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Collection Ontogenesis: Following the Nascence and Maturation of the Montgomery Place Archive, 1802 - 2018

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Collection Ontogenesis:
Following the Nascence and Maturation of the Montgomery Place Archive
1802 - 2018

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Senior Project Submitted to the Division of the Arts in Art History at Bard College
Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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Undone

How is the history of a nation remembered?

Well-- it all depends on what you keep.¹

This is where my story-- my fragment of this archivable memory-- begins: sifting through big boxes packed full of little boxes stuffed with carefully wrapped pieces of a foreign family’s history. I first experienced the Montgomery Place collection in the basement of the Bard College Stevenson Library in September of 2016. After the college purchased the property in April of that year, the estate's collection was indiscriminately scattered in an effort to create an efficient and expedited transfer; the collection, most of which was no longer stored in the mansion, was sealed up in shipping containers, or tucked away on rachitic shelves in locked attic rooms. And thus, piece by fractured piece, two supervisors (Amy Husten and Helene Tieger) and I began the long and laborious process of cataloging and inventorying the unaccessioned remnants of a bygone family.

The first fateful weeks I spent among unfamiliar antiquities in the meticulously regulated library vault oddly stimulated within me an ever-flourishing attraction to the abstract notion of a biological family collection. Collection pieces stored in the Stevenson Library vault included pocket watches, fobs, coins, lockets, and brooches. As the adoption of the estate into the college was desperately recent, I was permitted, otherwise usually unavailable (for inexperienced undergraduate students) access to the foundational cataloging, storage, collection handling, and appraisal processes for slivers of the estate's archive and collection. This moment is where I

made my contributory debut in the Montgomery Place archive, my proximate touch to the
collection pieces aligned with my messy handwriting on boxes and container lists will live
forever alongside the fingerprints of long dead historic Hudson Valley families.

Now, a year and many months later, I work in Butler South, an unremarkable outbuilding
on the property which serves as the collections permanent storage facility. While handling,
cataloging, and processing these objects—documents, mourning rings, drapery sets, muskets, and
Argon lamps—which had been long packed away, impervious to human touch for decades, I
became conditioned to value the objects outside their intended context. Each collection piece
turned into a set of numbers: an accessioned or unaccessioned code, an insurance estimate, a
container list notation, a box number, dimensions, a processing date... after a while, I found
myself questioning this method of object and collection processing: What was happening to the
assessment of these objects once they were moved out of the framework of their original
proprietors? What were they losing? I considered the troubling notion that these objects were
losing their structural and historic influence, their contextual significance, and most notably, the
original, familial memories these domestic items once functionally procured.

The families of Montgomery Place saved every document they deemed at all emblematic,
from receipts for fertilizer shipments to invitations to dinner parties at the Manhattan Club to
garden catalogs. Back at Butler South, over the hum of the dehumidifier, we often gawk at the
absurdity of the family's compulsion to meticulously preserve thousands of ostensibly
inconsequential trinkets and correspondences. Preserving a familial collection is only feasible if
the necessary resources are available to maintain it. If Bard College were to discard these
folders—these boxes—of things I saw to be trivial or uninteresting in an effort to focus on ‘more
important’ collection items, would anyone notice? When and how do caretakers responsible for
these collections decide if something is worth keeping? Who has that authority? Does anyone? Does an object’s distinction essentialize from its monetary value? its historic value? How do we know if something has or might someday possess historic value? We all collect things; every family, every generation, every house has its collection. What I want to investigate is how these collections become valuable. More importantly, I want to try and understand how these collections manage to create and retain a life of their own. I’m fascinated by these collections of nothing and what or who makes them more than nothing.

... Relationships between form and function in the archive can so easily be broken by the transfer from family to memory to institution. I will be exploring these disintegrating relationships in this thesis, which you will find consists of separate but dependent (much like the organic archive itself) components: research, family stories and object history. Additionally, this thesis is broken up into three chapters based on considerable functionality: the archive as familial memory preservation, the archive as legacy protection, and the archive as a management of history.

The foundation of this story, the story of Montgomery Place, originally known as "Chateau de Montgomery," begins long before Bard College, before Amtrak and route 9. It begins in May of 1802 when Janet Livingston Montgomery purchased a river-front farm from John and Catherine Van Benthuysen. The family names of the estate, Livingston, Beekman, Montgomery, imply an archive and a collection within itself. Over the decades, these families found themselves blindly commingling their histories at Montgomery Place.

... Attempts to catalog and archive the personal belongings of Montgomery Place’s historic families began with the families themselves and later, outside institutions. For example, when
Edward Livingston inherited the property in 1828 from Janet Montgomery, he attempted the first formal inventory of the estate. A later resident, John Ross Delafield, made the second compulsory inventory in the 1940s, his grandson, Dennis, worked on the final domestic catalogue of the property. With each new tenant came a plethora of tchotchkes and trivialities. In the 1980s, after Sleepy Hollow Renovations (now Historic Hudson Valley) took over the estate from Dennis Delafield, another, more institutional cataloging system emerged. A substantial part of this procedure included vehemently protecting objects by law through the process of accessioning collection items. Once voted for accession, an object could not lawfully be separated from the rest of the collection and an insurance policy was written for the item to safeguard the collections integrity.

The archivists at Historic Hudson Valley (HHV) wanted to preserve the inventories penned by the family members, and once found, these catalogues were promptly archived and protected as slivers of the hesternal truth of Montgomery Place. In diary entry written by John Ross Delafield detailing one of his summers spent at Montgomery Place, he mentions spending at least two hours after supper every evening in the library with his wife pouring over old family photographs, papers, and letters. If the inhabitants themselves were so interested by the concept and creation of the family archive, does that, or should that, affect the gravity of institutional investment? What and who makes these decisions that create the archive?

Chapter One, Hesternal Truths of Montgomery Place, will discuss the importance (or lack of importance) of memory in respect to object relevance within familial past. This will be a hermeneutic view of the archive as memory. There will be more discussion on the history and establishment of the estate and an extensive look at the foundational genealogy of the property. After describing the inhabitants and setting up a general historic stage, I will analyze the
significant role genealogy, under the time of the Livingston-Montgomery’s, had in the archive. What I'm looking at here is what is given in the most present and accessible function of the archive, what can I/we/anyone learn from the past?

Chapter Two, *Family, Locality, Objectivity*, will ask the question: where do the family and the institution meet? At what point does a family become "important" enough, either historically or monetarily (although often these two go hand in hand), to be remembered and categorically preserved with the help of an outside organization? This is an examination of the archive as objects in the Delafield era. There will also be a discussion on conservation theory and practice. Why is it important and what are the motivations behind conserving objects? Additionally, both the first and second chapters include ekphrastic readings of a few collection objects. I chose this analytical method because I found it incredibly important to maintain the personalities of each piece and that trying to clinically analyze the objects failed to express the lives and characteristics that subsisted within them.

Chapter Three, *Institution and the Management of Management*, will look at the present physical experience of the archive. Archives exist in what I consider a kind of nowhere land that very few people ever have access to. For example, you may never have physically seen the Declaration of Independence, but I'm sure you can imagine it very clearly in your mind. How are archives presented? Is this procedure feasible and sustainable? Do we need to make people care about the archive? Why? How? This is a discussion of the archive as structure and where Montgomery Place exists in the deconstruction of the public archive.

Each chapter opens with an *Ontogenesis*. I’m using this biological term, meaning “the development of an individual organism or anatomical or behavioral feature from the earliest
stage to maturity,” to explore the idea that an archive can and should be considered a living organism, and that this approach ought to manifest in the practical structure and management of the collection. As objects are added to the collection or are lost in the annals of history, the physical collection warps around these additive and subtractive characters. Collection objects are the cells, the skeletons, the hearts and brains, of the sum of their whole. Each object can be examined under these terms and given a role to play within the all-encompassing structure of the collection. ’Biological’ is a forgiving and transposable categorical term, thus I think archives can be ’biologically personified’ by the archivists and collection managers who spend time with them. Endowing an organic nature in a collection creates new and important considerations for the study of history, considerations that I’d like to examine within the context of the Montgomery Place collection.

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What is the past? Some might argue that, in a strict sense, it doesn’t exist. The past is only the memory or residue of things that now exist in the present moment, a mental construction that—cleaned up or embellished—often serves the needs of the current moment instead of corresponding to any historic ‘truth’.

The Ontogenesis: Part One

In this story, the story of Montgomery Place, initially "Chateau de Montgomery," the past is abbreviated by human agents aspiring to maintain a legacy. Generations of residents came and went, dropping pieces of their history in attic rooms, hall closets, and behind cellar doors; a bread crumb trail picked up by the proceeding family and added to the layers of what would eventually be the Montgomery Place collection. One way of approaching this incredibly dense narrative is through the interpretation of those collection objects, which are given a contextual life through the numerous genealogies of the families. Versions of their stories, written by historians or avid Hudson Valley enthusiasts, provide access to conclusions drawn by overlapping objects and perception. In order to make sense of the lives of people we have no physical or genealogical connection with, we look at what they’ve left behind. Here is the ontogenesis, the first spark of life for this collection of nothing.

...
A Watch, A Chest, A Man: The Military Roots of a Family & Nation

Wealthy, established, property-holding, families have long been the focal point for Western historians and have thus become the basis for the development of the “historically significant.”\(^4\) This ontogenetic development is partly due to the fact that it was these families who had the means to preserve their legacies and—in the canon of history—appear to have made the most powerful impacts. But this begs the proverbial question: what came first, the significance of the families? Or the significance of their objects?

The first individual of interest in the Montgomery Place collection is Janet Livingston Montgomery. She was born into the prestigious Livingston family, a family whose history is irrevocably entwined with the outset of patriot idealism and epitomized the essential cultural foundation of the Hudson Valley.\(^5\) Shortly after Robert Livingston’s migration from England to New York, in 1686, he earned the title “Lord of Livingston Manor” (over 160,000 acres of land across Dutchess and Columbia county) and hence served as a Judge in the New York Supreme Court.\(^6\) Robert married Margaret Beekman, a society woman hailing from a similarly distinguished Dutch family which was likewise crucial in the social development of Upstate New York. After their union, Robert, his wife and their nine children resided medially between two family estates, one in Rhinebeck now known as the Beekman Arms and another just a few miles north up the Hudson River called Clermont. Robert and Margaret’s daughter, Janet Livingston,

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\(^4\) Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg, ed., *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity* (Wayne State University Press 1999)

\(^5\) The Livingston’s were actually considered, by Historic Hudson Valley (according to an internal research paper done in the early 1980s titled *MP: History of a People and Place* written by Jacquetta Haley) to be English “late-comers” to the Hudson Valley, compared to old Dutch families such as the Van Dykes and the Beekmans.

