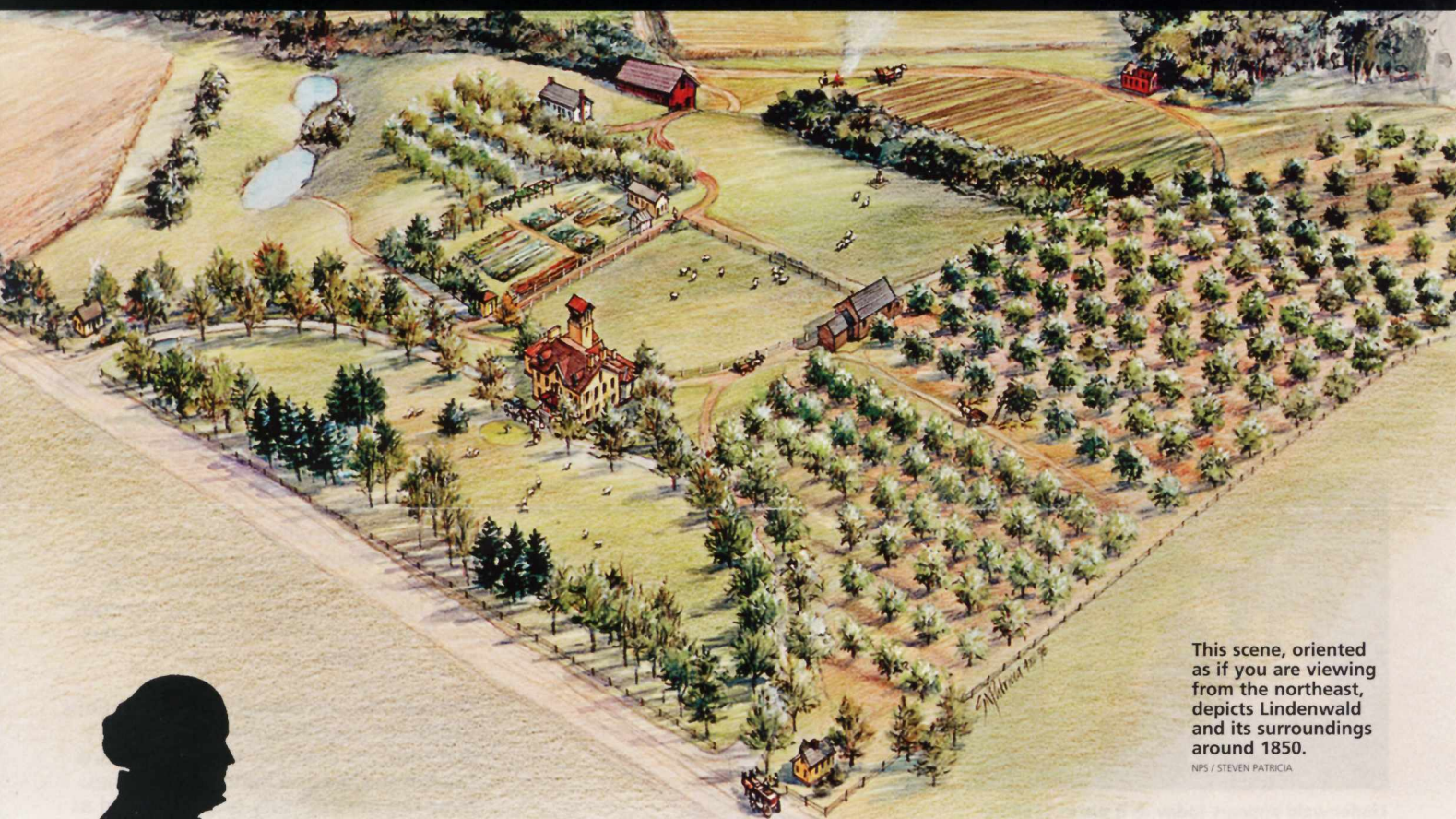


Martin Van Buren

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



National Historic Site
New York



This scene, oriented as if you are viewing from the northeast, depicts Lindenwald and its surroundings around 1850.

NPS / STEVEN PATRICIA

"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



M Van Buren

Martin Van Buren was born in Kinderhook in 1782, as the Revolutionary War was drawing to a close. His parents kept a tavern and, like their Dutch predecessors of 150 years, made a moderate living farming in the Hudson Valley. Young Martin, with his fine mind and 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 a 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 in which a new party system was taking shape. Van Buren positioned himself in the eye of the storm, advocating the principles of the Jeffersonian Republicans: states' rights, strict constitutional construction, and civil liberties. His efforts helped to bring about an alliance of the "planters of the South and the plain republicans of the North"—what came to be called the Democratic party. During the administration of the Democrats' first President, the enormously popular Andrew Jackson, Van Buren was Old Hickory's top adviser.

