the building and grounds rather unattractive to a man who took pride in elegant surroundings, Van Buren paid owner William Paulding, Jr., \$14,000 for the estate. Even before he moved in permanently Van Buren was anxious to begin what he called "improvements." In accordance with his heritage he set about making his piece of the Hudson Valley into a working farm. Soon the place came back to life; by



Van Buren commissioned this painted miniature of his wife, Hannah, shortly after she died in 1819. He never remarried; aided by his sister-in-law and various educational institutions, Martin raised the couple's four sons who became his close companions.

1845 he could gaze proudly on more than 220 acres of cropland, as well as formal flower gardens, ornamental fish ponds, wooded paths, and outbuildings of all kinds.

Primarily concerned with the grounds, Van Buren also lavished attention on his new house. His most elaborate modification involved removing the central stairway in the entrance hall to create large rooms on both stories. Fifty-one vividly colored wallpaper panels, imported from France, formed a mural-like hunting scene in the downstairs hall. Underneath was a wallpaper balustrade design. Elsewhere he placed fine furniture and Brussels carpets, and hung portraits of some personal friends—Thomas Jefferson, Henry Clay, and Andrew Jackson. Van Buren described one "improvement" to a friend in 1846: "When you visit me again you shall wash off the impurities of Mammon in the Bath which has been put up." Lindenwald was a source of great satisfaction to its owner.

"We are to undergo a great Revolution here," Van Buren wrote in 1849. Because his son Smith agreed to move in and help manage the estate, Van Buren gave him license to make alterations in order to accommodate his



Van Buren is believed to have purchased this mahogany armchair—part of an eight-piece set attributed to the New York company J. Meeks—while selecting Lindenwald's new furnishings in 1841. Michael Fredericks

growing family. Smith sought out Richard Upjohn, whom Van Buren referred to as the "great architectural oracle." The new plan called for kitchen ranges, running water, a furnace, and many additional rooms. But it was the decorative features—a four-story brick tower, a central gable, attic dormers, and "as beautiful a Porch as you ever laid your eyes upon"—that transported Lindenwald from the 18th to the mid-19th century, an era when fashionable builders modeled their works after the grand villas of northern Italy. Finally, Lindenwald was painted yellow. The indulgent father explained that "the idea of seeing in life, the changes



Never one to spare expense when it came to decorating Lindenwald *a la mode*, Van Buren

acquired costly French wallpaper that formed a scene entitled "Landscape of the Hunt." Michael Fredericks

which my heir would be sure to make after I am gone, amuses me."

The next decade brought few alterations to Lindenwald. Van Buren lived happily at his country seat until his death in 1862. Afterward, the house changed hands many times. Over the next century or so it served as a private residence, a tea house, a nursing home, and an antiques shop. The property became part of the National Park Service in the 1970s. Restored to the era of Van Buren's occupancy, the mansion and grounds recall the time when this gentleman farmer "drank the pure pleasure of a rural life" at his Lindenwald.



This painted-grain shaving stand, which remained at the estate through numerous changes in ownership, attests to Van Buren's widely-held reputation for immaculate grooming. Michael Fredericks

About Your Visit

Established by Congress on October 26, 1974, to commemorate the life and work of the eighth U.S. President, the Martin Van Buren National Historic Site preserves 22 acres of land from Van Buren's original holdings, as well as the mansion that was built in the 1790s and renovated in the mid-19th century. Named for the linden trees on the estate, Lindenwald was Van Buren's home from 1841 to 1862.

Location

The site is located just south of the Village of Kinderhook on N.Y. 9H. Visitor parking is in the parking lot on Old Post Road in front of the house; there are accessible parking spaces behind the house.

Hours

The house is open seven days a week from mid-May through October. In November and early December it is open on weekends only. It is closed on Thanksgiving Day. The house is closed for the winter on December 6. Guided tours are given from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The park charges an entrance fee; visitors with Golden Eagle, Golden Age, or Golden Access passports, as well as those under 17 years of age, are admitted free.

For More Information

Write: Superintendent, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, 1013 Old Post Road, Kinderhook, NY 12106-0545; or call: 518-758-9689. The park's e-mail address is: mavainfo@nps.gov. On the Internet, you can find us at: www.nps.gov/mava.

Related Sites

If you wish to know more about Van Buren's life and background, take a short drive to the Village of Kinderhook.

A historical marker on Hudson Street indicates the site of the Van Buren family tavern where Martin was born. The original structure burned long ago and has been replaced by a succession of other buildings. The tavern served as a hostel for travelers and a gathering place for villagers desirous of food, drink, and lively conversation. Helping out in his parents' tavern, young Martin learned a great deal about human nature.

Though his brother Lawrence and son Smith were founding members of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, designed by architect Richard Upjohn, Van Buren attended the nearby Kinderhook Reformed Church. The present building, on the site of the original which burned in 1867, stands on Broad Street.

Van Buren died on July 24, 1862, at age 79. He is buried in Kinderhook Reformed Cemetery along with his wife Hannah, his parents, and his son Martin Jr. The cemetery dates from 1817 and is located on Albany Avenue. Each December 5, the day Van Buren was born, a ceremony is held here in his honor.