\(^6\) David McAdam and others, *History of the Bench and Bar of New York* (New York History Company 1897)
born in 1743, married Richard Montgomery on July 24th 1773. Richard, born in Swords, Ireland in 1738, was originally a captain in the British Royal Army. After a successful military career in England, a career which including aiding in the British capture of the ports of Martinique and Havana, Richard became disenchanted by the crown and British politics in general. He left the Royal Army, moved to upstate New York and was chosen to represent Dutchess County in the New York Provincial Congress. Once established in the States, he and Janet began their happy marriage in a small cottage outside Rhinebeck, New York. Richard was elected the Brigadier-General of the newly formed Continental Army by the Commander in Chief, George Washington, and in 1775, Richard Montgomery earned the title of America’s "First National Hero" by having the glorious misfortune to be the first general killed in battle during the American Revolution.

Janet was absolutely devastated by the sudden death of her husband and became a widow at only thirty-two years old. She reportedly never recovered from the pain of her “General’s” premature demise. In place of her husband’s body, which wasn’t sent home until many years later (in 1818), Janet was given Richard’s pocket watch (fig. 1) and his military traveling trunk (fig. 2). In an article from the German journal, Shofar, authors Mona Körte and Toby Axelrod examine the objects given to the “Kindertransports” (Jewish children fleeing

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Germany by being shipped to England or elsewhere by relatives in the early years of the second World War). While the context of the precious ephemera carried by the Kindertransports is quite different from Richard and Janet’s story, the idea that as objects of mourning, the ephemera retained significance by their ability to “extend their message through time… symbolically compressed within them are entire thematic clusters, making them[—the objects—]… keepers of memory.”\footnote{Mona Körte and Toby Axelrod, “Bracelet, Hand Towel, Pocket Watch: Objects of the Last Moment in Memory and Narration,” \textit{Shofar} 23, no. 1 (2004): 115.} These treasured token, objects narrating Gen. Montgomery’s last moments, constituted the beginning of the Montgomery Place collection. The collection dramatically inflated over the next two-hundred years, but these two objects\footnote{There are additional family pieces within the archive that date back to the Livingston and Beekman histories. For the purpose of this chapter, I’m considering primarily the objects which are directly attached to the residents of Montgomery Place.} and the few pieces of Richard Montgomery’s past which Janet saved from their Rhinebeck home, established themes which would later prove to play dominant roles in the collection: military history, early American history, and delicate (precious) familial artifacts.

In Janet’s case, Richard’s pocket watch and travelling trunk create an unbreakable link between her, (safe in their home in Rhinebeck), and her husband, (fighting to his death in the American Revolution in Quebec). This link evidentially supports their memories together and Janet’s memories of Richard. It’s possible to go so far as to say that these objects are evidence of the existence, not solely of Richard Montgomery, but of the events surrounding his demise, providing some kind of an orderly sequence to the narrative. Eventually these objects also become a link to something beyond personal narrative and created a memory bracket for the Battle of Quebec and by extent, The American Revolution. But, “obsessions with the objects [have the potential to] become a burden, in that the owners see themselves as the [objects] sole...
guardian for life.”\textsuperscript{13} Additionally, the importance of the mementos shift from being based primarily on the ownership by the beloved, to assisting in identifying continuity in the original owners personality. Because these objects (such as the pocket watch) are the only tangible, \textit{physical}, reminders of someone's existence, they inherently shape a viewer’s memory of the owner’s life. Perhaps Richard had not been as neatly observant of the passage of time while he was alive and actually carrying the pocket watch, but as it is one of the few pieces left of his legacy. The pocket watch may suggest or construct a different, maybe even fictional, corporeal reality for the General. A transformation occurs surrounding the initial owner which is then translated into the object given to the final owner and essentially becomes a memento for aiding the mourning process.

In May of 1802, the widow, Janet Livingston Montgomery purchased a 242-acre farm from John and Catherine Van Benthuysen. She entered into a business venture to establish a commercial nursery on the land. Janet built a modest Federal style manor, the foundational and structural core of the current mansion, on the property, where she lived out the rest of her long life. William Jones, the son of Lord and Lady Ranelagh (old-world cousins of Richard Montgomery), moved in with Janet during the genesis of the estate. Janet, herself childless, decided to quasi- ‘adopt’ Jones. Janet originally bequeathed the property to Jones, but he perished in 1815 and thus Janet offered the estate to her nephew, Lewis Livingston, whose handsome portrait still hangs in the drawing room. Alas, Janet outlived her second heir; consequently, she bestowed the estate to her brother, Edward Livingston. Janet died at "Chateau de Montgomery" in 1828 when she was eighty-five years old.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} A. J. Downing, \textit{A Visit to Montgomery Place} (Tarrytown NY: Sleepy Hollow Press 1988)
General Richard Montgomery’s Pocket Watch (fig. 1)

For being only slightly larger than an Oreo cookie, the simple gold watch feels like it should weigh a hundred pounds. The glass face which once protected the delicate metal hands is gone and there is a chip in the enamel at the thirty second/“VI” o’clock mark. Given the two hard facts associated with the watch—One, it belonged to General Richard Montgomery, and two, he brought this watch with him to the battle that claimed his life—the missing glass and the broken face extend an enigmatic, even mystical, air to the timepiece. There are no records indicating exactly where the watch was found before it was sent back to his widow, Janet Livingston Montgomery (whether it had been on his person or with his belongings) but it’s quite natural to picture the gold pocket watch tucked into his fussy military uniform as he charged onto the battlefield in 1775.

Time itself has imbued a reverence to the piece, there’s an inexplicable emotion tied to the idea that someone might have died, no less a figure who is considered a foundational American hero, while this wonderfully personal item was resting close to their slowing heart. On the back of the pocket watch, etched into the gold, reads “RM” in superfluous script. The initials are faded, along with the rest of the decorative floral pattern, suggesting the watch spent a lot of time in the palm of someone’s

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15 Not only are his initials carved on to the back, but the watch is described in a familial inventory done by Louise Livingston in the 1830s and again in another catalogue by a family member in the late 1960s.
hand—being pulled out of a pocket or checked hastily at sunrise. Holding this watch now feels like spotting a celebrity in a crowd, knowing you’re taking up the same space as something Important and Historic, but distanced, you’re going your way and they’re going theirs.

Attached as a fob by a modified filigree mother and son chain is Richard Montgomery’s personal embossing seal and a winding key for the watch. The seal would have been used to secure letters, ratify legal records, and authenticate documents. This design belonged exclusively to Richard; the application of the seal was just as binding as his signature. The fact that it remains attached to his watch, not only out of convenience, but so that it was protected inside his clothes and was accessible at all times, indicates how symbolically significant his use of the seal was. The winding key attached to the same link as the fob seal adds another layer of intimacy. Everyday, the watch would have had to have been wound by Richard; it would have been a part of his daily routine, as mundane as putting in contact lenses or taking a multivitamin. When the owner of a watch dies, there is a possibility that the clock might never be wound again, (especially in this case, as the watch is critically damaged). Richard’s watch stopped at exactly 1:55 and 3 seconds.

His initials engraved on the back of the watch, the innate exclusivity of his personal seal, the notion that the watch might have been with him—might have stopped when Richard was gravely wounded, when he fell from his horse after being hit by a grapeshot cannon—make the
watch mythical. Known for his paramount role in the American Revolution, Richard Montgomery is forever embedded in American lore and legend. His namesake is recorded in the annals of glory and splashed across the states as cities, towns, schools and churches. This little watch is a cornerstone for the Montgomery Place collection. It demonstrates the importance of a name and emphasizes the collections deep American substrate.

A Letter, A Drawing, A Portrait: Footprints of the Idle Rich

The Livingston legacy continued for more than four decades after Janet’s death. Edward Livingston, Janet’s brother and subsequent heir, his wife, Louise d’Avezac and their daughter, Coralie, turned the property into a sublime pleasure ground and began redesigning the grounds to create an escape from the bedlam of city life in order to establish a residential and suburban sanctuary for themselves. Edward Livingston was a prominent political man in antebellum America. He served as the Mayor of New York City and then antecedently, he was elected to be the U.S. Representative to Louisiana. During the early 19th century, Edward became heavily preoccupied with the politics of President Andrew Jackson and the Louisiana Purchase. Upon taking oath as the Representative of Louisiana,\textsuperscript{16} he moved down to a major port city on the Gulf of Mexico—what would eventually be New Orleans—and, with the help of his long time military partner and friend, Andrew Jackson, subsequently contributed to the defense of New Orleans.

\textsuperscript{16} Edward Livingston’s most notable political act was the Livingston Code. While this code—a set of laws written during the 1820s intended to serve as a governing force in Louisiana—was never put into action, many countries including England and France adopted policies from the code into their own legislative systems.
Orleans during the War of 1812. Edward’s political life often kept him away from the States, essentially allowing his wife and daughter full control of the Montgomery Place property.

The new generation of Livingston’s brought with them another important theme to the Montgomery Place collection: the paraphernalia of the idle rich. Not only were the Livingston’s wealthy (Louise possessed a huge family fortune from her parent’s plantation in the French colony, St. Domingo, and Edward inherited a large sum of the Livingston fortune), Edward’s political standing forced the family to become upstanding participants of the new ‘American Elite.’ Edward maintained a close correspondence with President Andrew Jackson long after his stay in Louisiana and was eventually appointed as President Jackson’s Secretary of State. In return for his service, Edward was gifted a gratitude portrait (fig. 4) of President Jackson, commemorating his support and political companionship.

In lieu of the farm Janet initiated, the new generation of Livingston’s concentrated on landscape design, ardently promoting the ontogenesis of growing interest in enlightened thinking and the seminal formation of the American national identity. The family intentionally mirrored the mindset of the Age of Enlightenment by transmitting the idea of the collective natural world into a recognizable material landscape surrounding the estate. They furthermore expanded the property to include the land at the mouth of the Sawkill creek (fig. 5) and further curtailed the scope of the operational farming activities Janet codified during the early days of Montgomery Place. Even still, Edward and Louise kept a watchful eye on the agricultural market during the mid 19th century and resolved to preserve the orchard Janet established; subsequently he and

18 A map of the Land belonging to Edward Livingston circa 1836 drawn after his death. Many of the property boundaries are signified as such: by a “black oak stump” or “stone heap”. The map also shows the lands of John C. Cruger and John Armstrong (known for building Blithewood).
Louise imported over three-hundred non-native fruit trees, many of which continue to generate profit to this day. Additionally, Edward modified the name of the estate from the frilly and misleadingly frenchified "Chateau de Montgomery" to the prevailing, and more honest, American title of "Montgomery Place," inaugurating great change in future documentation in the collection and archiving of the estate. This change also conceivably served to reflect Edward’s own allegiance to the States in order to indemnify his continued political relations with France.