As eighth President—the first born under the U.S. flag—Van Buren continued the

era of Jacksonian Democracy. He faced daunting problems. The nation suffered a lingering economic depression. Crises with Great Britain, Spain, and Texas taxed his diplomatic skills. Most troublesome was the issue of extending slavery into new states, which Van Buren opposed.

After his defeat for reelection in 1840 Van Buren returned to Kinderhook. He made a bid for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1844 but lost at the convention to James K. Polk. As the subject of slavery became more contentious, Van Buren was again persuaded to run for president in 1848—as a third-party candidate for the Free Soil party.

After that he gave up public life. The 1850 census listed his occupation as "farmer." Once settled at Lindenwald, he resisted all efforts 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.

Right: Artist Henry Inman painted this portrait of Martin Van Buren at the height of his political power in the mid-1830s. Left: A silhouette profile of Van Buren was published in 1846.

IMAGES RIGHT AND FAR LEFT—NPS



A Master Politician's Magical Career

A long series of elected and appointed posts gave the "Little Magician" ample opportunity to practice his true craft—cool, competent diplomacy. Van Buren operated most effectively behind the scenes, where one observer noted that he "rowed to his object with muffled oars."

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 statewide political machine in the nation.

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 adviser.

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 Jackson's 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 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.

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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 Judge Peter Van Ness. It followed a simple rectangular plan and featured a Palladian window illuminating the second story hallway. The Georgian style carried over to the inside; pilasters and entablatures framed six-panel molded doors, and finely carved cornices edged the ceilings. At the entrance was a silver-plated doorknocker

wooded paths, and outbuildings of all kinds. Extensive pear and apple orchards grew, and in later years he kept a large flock of sheep.

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 colored wallpaper panels imported from France formed a mural hunting scene in the downstairs hall. Elsewhere he placed fine furniture and Brussels carpets, and hung portraits of some 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 tremendous satisfaction to its owner.



Lindenwald appears today as it did in 1850 following the extensive additions and alterations made by the President's son Smith.

NPS / HAB5

inscribed "1797," the year the original structure 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 Van Buren was anxious to begin improvements, and he set about making his piece of the Hudson Valley into a working farm. Soon the place came back to life. By 1845 he could gaze proudly on more than 220 acres of cropland,



This bust of Van Buren, in the library, is one of three sculpted by Hiram Powers, for whom the President posed in 1836. Another bust sits in the Red Room of the White House.

NPS

"We are to undergo a great Revolution here," Van Buren announced in 1849. When his son Smith agreed to move in and help manage the estate, Van Buren gave him license to make alterations to accommodate his growing family. Smith hired noted architect Richard Upjohn. The new plan called for kitchen ranges, running water, a furnace, and additional rooms. But it was the stylistic 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 homes



Never one to spare expense when it came to Lindenwald, Van Buren bought costly French wallpaper that formed a scene entitled "Landscape of the Hunt."

NPS

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

The next decade brought few alterations. 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, tea house, nursing home, and antiques shop. The property was added to the National Park System in 1974. Today 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.



Muscat blanc was one of the varieties of grapes grown on the Lindenwald farm. Van Buren had large orchards of pears and apples and grew both field and row crops. He also experimented with growing hops used in brewing.

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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.

NPS

Established by Congress in 1974 to commemorate the life and work of the eighth U.S. President, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site preserves 22 acres of Van Buren's original holdings (see map for extent of original farm property), as well as the mansion built in the 1790s and renovated in the mid-19th century. Named for the estate's linden trees, Lindenwald was Van Buren's home 1841–1862.

Hours

The house is open seven days a week from mid-May through October. Guided tours are offered throughout the day; contact the park staff for times. The house is closed during the winter, but park grounds are open year-round from sunrise to

sunset. There is an entrance fee; visitors age 15 and younger are admitted free, as are holders of National Park passes and Golden Passports.

Beyond the Park

If you wish to know more about Van Buren's life, take a short drive to the village of Kinderhook. A historical marker on Hudson Street marks the site of the Van Buren family tavern where Martin was born. The original structure burned long ago and has been replaced. The tavern served as a hostel for travelers and a gathering place for villagers. 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 Dutch 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 Dutch 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, Van Buren's birthday, a ceremony is held here in his honor.

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 opposite the visitor center and park headquarters.

For More Information

Martin Van Buren National Historic Site is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

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