Following Edward's passing in 1836, his wife and daughter took over the persisting modernization the property. After meeting at a formal affair one evening, Louise Livingston connected with architect Alexander Jackson Davis to discuss major additions to Janet's modest and, by then, antiquated manor. A. J. Davis was known primarily for his use of the Gothic Revival style and had consulted with numerous other Hudson Valley families surrounding Montgomery Place. Moreover, he was commissioned to design many of the large plantations in North Carolina during the antebellum period which consequently significantly influenced preferred architectural styles in the South during this period. But, Davis was New York born and raised, so many of his lasting and most revered architectural achievements were in New York state. Louise approved plans proposed by A.J. Davis to add several contemporarily modern features to the mansion, including a portico, pavilion, piazza, and the entire south wing. These features attempted to bring the natural world (which had been vastly disregarded by Janet, canonizing the attitude of her time) —highly apotheosized in the cultural coterie of 19th century high society—into the everyday living spaces of the family. Davis’ architectural drafts for the property, a few of which he transposed as poignant watercolors (fig. 6), were subsumed into the collection. Davis also published a few diary-style articles about his time at the Montgomery

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Place estate including the well known, “A Visit to Montgomery Place,” a copy of which is conserved in the estate archives. Louise Livingston and A.J. Davis established a repertoire that solidified an important reflection between the domicile and the public. Having—even as summer home—a dull Federal style estate was not an investment anyone sharing the name Livingston would dare accept. Louise and Coralie understood how culturally important it was to maintain a grandiose and beautiful public image.

Ergo, when Louise crossed paths with Andrew Jackson Downing, an acclaimed horticulturalist considered to be the founder of American landscape architecture, in 1842, she was eager to have him visit Montgomery Place. Just a year earlier, A. J. Downing published *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* in which he outlined his ideas concerning:

> historical notices and general principles of the art [of landscaping], directions for laying out gardens and arranging plantations, the description and cultivation of hardy trees, decorative accompaniments to the house and grounds, the formation of pieces of artificial water, flower gardens, etc., with remarks on rural architecture.\(^20\)

Downing was able to gain notoriety during the 1830s due to the formation of early horticultural societies. The American landscape was undergoing drastic changes. Once the American Revolution ended and wealthy families established “American” homesteads, later becoming huge estates, the sheer amount of land available to the greedy colonists encouraged the growth of garden and lawn culture, an inclination that was spurred on by European (specifically French and English) style landscape designs. Downing was one of the pioneering forces behind horticultural literature and practice.\(^21\) Enamored with his work—and perhaps more so the prestige of his


name—Louise contracted the young Downing to redesign the unessential farmlands surrounding Montgomery Place. Together they created a plan for a formal garden and arboretum. Numerous other additions to the property, including a barn and a coach house, were added whilst Louise managed the estate. Due to these changes, the property as it is experienced today does not entirely resemble the collective estate that the Livingston family created. Many buildings, and the artifacts within them, were lost during the properties numerous modifications and can only be recalled through photographs and documented experiences.\textsuperscript{22}

A.J. Davis and A.J. Downing continued their work on the estate through the shifting patronage of the property from Louise to her daughter, Coralie Livingston, and her son in law, Thomas Barton.\textsuperscript{23} Thomas Barton, son of the botanist Benjamin Smith Barton, pushed for the development of an exotic fruit arboretum containing unique and neoteric specimen trees. His notebooks and sketches were indicative of amateur botanical skills. Coralie also took an interest in a fascination with Flora and documented many of the flowers and shrub varieties located around the property. She also established the famous rose garden. Unfortunately, Cora’s layout of the rose garden which cited the various species she planted and their original locations within the plot, is long lost. But Coralie subscribed to numerous garden catalogs and it’s possible that the notes she left behind in the catalog margins, indicating the rose species she purchased, might allow the garden to be contemporarily reconstructed.

Thomas and Coralie died childless, and, in 1873, Montgomery Place was officially signed over to Maturin Livingston Delafield. But before her death, Coralie ensured Carleton,  

\textsuperscript{22} A. J. Downing, \textit{A Visit to Montgomery Place} (Tarrytown NY: Sleepy Hollow Press 1988)  
\textsuperscript{23} Kathleen Eagen Johnson, \textit{American Arcadia}, http://american-arcadia.hudsonvalley.org/content/plant-lover2. Thomas Barton was also an obsessive bibliophile and amassed one of the largest collections of early Shakespearean plays, which Cora donated to the Boston Public Library after her husband’s passing.
Julia, and Louise Hunt, her dear friends and her husbands cousins from New Orleans, a life tenancy at the mansion, concluding the reign of the Livingston’s.

_Coralie Barton Livingston Hunt’s Sketch of “Mrs. Montgomery”_  
(fig.7)

Coralie (Cora) Livingston, born in 1806, shortly after the completion of the original _Chateau de Montgomery_, spent the summers of her youth on the estate. She was one of Janet’s closest family members and spent hours every summer evening with her in the reading room or in the gradually flourishing gardens. As patriarchy reigned throughout the early 19th century, Coralie was limited in her exposure to worldly studies, but one subject she took particular interest in was practicing arts. As the years progressed, and her aunt Janet passed away, Cora took her drawing and painting skills to the garden and beautifully documented many flower and shrub species. In regards to Cora’s early work, there is not an incredible plethora of portraits of Janet Livingston Montgomery, especially not from the final years of her life. Coralie did a profile portrait study of her aunt, Mrs. Montgomery, capturing the heaviness of age and Janet’s never-ending mourning in the simple graphite sketch.

Time is evident in Janet’s posture and physiognomy. Janet is resting her chin in the palm of her left hand, gaze set to something unseen beyond the frame and far away. She never recovered from the death of her husband, Richard, and maintained a vestibule of mourning wear for the rest of her life. Cora’s sketch has no color, other than the stains of age
washed along the top and bottom edge of the once white paper, but the shading on Janet’s bonnet suggests it was most likely black or gray, indicative of her perpetual mourning. This sketch outlines the legacy of Janet and Richard subtly, almost inconspicuously. Here is Janet pictured without Richard, the ultimate reality of her time at Montgomery Place. Richard’s absence was an unspoken doloras truth in the character of the estate. Had Richard not perished in 1776, Janet might never have been inspired to establish Montgomery Place; or at the very least the property would not have been considered as critically historical in the way it is perceived today. Janet’s refusal to remarry or bare children presented the opportunity for Edward to become the heir of Montgomery Place and create the outstanding legacy which exists today.

*Janet Livingston’s Letter to Edward Livingston*

Before Janet’s death in 1828, she wrote a book length letter to her brother, Edward, in which she retold details from her personal life and the lives of many of their family members and connections (fig. 3). Throughout the letter Janet leaks out hints of her character, imbuing a personality on the pieces of her which were left in the collection. She writes about her everlasting love for Richard—*her soldier*—and brief snippets about her day to day life at Montgomery Place. As the letter progresses, her handwriting becomes increasingly larger and less legible.

Aside from the hint of her age on the first page, there is little mention of dates. Considering that she lived well into her eighties, it’s
quite possible that she worked on this journal for a number of years. Slipped into the front of the letter is a long quote from St. Luke V:12 and Leviticus XIV:1-7. The page, folded twice into itself, is roughly eight inches long. In beautiful calligraphy, it reads “Bone to the dust, behold Him fall!” Each following line is punctuated by an exclamation point, projecting a fierce spirituality into the syntax of the quote. It’s uncertain when these biblical passages were penned and by whom, but, comparing the chirography of the journal and the quotes, it was almost certainly transcribed by Janet. Some of the passages are clearly linked, while others read as asides or even personal notes. Interestingly, all of Janet’s lovers/love interests died shortly after making her acquaintance. While she was incredibly spiritual, she also maintained a lifelong respect for premonitions, dream readings and psychics, which influenced many members of her family.

This journal will be revisited in the second chapter; it was discovered in the early 1920s by the Delafield family. John Ross, the patriarch, took it upon himself to transcribe the entire text and annotate Janet’s retelling of her genealogical history with his own corrections.

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Renewal

At Montgomery Place, the biological identity of the property ebbed and flowed through the centuries, but much of the foundational pieces in the current collection found themselves entangled in the property during the early 19th century during the Livingston-Montgomery
dynasty. These first two generations established incredibly fundamental “truths” in the collection. Janet Montgomery brought the presence of the first “Great Man” of Montgomery Place, her husband, General Richard Montgomery, and the considerable gravity of his almost mythic military prestige; his fragmented death was a keystone moment in the American Revolution and, consequently, the founding of the United States. With the second generation of Livingston’s, there comes the weight of a historically significant name and substantial political celebrity. These families stipulated the traditions which the next generation of residents accepted.

The general harmony of the collection reflects important sentiments in consideration of the possibility of collective memory. In a chapter from *Commemorating and Forgetting* by Prof. Martin J. Murray, Murray discusses the power contained within the socially constructed ideology of the collective past. He argues that “collective remembrance is absolutely essential for connecting the past with the future” and that “filtered through [this] lens, collective memory renders scenes, events, persons and actions that were ambiguous or inconsistent in historical accounts straightforward and clear.” Our understanding of history as a concise narrative timeline is rooted in the substantiation of collective memory. Additionally, in the words of French anthropologist and archaeologist, André Leroi-Gourhan,

> Tradition is biologically just as indispensable for the human species as genetic conditioning is to insect societies: ethnic survival depends on routine and the dialogue that is established brings about the equilibrium between routine and progress, routine symbolizing capital necessary to the group’s survival, and progress the intervention of individual innovation that produces better survival.\(^{26}\)

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\(^{24}\) This term and its relation to Montgomery Place will be discussed in depth in the following chapters.


Thus, memory is a fundamental element to the survival of a species, but even more so, memory itself might be traced back to the establishment of a species. Frances Yates, in The Art of Memory, discusses how the invention of the ‘Art’ of memory (in her interpretation, the Greeks initiated this practice and it was passed down generationally as a European tradition) focuses on the ability to impress physical places, objects and images using mnemotechnics. This also applies to imbuing the images from architectural landscapes with memories. Presently, this feels like an unconscious task that we seemingly perform with nearly everything we interact with, but Yates argues that this pattern of thinking is something we’ve collectively learned from a history we created. The interest in preserving a created past is both fundamentally biological and concurrently entirely socially constructed. The question becomes less of an inquest into the narrative histories of the family and more so an investigation of the importance (or lack of importance) of memory, particularly personal memory, in respect to the familial past. “The relationship between the remembered and [the] remembering self is built into the history of objects.”

The only memories left of the family members are from the interpolations of their things. Professor Murray, in the same chapter from Commemorating and Forgetting, “The Power of Collective Memory”, writes,

> Although typically unacknowledged, the visual memories of the past are embedded in the physical landscape of the walls, gates, and barriers [the structural architecture]... Memories are also embodied in particular places, visual images, virtual reenactments of the past, personal stories and casual conversations.

… essentially, the makings of a collection. In Mona Körte and Toby Alexander’s article, Bracelet, Hand Towel, Pocket Watch: Objects of the Last Moment in Memory and Narration,

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30 Martin Murray, Commemorating and Forgetting, (University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 12.
they discuss the fact that objects not only serve as a contribution of self-assurance and thus an extension of the self; “they also maintain a connection over distance, and console by suggesting that, though perhaps gone, the [owners] are not lost.”31 They become artifacts that are recognized symbolically as an integral part of the human biorhythm. Even the most seemingly personal objects, like Janet’s letter to Edward, were never truly personal and recorded many pieces of historic notification. Additionally, the Livingston-Montgomery’s existed so profoundly in the public eye; anything they owned—what lives on in the collection being the only proof of their legacy—they expected to have scrutinized.

Nonetheless, keepsakes/memorabilia/ephemera/collection objects are fundamental features in the landscape of remembrance; making the connection between memory and historic preservation requires a need to embrace entire thematic complexities anointed symbolically within the objects. Would this connection make those objects—the collection entirely—and the memories attached to them dishonest? Or is that just part of the biological dialogue historians are forced to contend with concerning anything preserved as part of a collection? What is permanently in the collection might not have been what the family members themselves considered important or relevant to their personal history, but it was the cumulative residents and formative two centuries that decided what was worth saving. Maybe it’s completely arbitrary, maybe contending to the fluidity of memorial relevance and perspective is exactly what makes a collection so intriguing and hard to leave behind.

Images & Figures

(fig. 1)
MP.88.6, General Montgomery’s Pocket Watch. 2016. Montgomery Place Collections, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.
(fig. 1) fob detail
MP.88.6, General Montgomery’s Pocket Watch. 2016. Montgomery Place Collections, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.
(fig. 2)
(fig. 3)
(fig. 4)
(fig. 5)
(fig. 6)
(fig. 6)
NA.0023, Edward Livingston’s Pocket Watch. 2016. Montgomery Place Collections, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.
MP.87.315, “Century Plant in Blossom 1873 Belonging to Mrs. Cora Livingston Barton”
“John W. Delafield drove me in our Ford Sedan to Montgomery Place. We took luncheon at the Beekman Arms in Rhinebeck where a Bankers’ convention was going on which ensured plenty of good food. Then went on and inspected work at the farm- in the mansion, etc., and drove back in the afternoon arriving at the house about 6 p.m.” signed “JRD” March 13th 1958.

The Ontogenesis: Part Two

“Family muniments are essential sources of local history not only of the family estate but of the town or village nearby.”\(^{32}\) Thus is the truth recognized and propagated by the Delafield family. The history collected and preserved by the families of the great Hudson Valley estates serve as substantial foundational source material for Hudson Valley history. Historian Charlotte Smith, in a journal article published in 2002\(^ {33}\) coins the term and establishes the concept of the “house museum” (a term I believe accurately describes the position the Montgomery Place estate is currently in). These “house museums” exist to celebrate the lives of dominant (i.e. patriotic) individuals—in this case, Gen. Richard Montgomery—, and as something akin to a place of worship for these “Great Men.” The Montgomery Place Estate housed members of some of the wealthiest families in the Hudson Valley, and even more importantly, the property was established under Mrs. Janet Richard Montgomery, the wife of an American military hero, and, following her death, her brother, a well known jurist and statesman, inherited the estate. From then until the mid-1980s the property dipped in and out of the hands of politicians, military


generals, and other elected officials. Heavily weighted on the other, landed families and political strength serve as the structure for the culture of the Hudson Valley.

The Relic Room

In the basement of Montgomery Place, down the hall from the kitchen and wine cellar and adjacent to what is known as “the slave pen,” is a stuffy room, swollen with heavy rugs and dusty armchairs, colloquially called the Relic (or Curio) Room. One of the four walls is covered by glass latrines (fig. 8) displaying nearly a dozen shelves covered in archeological artifacts collected by members of the Delafield family in the early 20th Century. There are over forty arrow and spearheads and dozens of fossil and mineral samples exhibited in the relic room representing the pre-colonial era of the Hudson Valley. The true, originary moment—the biological ontogenesis—of the Montgomery Place collection rests on unstable ground. The constructed narrative of the land stored in the relic room was collected by the family and curated solely by the people creating it. This approach created a naive narrative and undermines the desired truth we seek from exploring the past through artifacts.

Before the apple orchards and farm stands, before hippies and communes, before Route 9 and the Taconic Parkway, before sublime landscape paintings and huge estates, before the Hudson Valley was the Hudson Valley, the land was home to several primarily Iroquoian-speaking and Algonquian-speaking tribes. Pre-European contact, upwards of 11,000 years ago, these tribes made their way to the Hudson Valley. The Algonquian tribes were believed to have been broken up into at least three subdivided (often rival) bands, the Delaware, the Wappinger, and the Mahicans. Each group dominated separate regions of the Valley but were frequently in

34 J. Alfieri, The Lenapes: A Study of Hudson Valley Indians (Marist College, 1999), 4
contact with each other either through trade or tribal war. The land on which the Montgomery Place estate was built is thought to have been a vital hunting ground for these tribes more than 5,000 years ago.\textsuperscript{35} While the Algonquian tribes lived, for the most part, in seasonally nomadic groups, the Iroquoian tribes, originally hunter-gathers themselves, transformed the land by cultivating the rich valley and establishing permanent village communities.

The tribes of the Hudson Valley were brutally displaced in the early 17\textsuperscript{th} century when Henry Hudson, a Dutch ship captain working for the Dutch East India Trading Company, stumbled upon the Delaware bay while searching for a trade route through North America to the Eastern Orient. Hudson quickly recognized the exorbitant monetary possibilities he uncovered and began vehemently exchanging with indigenous tribes he encountered along his journey up the river valley. When news of the valuable furs Capt. Hudson acquired through trade and violence from the indigenous peoples reached Amsterdam, Dutch sailors, spurred on by prospective wealth, launched into the Atlantic and thus began the economically advantageous era of fur trading in the Hudson Valley.\textsuperscript{36}

As the power began to violently shift from indigenous tribes to Dutch colonists, the land surrounding Montgomery Place became a tenuous battleground for perpetual trade war. The port town of Hudson, originally known as Claverack Landing,\textsuperscript{37} was a hub for trading ships due to the deep water just offshore which allowed large ships to dock near the town. When the American Revolution tore through the colonies, New York, specifically the Hudson corridor, was ravaged by numerous bloody battles. It wasn’t until the 1780s that uneasy peace began to settle on the valley and “a wave of new immigration flooded into the state from the countryside of New

\textsuperscript{35} Charles E. Peet, “Glacial and Post-Glacial History of the Hudson and Champlain Valleys.” \textit{The Journal of Geology} 12, no. 7 (1904)
\textsuperscript{36} J. Alfieri, \textit{The Lenapes: A Study of Hudson Valley Indians}, 4
\textsuperscript{37} George J. Lankevich, \textit{River of Dreams}, 37.
England.”38 These (carpet bagging) Yankees quickly realized the agricultural promise of the Hudson Valley and established farms all along the river, traveling as far North as Lake Champlain to chase the fertile land. Even before Robert Fulton began his notorious ferry line in 1807, informal river boats were common throughout the late 18th Century and facilitated the grandeur of life in the Hudson Valley.39 It was this lifestyle that led historic families to the valley and created a platform of estates like Montgomery Place.

In the 1920s, when the Delafield family came to manage the estate, they frequently spent afternoons in the summer rummaging around the property collecting mineral samples and archaeologically significant objects. The family was unduly interested in mineralogy and artifact collection and identification, so much so that they purchased geology course books and sample sets (fig. 9). In an article published in the Smithsonian Magazine in 2012, scientific sets are described as great tools for the curious minded individuals of this time period. “The story of how the chemistry [or science discovery] set rose to such prominence… follows the arc of 20th-century America, from its rise as a hub of new commerce to an era of scientific discovery, and reflects the changing values and fears of the American people.”40 These branded “portable laboratories”41 encouraged the progression of domestic (locally based) scientific discovery. Even as a hobby, the Delafield’s meticulously recorded their archaeological and geological finds. Attached to many of the objects stored in the relic room curiosity cabinets are handwritten notes describing who found the specimen, where it was found, the date of discovery, and sometimes

38 George J. Lankevich, River of Dreams, 89.
other trivial contemporary events concerning the family. One such note reads: “Iron pyrite nodules from clay jug near Waddesdon—Buck (sp) August 1927.”

While the Delafield family certainly had a flare for protecting the past, the violent history of the Hudson Valley is sugar coated in a varnish of near exoticism of the indigenous tribes.

A Sword and a Garden: John Ross and Violetta

In 1921, Maturin Livingston Delafield, the formal proprietor of the estate (a distant cousin of the Livingston’s), renounced ownership and gifted the property to his son, John Ross Delafield. John Ross was born in Fieldston, New York in 1874 to Maturin Delafield and Mary Coleman Livingston Delafield. Following the established theme, both of his parents came from renowned Hudson Valley families. Mary Coleman was a distant relative, perhaps the second or third cousin of Janet and Edward Livingston. Similar to the transition from Janet Livingston to her brother Edward, John Ross established Montgomery Place as his country retreat with his wife, Violetta (Susan) White. John Ross Delafield graduated Princeton in 1896 then moved on to Harvard Law, graduating in 1899. He then went on to start his own law firm, Delafield, Linker & Blac, and worked as a senior partner with them for many years.

Upon establishing Montgomery Place as their official summer retreat, John Ross and Violetta White Delafield initiated the final extensive alterations to the original mansion. The house was renovated to incorporate plumbing and sewage systems, a central heating system, and

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42 (fig. 10)  
44 As stated previously, Janet Livingston Montgomery was the only resident of Montgomery Place to live on the property year round. Edward’s generation, Cora’s generation and the Delafield occupancy used the estate as a summer, or seasonal, retreat.
electricity (using a power house dam built in the Sawkill creek). John Ross additionally supervised the construction of a sleeping porch, squash courts, and a greenhouse, which are still standing on the property today. These physical constructions are the archive that we can turn to now for reference to these families and their history. John Ross’s wife, Violettta, was an avid horticulturist. She, much like her predecessor Cora Barton, meticulously cataloged the natural fauna on the property and many of her botanical watercolors, particularly her mushroom drawings (fig. 11) became esteemed components of the estate's collection. Her voracious pursuit of botany led to the planting of a rose and herb garden and ultimately, "the Ellipse" reflection pool in the oval green garden. Violettta correspondingly chartered the "Wayside Stand", which is remarkably still operating to this day. The couple had three children, one of whom (John White Delafield) inherited the property in 1964 after the deaths of John Ross and his second wife, Elise Funkhouser.

The character of John Ross Delafield comes across through his impact on the family collection, painting him as a meticulous and straightforward man. One small example of his anal banality can be found in the journals he maintained from 1904 to 1964. In an entry from one of John Ross’s long term and borderline obsessive journal taken from a transcription done by one of the employees at Historic Hudson Valley (or Sleepy Hollow Restorations), titled, “Typical Summer Day at Montgomery Place” written on September 1st, 1931, he writes:

A typical day in Summer while on vacation at Montgomery Place is often spent about as follows: I am dressed in my riding clothes ready for a walk with V.W.D. [his wife, Violettta] and the two dogs about half past seven and we go about three-quarters of a mile, returning for breakfast, following which I ride on my horse “Captain” to the farm, inspecting the work being done there and giving directions for the day for the work for the future, returning to the house about half-past eleven… I take a swim and sunbath [sic] returning in time for luncheon… I spend the afternoon with Mrs. Delafield [presumably Violettta] doing things about the house… we have afternoon Tea together about five… and dinner… and then [after another walking jaunt] we go to the charter room in the
basement where we sort and arrange old letter [sic] and papers.

In the document constructed by Historic Hudson Valley/Sleepy Hollow Restorations, which are only excerpts taken from these journals which relate to Montgomery Place, there are over 180 pages. The introduction, presumably written by the unnamed curator of these excerpts, explains that John Ross’s vision for the estate changed over time. So much so that “following WWII and Violetta’s death in 1949\textsuperscript{45}… [the usage of] Montgomery Place gradually shifted”. In the early years of the Delafield’s, the early 20th century, the property was primarily a display of wealth and acted as an upstate showplace. Now, without Violetta, the “driving force behind the gardens [and the opulent air of the estate] was gone. For John Ross, the house became more of a historical, genealogical treasure dedicated to the [legacy of] the Livingston’s and Delafield’s and less of the beautiful country retreat” Violetta created. Alas, John Ross still opened up the house and the gardens for tours, originally designed and promulgated by Violetta, to wealthy acquaintances and business ventures; but it was becoming clear that “the emphasis [of the estate] was placed increasingly on the house and its historical documents rather than the grounds.”\textsuperscript{46} The Delafield family, specifically John Ross, were proud of their heritage and the historical authority invoked upon hearing the Livingston name. Many of the men in the family came from political or military backgrounds including Judge Maturin Delafield, John Ross Delafield’s father, who was close friends with Alexander Hamilton and served as the First Judge of Dutchess County from 1823 to 1828.\textsuperscript{47} The hope to prolong this legalic heritage is apparent in John Ross

\textsuperscript{45} Additionally, John Ross, now in his seventies, began his retirement during these formative years, allowing him to spend much more time and energy on the estate. He also began spending parts of the winter at the estate; something which had not been done after Janet’s death almost one-hundred years prior.

\textsuperscript{46} That being said, John Ross cultivated the productivity of the Montgomery Place orchards and became actively involved in the valuable, flourishing apple and fruit business.

\textsuperscript{47} John Ross Delafield, \textit{Delafield: The Family History}, (New York, 1945)
Delafield’s compulsive journaling and scrapbook making (fig. 13-16). It’s unknown how many other journals John Ross wrote as the only excerpts available in the collection are those which relate directly to the estate.

Transition

In order to further discuss the regalic prominence of the Delafield and Livingston family names and the impact these families had on the history of the Hudson Valley, I think it’s important to establish a few key points of analysis within this thesis: the first, taken from a book by Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, in which Koopman attempts to navigate the complex philosophy and semantics of genealogy established by Foucault, Nietzsche and other 20th century philosophers, defines genealogy as a methodological tool kit, used for classification and justification of biopower. By this, Koopman is arguing that genealogy is a philosophical tradition which is implemented to explain cultural phenomenon’s including the classification of the self.

Another prominent voice in the debate on the semiotics of genealogy is Sir Bernard Williams, an English moral philosopher and author. In his text, *Truth and Truthfulness*, he says, “A genealogy is a narrative that tries to explain a cultural phenomenon by describing a way in which it came about, or could have come about, or might be imagined to have come about.” For Williams, genealogy was a way to understand historical truth (also thought of as historical

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48 Colin, Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, *Foucault and the Problems of Modernity*, (Indiana University Press, 2013). Intro., “biopower” is a term coined by Michel Foucault in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* published in 1976. While similar to another of Foucault’s terms, biopolitics, he describes it as a form of technology (a word used loosely in this sense) to manage and control large populations of people.

evidence) and acted as, like with Koopman, a tool kit to recognize authority. Williams goes on to explain that “genealogy is not simply a matter of what [he has] called real history. There is also a role for a fictional narrative, an imagined developmental story… [it] is intended to serve the aims of naturalism… a general outlook which, in relation to human beings, is traditionally expressed in the idea that they are ‘part of a narrative’.”\(^50\) Here Williams relates the socially constructed idea of genealogy to biology by suggesting there is some aspect of altruism in the human species, albeit, this creates a strong opportunity for social and cultural reductiveness. But enmasse, humans tend to cordially welcome genealogy as a tool to employ for political resistance, esteemed civility, and aesthetic criticism on a macro scale. More simply, the study of genealogy as most Americans know it, is colloquially deemed “America’s most popular indoor hobby.”\(^51\) When we approach family history as a process of documentation, the lives and influences of one generation flow into the next creating a fluid continuum. Genealogy gives history a tangible context and continuity, and even more so, a genealogical study has the potential to reveal the influence of mass culture on both personal and familial levels.

The second essential point I need to establish, which I briefly discussed at the start of this chapter, is based on an idea promoted by Charlotte Smith in an article published in 2002 titled “Civic Consciousness and House Museums: The Instructional Role of Interpretive Narratives.”\(^52\) Smith argues that Americans came up with something akin to a “national religion”\(^53\) created to celebrate nationhood through rituals such as parades on the fourth of July, the celebration of Presidents Day and Memorial Day, etc. and that these ‘religious’ festivities forgave and accepted

\(^{50}\) Williams, \textit{Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy}. 21-22.


\(^{53}\) Note that this is a secular but Protestant based idea.
the “created” narratives which became easily adopted into American culture and the American sense of identity.

Many of the creation narratives were associated with buildings: sites of... Revolutionary war battles, houses that had once sheltered republican hero’s... all assumed spiritual qualities. Calling upon the patriotic deeds of the men associated with these sites became a catch cry of the preservation movement, the beginnings of which paralleled the house museum movement. Having transformed into public museums, highlighting the patriotic tenor was a primary consideration in the presentation of the site... These sites became tombs of the moral elite, sites in which civic loyalty could be taught and national identities constructed.55

Examples of this style of conceptualization at Montgomery Place include the prominently displayed portrait of Andrew Jackson in the antechamber and the exhausting list of military memorabilia found throughout the house56 which serve as a mainstay in the collection. In the case of “house museums”, having patriotic deeds be the cornerstone of approach for all of the collection items, allowed estates like Montgomery Place to become ‘pilgrim tourist’ destinations in this constructed civic religion because the properties and their collections were created to be displays of the “physical reminders of [a] revolutionary hero’s life... relics: thus [acting as, or in place of] his mortal remains.”57 Smith used an ancient roman term, *numen*, meaning “a kind of spirit that calls forth in many of us a reaction of awe and reverence”58 to exacerbate the heavy cultural connotations found in the display and appreciation of this category of historic sites. Even more considerably, as physical architectural structures designed to celebrate the lives of these patriotic heroes - the buildings themselves - became extensions of their heroic personalities. This allowed visitors an opportunity to access the considerably valiant (often problematic—this

54 This idea of created narratives in history goes back to theories put forth by Blake Williams in the 1960s
55 Smith, “Civic Consciousness and House Museums.” 76.
56 Including John Ross Delafield’s Presentation Sword (fig. 12)
57 Smith, “Civic Consciousness and House Museums.” 76.
58 Smith, “Civic Consciousness and House Museums.” 76. Taken from a text by P. Maines and J.J. Glynn titled *Numinous Objects*
suppositioned view will be discussed in the following chapter) essence of the Great Man’s sacrifices and patriotic deeds.⁵⁹

Even A.J. Downing, the landscape architect commissioned by Louise Livingston and Cora Barton Livingston Hunt to transmogrify the grounds surround the Montgomery Place estate, “promoted Ruskin’s belief that ‘domestic architecture was a critical moral issue.’” Downing summarized his perception of the home as a civilizing agent as follows: ‘when smiling lawns and tasteful cottages begin to embellish the country, we know that order and culture are established.”⁶¹ What Smith called, shrines of patriotic virtue, were, for Janet and consequently Montgomery Place (considering the General never actually resided on the estate), strictly dedicated to the ephemeral memories of fallen heroes. As a consequence, without a patriotic name attached to a building or destination, there is less of an urgency to preserve, protect, and promote on a more national and less local level.

Creators of Great Man… house museums [sought] to shape national opinions and social consciousness by providing interpretive narratives that offer instruction by example and furthermore, to provide shrines in which patriotism, or a love of country, could be promoted. These new symbols of a shared heritage embodied the spirits of great American heroes, whose mortal lives were held up as examples for contemporary Americans.⁶²

In the next chapter I will return to Charlotte Smith to discuss some of the social politics wrapped up in the controversy of created narratives and Great Man house museums.

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⁵⁹ One woman (Maud Littleton), in arguing for the enshrinement (or museum making) of Monticello, the house Thomas Jefferson’s designed and inhabited, believed that private ownership “prevented complete access to an icon of American heritage.” This is a social history topic that will be further discussed in the third chapter but is worth mentioning as a reminder that until the 1980s, Montgomery Place was privately owned by the descendants of John Ross and Violetta Delafield.

⁶⁰ John Ruskin: A leading British art critic mentioned in Charlotte Smith’s article wrote extensively on geography, landscape, ornithology and education (among other topics).

⁶¹ Smith, “Civic Consciousness and House Museums.” 76.

⁶² Smith, “Civic Consciousness and House Museums.” 86.
Reconnecting the subjects of genealogies, the Montgomery Place estate, and local narrative, I’m going to engage with a text by John Beckett titled *Writing Local History*. Beckett first describes the phenomenon of ‘chorographies’ which “were studies of places… [connecting] history with genealogies, antiquarian collections, and topographical discussions.” William Camden (a pioneering theorist on the study of local history) hoped “to renew the memory of what was old, illustrate what was obscure, and settle what was doubtful.” This genre of discourse relating the study of history, family lineage and local narrative came about during the renaissance and was acceptably cultivated by court members and religious authorities who were attempting to obtain sanctioned historic support. These studies also began in an effort to claim and justify “place-ness” (ex. Englishness).

One way of practicing this discourse was by linking gentry families directly to the land in order to utilize these families understanding of the topography and demographics of the land they managed, and likewise because of how comprehensively these families preserved the history of their lineage. Montgomery Place, and especially the genealogical and catoragraphical work done by John Ross and Violetta during their summers at the estate, proved that it was this ilk of historically relevant families who obsessively chartered their histories as both genealogies and studies of local history (an easy alliance considering how entrenched the Livingston and Delafield domestic history is within the context of the Hudson Valley).

The final necessary point I’d like to establish within this thesis is the gravity of material possession. Carolyn Folkman Curasi attempted to break down the significance of the weight cherished possessions held within familial and local history. Considering this, it was entirely

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64 John Beckett, *Writing Local History*. 11
rational that John Ross Delafield felt the need to protect and preserve the family treasures at Montgomery Place. “These items [to this day] hold an imaginary power over a [syndicate] and embody an understanding that requires their possessors to keep these objects within their group membership.”

Even though John Ross was a Delafield, not a Livingston (although very tangentially the two families are linked by blood and marriage, as was the case with many distinguished Hudson Valley families, i.e. the Vanderbilt’s, the Roosevelt’s, the Beekman’s, the Schuyler’s...), he took great care in preserving the possessions left in the mansion by the previous tenants, the Hunt siblings. “Cherished… possessions are treated independent of their exchange value, and private or personal meanings are central to their worth. These possessions attract psychic energy—consumers cultivate and invest attention and layer meaning on these objects.”

For example, Janet Livingston Montgomery's mourning jewelry valued strictly by their monetary value would not be considered worth saving to someone like John Ross Delafield (a wealthy, high-standing member of New York society). But, as the Delafield's demonstratively knew, “cherished objects may have only private meanings or may combine public and private meaning [and worth].” Returning to the example of Janet Montgomery’s mourning jewelry, while the metal or gemstones independently may not have added up to a surmountable value, the...
private meaning of the objects as pieces of irreplaceable family artifacts superseded any potential strict material based value. Asking someone who owns, in their opinion, an irreplaceable object what the imagined the material monetary value of their object might be is asking said owner to go so far into hypotheticals that it becomes a meaningless inquiry. In contrast to replaceable possessions; irreplaceable possessions provide a physical (evidentiary) association with a time, place, or person, that is, a corporally indexical association which cannot, in any capacity, be overlooked when assessing the objects value.

Additionally, each generation who inherits the object adds to the psychic (or sentimental) elements of the object; memorial or physical residual from each of the owners invariably adds evocative layers of worth to the burgeoning irreplaceable value of the object. The association of the Delafield family in conjunction with the Livingston and Montgomery families adds layer after layer of significance and historic value. In a sense, these objects serve to the “provide vehicles for creating, shaping, and containing memories” for the proprietors of the estate.

Another, albeit less pressing, component of the object/possession conundrum is the factor of subtle social hierarchy within families; who in this generation is the designated protector/owner/caretaker of this heirloom? (Who is going to be responsible for the welfare of General Montgomery’s pocket watch when it is in the pre-house museum stage?)

The house has to be considered as an individual, as a dynamic entity whose every month of life is significant for the [people] who act in and around it. It seems to me that the concept of life-history of [a] house has a more historical and humanistic significance than the term use-life [which is simply the time span of an object’s usefulness to its owner]. It concerns the time aspect - the duration of the house, the continuity of its generation, its

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69 Carolyn Folman, “How Individuals’ Cherished possessions Become Families’ Inalienable Wealth.” 609.
70 Carolyn Folman, “How Individuals’ Cherished possessions Become Families’ Inalienable Wealth.” 610.
ancestors and descendants, the memories of it that are held within its walls and under its foundation. In other words, I become interested in [the house’s] biography.\footnote{Ruth Tringham, \textit{The Home: Words, Interpretations, Meanings, and Environments} (Avebury Press, Aldershot, 1995), 79-107.}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Tender Home}
\end{quote}

The Delafield inheritance of the Montgomery Place estate ensured that the collection (or what was left of it after the Livingston family virtually dissociated from the property, taking with them what they considered their own invaluable possessions) would be cared for and kept in tact. Biographies on objects\footnote{‘Biographies’ being the history established within the narrative of the object as perceived, antithetically, by everyone who comes in contact with the object, be it the original owner or an anonymous visitor at a museum.} are based on the object's movement between people. The physical exchange and migration creates dates, places, context and significant memories which can then be attached to the object. A collection piece notable as an adept example of object and memory attachment is Janet Livingston Montgomery’s letter to her brother (fig. 3) (mentioned in the previous chapter) and John Ross Delafield’s subsequent additions and corrections published in the 1940s titled “Reminisces.” In this primary source John Ross annotated Janet’s original letter to Edward which, considering its historic and genealogical value, had been passed amongst and read by many Livingston family members.\footnote{The little black journal wasn’t actually returned to the mansion until John Ross acquired it in the 1930s. But Janet thought her letter was incredibly important to preserve her stories and memories and actually had a few copies of the book made in case the original was destroyed/lost.} In the introduction by John Ross, he decided to include a transcript of the endearing letter Richard Montgomery sent to Robert Livingston (Janet’s Livingston’s father) asking to marry Janet. This small patch of text ignites both Janet and Richard’s personalities in a way that is considerably unachievable if looked for through the lens of other collection pieces.
John Ross’s first annotation to Janet’s letter is a short but very intense biography of Janet’s paternal grandmother who Janet spent a lot of time with. Janet was fond of her elder relatives, much more so than her siblings or direct relations. During her youth she spent many seasons cycling between older family members in New York City. The stories Janet recounts in the letter paint her father’s mother, her grandmother, as a tragic woman who suffered greatly during her lifetime. The second annotation made by John Ross is incredibly similar; a very detail oriented lineage of the Bedlow family, who were tangentially related to the Livingston family, traceable as far back as the early 17th century. The letter continues on as such (Janet providing anecdotes and John Ross expanding on Janet’s name dropped family members and friends) for many pages until John Ross makes his first correction on a story Janet told of the “evil” Lord Cornbury. Janet claimed the Lord stole a large sum of money from one of her grandparents. John Ross’s research proved that Lord Cornbury would not have chronologically come into contact with any Beekman’s so this most likely didn’t technically happen, rather it became a compelling familial legend.

Janet Beekman Livingston Montgomery’s family was inalienably tied up in the socio-political history of the Hudson Valley, for instance, Janet was directly related to the first mayor of Albany. The Dutch Schuyler and Beekman families (surnames associated with Janet’s ancestors) were hugely responsible for the colonization of the Hudson Valley through the early 18th and 19th centuries. They annihilated or dispossessed a considerable number of indigenous

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74 John Ross Delafield did not cite any sources for his corrections which, had he, would have brought another layer of legitimization to the letter. Still, he wrote out all of his notes and corrections with such an authoritative voice. Due to the amount of detail in each annotation, it was clear that he was using outside research sources.
tribes from “their” (colonized, stolen, subjugated…) land. Perhaps the resolute instinct to preserve their legacy was the reason why the Livingston’s recycled the same few Christian names for centuries. John Ross, in his notions in Reminiscences, theorized this identification practice might have contributed to some of the inaccuracies in Janet’s antidotes.

Janet’s exhaustive letter is proof that the collection objects from the Montgomery Place estate have biographies which were created through exchange rather—than biographies based on significance driven by ritualistic or ceremonial use (an example of this type of object would be a ceremonial shawl or a family bible). “The central idea is that as people and objects gather time, movement, and change, they are constantly transformed, and these transformations of person and object are tied up in one another.” In that sense, the fame of an object and “the renown of people are mutually creating, so that objects gain value through links to powerful people and an individual's standing is enhanced by the possession of a well known object.” The notion that John Ross Delafield, an active member of the Army Reserve Community and Brigadier Gen. in the Ordnance Department of the Army,78 owned the famed pocket watch of the mythic General Richard Montgomery, adds an explorable layer of connotation supported by both militaristically significant men. Archaeologists Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall accented the concept of mutualism within collections in their article published in World Archaeology titled “The Cultural Biography of Objects.” Gosden and Marshall claim that “the important role of possessions in

75 “The Peach War” (which Janet’s grandmother managed to escape from due to a premonition dream she had as a child telling her to leave the Hudson Valley for New York City) resulted in numerous deaths and monumental property damages all because a (white) farmer killed a native woman for stealing a peach from his garden, inciting rage for a local tribe who decided to enact revenge on the the local colonizers.


communications and identity suggests that a possessions meaning is central to its value.”⁷⁹ They argue that objects not only gain significance through their general existence, but that an object actually has the ability to accumulate its own history to the extent that the contemporary connotation of the object can be derivational to the people and events which it is connected to.

John Ross Delafield seemed to have an appreciation for this connection, otherwise his passion for conservation would have been overshadowed by other elements of his personality and as a result, perhaps he would have accomplished very little of the genealogical work he did for the collection. “The notion of the extended self suggests that we transcend the immediate confines of our bodies by incorporating into our identities objects from our physical environment. This conception implies that the self [can actually be] spatially enlarged by such extensions; that our possessions make us bigger people.”⁸⁰ John Ross Delafield even went so far as to write an extensive biography on his wife Violetta, here is an excerpt from the beginning of the handwritten pages detailing her youth (fig. 17):

While Mr. and Mrs. John Jay White were abroad on an extended tour of Europe and staying in Florence, Italy, a girl was born to them, the day was Monday, the tenth of May. The baby was Christened Susan Elizabeth White. Mrs. White was in gradually failing health and it became necessary to employ a nurse. She became much attached to the baby and remained in the family employ for many years. To her, the English naming seemed not quite right and admiring (sp) the baby’s deep blue eyes, she called her Violetta. This name the family adopted and it remained her name through life. Indeed, in 1904 before her marriage it was made her legal name by the Supreme Court of New York. When they returned to New York in 1890 bringing their family, Violetta spoke French and Italian fluently with the vocabulary appropriate to her age and also some German. However she at first found her English wasn’t (sp) for use with her teachers and classmates. This she with her skill as a linguist soon overcame. Somewhat timid, she did not make many friends quickly. Amongst the first of these were classmates Susan Van Volkenburgh (sp?) and John L. Delafield. Her father who had a first rented a home on West 36th Street, bought the house 560 Fifth Avenue at the south westerly corner of 46th street, and had bought while a home in Litchfield, Connecticut not far from Rantam (sp) Lake…

While there is no date associated with the writing of Violetta’s biography, the style of the paper (yellow legal notebook paper), John Ross’s use of past tense, and his handwriting, it is likely (safe to assume) that he wrote this biography after the death of Violetta while he was married to his second wife, Elise Funkhouser. This might have been one way that John Ross believed he could encapsulate and validate Violetta’s role in his life. We, as humans existing in a cultural landscape, are temporarily enlarged by the magnitude of our ancestors and their ‘heirlooms’; our lineage creates a timeline that extends far into the past while still carving out a sense of contemporary identity. And precious familial objects ground this notion. “We [often] lose or fail to recall parts of our past… for this reason our life history is often marked, commemorated, or announced by objects.”81 Examples of these chronologically significant objects include the first pair of shoes worn by a child, a family photograph at a theme park, or a corsage worn to a school dance. Additionally, “souvenirs and mementos are intentionally selected to act as tangible markers for retrospective memories in the future.”82 In other words, we buy things or take pictures at certain events we deem important and noteworthy moments in our lives because we are preemptively anticipating the memories we will have associated with these objects when we encounter them in the future. This also compels us to purchase ‘nicer’ or more expensive objects, considering the significance we’ve preemptively assigned to the object. Chains of perspective and retroactive thinking directed at objects become a super complex and ever evolving web of stimuli and memories. Additionally, our memorabilia become reinforcements of the self and begin to represent who we are.

“We tend to be especially concerned with having a past when our current identity is being challenged.”\textsuperscript{83} Perhaps, John Ross Delafield became concerned with preserving his familial past because of his military participation in both World War I and World War II; these monumental years of the early to mid-twentieth century significantly challenged his biological and physical participation in the future.

Alas, there are personal antiquities and then there are non-personal antiquities and both exist to serve mutually exclusive purposes in our lives. Personal objects make sense to us because they contain the life of the memories we imbued into them. But non-personal antiquities which we encounter in museums or within collections are asked to provide a different service. We enjoy them because they are aesthetically pleasing, they are monetarily valuable (as in, they are made of precious metals or were made by high market value artists), or because they connect us to a greater past which we are asked and then given the means to relate to. Antiquities are also fascinating because they “provide direct, three-dimensional evidence of individuals who otherwise only exist in the abstract.”\textsuperscript{84} Objects are also important on a grander scale because they illuminate our course of development in terms of local and national identity.

Personal, local, national and international significance exist within each cell within the collection. The history collected and preserved by the families of the great Hudson Valley estates serve as substantial foundational source material for Hudson Valley history. Montgomery Place not only celebrates the lives of the “Great Men”; the objects which make up the collection tell a much more inclusive and, frankly, interesting, historical narrative. The presence of an individual who is excepted as a prominent figure in the scope of a collective history creates a base which the collection rests on. In the collection, it’s easy to take in, then move beyond the Great Men.

\textsuperscript{83} Russell W. Belk, “The Role of Possessions.” 670.
\textsuperscript{84} Russell W. Belk, “The Role of Possessions.” 674.
Images and Figures

(fig. 8)
*Shelves in the Curio Room.* 2016. Montgomery Place Collections, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY
(fig. 9)
*Objects Stored in the Curio Room.* 2016. Montgomery Place Collections, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY
(fig. 10)  
*Family Note in Curio Room*. 2016. Montgomery Place Collections, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY
(fig. 11)
(fig. 12)
(fig. 13)
(fig. 14)
(fig. 15)
Family Seals in Scrapbook by John Ross Delafield. 2016. Montgomery Place Collections, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY
Dear Mr. Delafied:

I regret that I am unable to find any record of the mark on the tankard. It is of the style which was peculiar to New York Silversmiths in the period of 1730 to 1760. It is a very handsome piece, and I am glad it is where it is apprected.

In regard to the date of the small old silver pitcher, this was undoubtedly made by Gale, Wood & Hughes who were working in New York in 1825, possibly earlier and probably later. A search of the New York directories at the Historical Society would enable you possibly to find an earlier date.

Very truly yours,

Mr. John R. Delafied,
17 East 70th Street,
New York.

An examination of the New York City directories shows that William Gale was in partnership with Mosely until 1833. In 1833 William Gale appears alone as silversmith. In the year of 1835-36 he first appears in the firm Gale, Wood & Hughes. This firm continues unmarred until it disappears from the directory. Gale, Wood & Hughes, silversmith, appeared alone.

S.R.D.

(fig. 16)
Provenanced Silver Platter in Scrapbook by John Ross Delafied. 2016. Montgomery Place Collections, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY
(fig. 17)

Biography of Violetta White Delafield by John Ross Delafield. 2016. Montgomery Place Collections, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY
Plant Log by Violetta White Delafield. 2016. Montgomery Place Collections, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY
When my great grandmother passed away in the early 1990s, my mother was living thousands of miles away and was unable to return to Pennsylvania to assist her mother, aunts, and sisters dismember her grandmother’s home. While her exclusion from this step in the mourning process was upsetting, Heidi was completely devastated when, one afternoon, some ten-odd years later, while browsing through her emails, she discovered that her late grandmother’s house had been torn down and the land had been sold to a subdivision contractor. In my mother’s mind, her grandmother’s house existed as the most permanent fixture and physical reminder of the life of her grandmother, and as a shrine to her memory. She explained this horrifying discovery as the wave of true and visceral mourning she experienced which had previously evaded her. While many generations wish they had the resources to preserve family homes, this privilege is generally reserved for the precious few ‘historically relevant’ families. The process of preserving and maintaining a conserved collection is excruciatingly financially taxing and requires a huge time commitment. An estate like Montgomery Place is one of the lucky few that became sanctioned and was able to establish an infrastructure for conservation.

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85 Russell W. Belk, “The Role of Possessions.” 678
John Ross Delafield passed away in 1964 and split up his assets amongst his surviving children and grandchildren. He placed Montgomery Place in the care of John White Delafield, his oldest son. It was John White’s son, J. Dennis Delafield (John Ross’s grandson) was the final totemic resident of Montgomery Place. In 1986 Dennis sold the estate to Sleepy Hollow Restorations\(^8^6\) and the property was renovated to create a historic house museum. After opening to the public, there was still an incredible amount of work to be done and the property braved a tedious period of cataloging and archiving over the next twenty years.

Dennis Delafield had been living in the mansion more consecutively than his father and grandparents. While it wasn’t his only property (Dennis worked in a self-titled law practice in New York City most of the year) he spent much of his childhood and adolescence on the estate. Nearing his sale of the property to Historic Hudson Valley, Dennis was spending most weekends at the mansion. Unfortunately, the growing monetary and time commitment the aging property required, exceeded Dennis and his family’s abilities and thus in an effort to preserve the historic estate, he petitioned to have Montgomery Place listed in the National Register of Historic Places, allowing him to sell the property to Historic Hudson Valley. Dennis left the property as it had been during his residency; there are a handful of collection objects which reflect his legacy including accessioned shag rugs and dinnerware sets from the early 1970s. While it’s hard to argue for the historic relevancy of these pieces (beyond nepotistic tendencies), these objects bookend the final years of the Delafield family. “Unlike anonymous antiques, monuments,

\(^8^6\) Sleepy Hollow Restorations was established in 1951 by John D. Rockefeller as a non-profit educational institution. Before selling Montgomery Place to Bard College in 1986, Sleepy Hollow Restorations (Historic Hudson Valley) managed six properties along the Hudson, primarily in Westchester County, including Sunnyside, the home of American author, Washington Irving.
landmarks, and museum artifacts, family heirlooms have been directly experienced by individuals and families during their past." This kind of object treatment is not universal, it is generally restricted to families in the upper social classes who were more likely to have singular valuable objects like jewelry or furniture to pass down through the generations. “Having family heirlooms, collections or other significant possessions [regardless of social class] that children or grandchildren are willing to take over… provide a sense of familial continuity that extends beyond death.” And even if families don’t pass heirlooms to succeeding generations, the continued existence of a childhood home can create the same sense of immortality.

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**Trivial**

“In 1974 historian John Hope Franklin stood… in a Chicago courtroom and stated… : there’s no way to know what’s going to be valuable ten, fifteen or 100 years from now,” thus you must protect everything; and “if it cost nothing to accession and preserve records, we could save everything, no matter how trivial,” but that is not the case. In fact, “society [should] regard such broadness of spirit as profligacy, if not outright idiocy.” The three major problems with the naive idea that everything could and should be preserved are: the physical bulk and space requirements for collections, redundancy within collections, and (ironic as it sounds) large swaths of missing information that create temptingly incomplete collections. Because of structural bias in modern record keeping practice (which I will discuss more in this

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87 Russell W. Belk, “The Role of Possessions.” 677
88 Russell W. Belk, “The Role of Possessions.” 678
90 F. Gerald Ham, “Archival Choices” 12.
chapter), “Archival accesses programs have loaded repository shelves with too much
documentation on certain aspects of American life and culture and almost nothing on others”
creating huge blank areas in collections.91 These holes are easy to cover up using clean and
frilly mythological conceptions of America’s past which create a false sense of nostalgia for
the past within cultural museums. The American system of archivisation is fraught with
administrative and cultural flaws, these flaws, while still relevant within the Montgomery
Place archives, are recognized and trying to be addressed within the physical and monetary
limits placed on the estate.

Currently, archivists are faced with an “overabundant [supply of] records and
information” and an increasing scarcity of resources. Combined, these two forces are “forcing
archivists to replace their essentially unplanned [customizable] approach to archival
preservation with a systemic, planned, documented process of building, maintaining and
preserving collections.”92 Understandably, considering many other institutions which rely on
federal support and funding, this approach might seem obvious but it is actually very difficult
to facilitate cooperation between separate but similarly structured institutions which might
enable archivists to make better use of limited resources and to compile a more inclusive
representative record of the past. “To build such a [comprehensive] record, however,
archivists must alter their perspective on collection development.”93 A tactical analogy to
understanding the scope of this problem is looking at the amalgamation of surf communities
run individually under one single ‘landlord’ to the establishment of towns, counties, countries
etc. run under a supreme set of laws and structures that were created and agreed upon as

generally inclusive. A universal policy that connects all archives and collections is the need to accommodate people or institutions that need access to the material for administration, research etc.

Archivist will have to look beyond introspective and customized archiving systems in order to” consider how individual institutional efforts might contribute to a broader regional and national collecting process.”\textsuperscript{94} For many reasons, this is not a quick transition. First, institutional archives\textsuperscript{95} are usually systemically kept with an administrative need in mind, not for research. On the other hand, small collections (specifically familial or locally historic landmarks) assume the opposite; their records are kept with the intent that they be used for research. There is also, as of now, not a ‘standard’ archival system to turn to. Additionally, there is no national or international (and very few local) databases that would be able to satisfy the needs of each individual collections’ holdings.\textsuperscript{96} Even more so, this proposed more systematized process suggests a newer approach to the archive; that the basic archival functions of appraisal, accessioning, arrangement, description, and conservation are not isolated activities but are rather parts of a multi-step process or continuum.\textsuperscript{97} Each step requires new specialists and forces newcomers to the archive to be deeply familiarized with the collection.

\textsuperscript{94} F. Gerald Ham, “Archival Choices” 13.
\textsuperscript{95} Institutional archives would be archives kept by privately owned companies kept in order to preserve a financial and personal historic record.
\textsuperscript{96} Some states have statewide archive structures in place to help institutions connect historic sites (similar to ILliad and ConnectNY). But it’s important to document and understand the locally distinctive characteristics of each institution, especially in large, multi-regional states. Interestingly, The New York State Archives believes: “when in doubt, leave it out” in regards to determining the importance of an object within a collection.
\textsuperscript{97} F. Gerald Ham, “Archival Choices” 13
Before beginning the archival process, the managing archivists have to know what kind of objects they will be dealing with. The density of archive or collection has to be measured in order to formulate an archival procedure that would take the entirety of the collection’s needs into consideration. For the Montgomery Place collection, we\textsuperscript{98} began by creating container lists as a liminal step before the records would be officially processed. This meant carefully dismembering every box in the collection, taking note of when each box contained, then putting everything back in exactly the same place so as not to disrupt any previous order enforced on the box. Each box (or folder, or room) layered on new narratives within the collection—without understanding, or at least considering, every layer, it would be easy to create glossy assumptions within the collection. This process also allowed holes within the collection to become clear and to be discussed and addressed as the conservation continued. Taking stock of a collection also allows the collection or archive managers to prioritize object conservation based on their temporal status: what books are moldy or losing their binding? What paintings ought to be cleaned first?

Every single step, from the transfer of objects from their original locations in mansion to the collection building, Butler South, to rearranging boxes on shelves, is documented. The issue here is that this meticulous process itself adds to the archive, essentially creating a positive feedback loop of documentation. This can also make redundancy within records much more likely. In general, rather than organize collections indiscriminately and inherently redundantly, archivists need a strategy to enable institutions to move beyond the important but hindering approach of specialization within each archive. Pre-archival management and procedure is just as important in the context of the entire archival process. One suggestion is

\textsuperscript{98} Myself, Amy Husten, Helene Tieger and Lauren Bailey (among a few other volunteers)
the development of software programs which would be able to essentially vet and sort the objects in a collection. Technological advancements (i.e. database structures and digital archiving), for as much help they might be, are creating new problems for archivists. There is still an anxiety about the original objects, just because a huge collection of personal letters, physically taking up three or more boxes, is digitized, does not make an archivist willing to part with the boxes of original letters. What this microform process\textsuperscript{99} does do, though, is make these letters accessible to a researcher or student who cannot physically be in the archives.

Bard College is currently dealing with transferring a huge digital archive, created in a dated software in the early 2000s by Historic Hudson Valley, into a useable platform which would open up more possibilities (and perhaps justification) for the archive. After all, it’s hard to argue shelf space and funding for boxes of inaccessible records and collection objects only a few select people have ever seen.

Aside from the systemic problems within an archive, there is the aspect of Montgomery Place as a designated “house museum” to discuss. Sometimes, as Phillip Fisher describes, “the social biology of [objects] become increasingly alienated from the original context, being first appropriated by a more aggregate local society and ultimately by a totally foreign society.”\textsuperscript{100} House museums are designed to create a sense of the ordinary and relatable. Rooms within these museums are set up to look and feel as if a viewer could walk right into the space and carry out the same steps taken by the original occupants. Unlike traditional museums, which tend to display collection pieces in sterile latrines behind Plexiglas, house museums and (period rooms within larger, traditional museums) demystify

\textsuperscript{99} Microform is a method of digitizing an archive which is used to compact and preserve data and create low-density archives.

\textsuperscript{100} Russell W. Belk, “The Role of Possessions.” 679
objects by placing them in their intended functional setting. Enshrining objects the way traditional museums do creates a mixed effect: it is more conservatory minded to display collection material in humidity controlled spaces and they also allow visitors to appreciate an objects pure aesthetic value, the issue with this is that the glass and the clean walls create an unbreachable distance between the functionality and context of the object itself. Natural history museums bridge the gap by creating life-like dioramas which give visitors a glimpse of the natural habitats.

In his book Mythical Past, Elusive Future, Frank Füredi (1992 p. 3) suggests that an anxiety about the direction of the future stimulated a scramble to appropriate the past and describes attempts by governments and elites throughout the world to reinvent national histories.101 The New Deal increased government funding and involvement in the preservation and curriculum development of house museums. On example of this is the National Trust for Historic Preservation established in 1949. In fact, it can be argued that house museums came about as an attempt to represent a mythological American past, one of simple, comfy, and stable patriotism. Additionally, they were a display of hypernationalized Americanism. Within the narrative of Montgomery Place, collection objects like the portrait of President Andrew Jackson still displayed in the entrance hall, Edward Livingston’s early American law library, and John Ross Delafield’s extensive collection of military correspondence demonstrate the American-ness of the estate’s history. “This reflects itself not only in the growing interest in heritage, museums, and local history, but also in the ways in which competing forces have attempted to lay claim to ‘official histories’ (there is, after all, no longer a history within

capital H; there are many competing histories).”¹⁰² In a sense, history, or the documentation and archiving of it, has always been political and this is an incredibly controversial issue within the practice of conservation and preservation. Patricia West discussed early house museums in a section of Born in the U.S.A. titled “Of Babies and Bathwater: Birthplace, Shrines, and the Future of Historic House Museums”. Female volunteers were a large part in the preservation of early historic houses. The Mount Vernon Ladies Association worked to preserve George Washington’s home in order to rescue the patriotic memories attached to the property, of course a lot of the development of the historic and educational material created for the house as a museum glossed over any dirty details (i.e. slavery) that played monumental roles in the history of the property. West argues that one reason these women were trying to preserve the past through conservation and historic accessibility was because they were upset with their contemporary socio-political climate. They wanted to elicit the (albeit controversial) memories of what they saw as a “simpler” and “happier” time.¹⁰³ A vital concept considering museums is their existence as not only presentations of facts, but a creation of understanding in contextual history.

Charlotte Smith, author of Civic Consciousness, continues to discuss the issue of romanticized history through the lens of the Great Man house museum (as discussed in chapter two). “The tendency to romanticize the [lives of Great Men] and to avoid complex social relationships encouraged massively idealized images of their history. Such presentations confirmed the dominant cultures’ social position. The early years of social history research provided new narratives to the established white, male ruling class view of

¹⁰³ Patricia West, Born in the U.S.A (University of Massachusetts Press, 2012). 263.
In recent years, the focus has been shifting away from the Great Men and “subordinate actors [servants, slaves, women] have become the principal focus of interpretation at some house museums.” In the early 2000s, Montgomery Place redesigned their mansion tour to highlight the roles of the women of the families (Janet Livingston, Cora and Louise Livingston, Violetta Delafield), rather than the “Great Men” (Richard Montgomery, Edward Livingston, John Ross Delafield). Similarly, the Thomas Jefferson Museum Foundation (TJMF) created multiple tours to incorporate subordinate persons at Monticello. Originally, the estate and the TJMF tours touted a horribly white washed narrative. Still, “less than 15% of visitors take the plantation tour.” Smith believes this is an indication, not that there is a lack of public interest in inclusive tours, rather that the TJMF is not doing its part to support the social history narrative of the property.

In contrast Smith uses the Lower East Side Tenement Museum to exemplify a Social History house museum. Social History museums are not focuses on a specific individual, they represent a disenfranchised group of people and create an accessible platform for their stories. While the Social history house museum might seem like the antithesis of the Great Man museum, “the rationale for both… types is framed by civil religion” (as discussed in chapter two). In both Social History and Great Man house museums, “the lifestyles of past occupants provide models for contemporary Americans to emulate” and exist as sites of pilgrimage. Both serve to influence contemporary societies actions, opinions and consciousness. As in most Great Man house museums, the TJMF designed an interpretation of Monticello that preserved Jefferson’s “numen”. It “was largely furnished with Jefferson’s provenanced

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105 Smith, “Civic Consciousness and House Museums.” 79.
106 Smith, “Civic Consciousness and House Museums.” 78.
objects,” an approach to display which allowed an interpretive narrative exemplifying the presence of the Great Man. This happened at Montgomery Place too, but as the tour shifted from Great Man to Great Woman, the narrative shared narrative of the objects changed as well. No longer was the library “Edward’s Study,” it became “Violetta’s Library.” Similarly, the garden and grounds became explorative areas for the women in the families and it is their names that take the stage. And as Louise Anderson Allen said, “a finished museum is a dead museum.” Thus house museums are pushed to work harder in developing curriculum to keep their narrative and histories relevant; the shifting visitor experience tours allow for this dynamism.

One interesting person who is trying to share the covert or passive discrimination is installation artist and political activist, Fred Wilson. He created a series called Mining the Museum in which he reshuffled collection pieces at the Maryland Historical Society to undermine and challenge the traditional (and frequently racist) history narratives developed by the museum. In one piece titled “metalwork”, Wilson snuck a pair of slave shackles into a display on colonial silver objects and in “models of transport”, tucked a Klu Klux Klan hood into a baby carriage. Wilson points out that even though the display tactics and visitor experience practices matured, “the instructional rationale for house museums remains the same.”

The Montgomery Place collection and archives is on the brink of a new era. The next few decades will decide the future of the estate and the collection; this precipice will challenge the extended life of history and the way we manage it.

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107 Smith, “Civic Consciousness and House Museums.” 84.
Closing Remarks

The archive is a biological organism: it grows, it changes, it breathes, it dies. Each component, each collection item, is a subordinate being that exists independently but relies on codependency in order to support the fundamental structure of the total archive.

The title, ontogenesis, is perhaps misleading. Rather, a collection is cyclical and forever reinforcing until—once there are no longer human agents to uphold the memory of the collection—it dies. As history runs its course, years are added and a collection inhales and exhales with the addition and subtraction of objects. During the 1880s, the Montgomery Place collection would have told quite a different story than the narrative we are provided with today, in 2018. Similarly, periods of exponential growth during different generations with different families serve as visible landmarks, akin to biological puberty.

Treating an archive as a living organism forces archivists and collection managers to adapt cookie-cutter practices to fit the personality of their collection. I’ve learned through my short time at the Montgomery Place estate just how difficult it is to create functional systems from the bits and pieces of preceding systems. As the property shifted operationally and cycled through owners, layers of organization fitted over each hesternal sliver. When the property became a link in the chain of Historic Hudson Valley properties in the 1980s, the familial chapter of the collection came to a close. But the imposition of institutional order settled over the property and the hush of generation long codification took priority. Then, in 2016, when the property changed hands once more, the order of the Historic Hudson Valley stepped back to define an outline for Bard College to elucidate.

As long as Montgomery Place remains atop a hill overlooking a bend in the Tivoli Bays along the Hudson River, there will continue to exist the perpetual stratification of progressive
functional systems. And even once the mansion, the orchard, the greenhouse and the rest of the physical property buckles under the tempo of contingency, the collection will be scattered and adapted into surrounding historic sites—much like a cadaver returns to the elements and is dispersed among the surrounding wilderness.
References


