1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Dr. Oliver Bronson House and Estate

Other Name/Site Number: Plumb-Bronson House and Estate

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: West of U.S. Route 9 Not for publication:__

City/Town: City of Hudson Vicinity:__

State: New York County: Columbia Code: 021 Zip Code:

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property		Category of Property	
Private:	___	Building(s):	X
Public-Local:	___	District:	___
Public-State:	X	Site:	___
Public-Federal:	__	Structure:	___
		Object:	___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
4	4	buildings
1	___	sites
___	4	structures
___	___	objects
5	8	Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 4

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ Entered in the National Register
___ Determined eligible for the National Register
___ Determined not eligible for the National Register
___ Removed from the National Register
___ Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Domestic Sub: Single Dwelling

Current: Vacant Sub:

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Early Republic: Federal
Mid-Nineteenth Century: Italian Villa
Bracketed

Materials
Foundation: Stone
Walls: Wood
Roof: Metal
Other: Brick, Terra Cotta, Glass, Stucco

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Overview

The Dr. Oliver Bronson House and Estate is located west of Worth Avenue, U.S. Route 9, just within the southern boundary of the City of Hudson in Columbia County, New York. The estate is accessed by a paved drive that curves briefly southward from the primary entrance on Route 9 before turning north to loop around in front of the house. A carriage house and barn, located south of the house, are also accessed from the main drive. The land slopes gently downward from Worth Avenue past the house and outbuildings, dropping steeply further west as it approaches the Hudson River. Steep ravines flank the house and outbuildings to the north and south. The significant loss in elevation between the house and the river largely shields the property's view shed from the adjacent New York State Hudson Correctional Facility, situated west of the nominated boundary. The non-wooded portions of the estate command expansive views toward the river, Mount Merino, and the Catskill Mountains to the south and west. The house and associated outbuildings were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, at which time they were saved from impending demolition. The Dr. Oliver Bronson House and Estate is being nominated for National Historic Landmark status for its association with prominent nineteenth century architect Alexander Jackson Davis as a distinctive example of mid-nineteenth century Picturesque design.

The Bronson House was a handsome Federal style building that received modifications and additions designed by Alexander Jackson Davis in 1839 and again in 1849. The original wood frame building, completed in 1812, was two stories in height with a one-bay gabled attic story, oriented with its façade facing east toward present-day Worth Avenue. The exterior of the house is embellished with both refined Federal style details and later picturesque alterations and additions designed by Davis. The interior is highlighted by an elegant elliptical stair, dating to the original building period, and other details representing both original construction and later work by Davis. The first set of alterations designed by Davis for Dr. Oliver Bronson, a relative by marriage to noted Davis patron Robert Donaldson, included a reworking of the eaves in the 'Bracketed' mode. Designs for the carriage house and barns, were likewise furnished by Davis at this time. The 1849 work, much more extensive in scope, included the construction of a one-story, one room deep addition with a three-story engaged central tower of Italian villa origin, constituting a new, west facing façade. Both the early and later additions by Davis included the use of ornamental verandas. Documentation regarding Davis's work for Bronson is chronicled in the architect's Day Book and Office Journal, [1] in addition to surviving drawings.

The relationship between the house and landscape, integral to the architectural vision of Davis and his friend and associate Andrew Jackson Downing, represented the very essence of the picturesque doctrine to which the two men subscribed. Although suffering the effects of deterioration due to an extended period of vacancy, the Bronson House survives largely intact and still maintains a vital relationship with its associated landscape and setting. The house, which is the earliest extant example of Davis's work in the 'Bracketed' style, and the outbuildings and interrelated landscape, framed to the west by an extensive panorama of the Catskill Mountains, remain an evocative and balanced complement that thoroughly capture the Romantic ideals of the era. The

[1] Davis, Day Book vol. 1, 1827-53. Alexander Jackson Davis Collection, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library (NYPL); Office Journal (24.66.1400). Alexander Jackson Davis Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (MMA). The specific location of entries by Davis in his Day Book and Office Journal regarding the Bronson House were compiled and made available by the late Davis authority Jane Davies in the early 1970s. Davies's admiration for the architect's work, not merely limited to her knowledge of Davis's surviving archival record, likewise included a genuine and active concern for the preservation of his extant buildings.

involvement of Downing in the development of the associated estate landscape, to an extent not fully known, further enhances the significance of the house and it's surroundings. Changes made to the estate plan in the post-Bronson years have been limited in scope and effect.

Included in the National Historic Landmark nomination are four contributing buildings. These are the Bronson House, a large carriage house with flankers, and two smaller barns. Deemed non-contributing are four buildings, those being the circa 1870 gatehouse and adjacent shed, a circa 1870 pattern book Gothic Revival style cottage, and a cement block garage. Likewise non-contributing are four structures, a picnic shelter, a shooting range, the stone and iron fence bounding Worth Avenue and the concrete footings of a bridge that formerly spanned a hollow on the north side of the estate near the non-contributing cottage. Included within the nomination boundaries is a total of approximately fifty-two acres of land, a contributing site. The circa 1800 'Appletree' house, which fell outside of Bronson's 1838 initial purchase of eighty acres, has been excluded from the nomination.

Setting

The city of Hudson is situated on the east bank of the Hudson River, approximately thirty-five miles south of Albany, on the extreme central western edge of Columbia County, New York. The Bronson House and Estate are located immediately south of the city proper, west of U.S. Route 9, or Worth Avenue. The Bronson Estate, a narrow rectangular tract of land comprised of open fields and woods, is bounded on the east by Worth Avenue and to the west by the correctional facility. On the eastern boundary, the estate is separated from Worth Avenue by a stone and iron fence, approximately eight hundred and fifty feet in length, with a small Second Empire style gatehouse situated on the south side of the entrance. Woods bound the north side of the estate, which fronts the southernmost edge of development in the city, from Worth Avenue west to the perimeter of the correctional facility. The only significant intrusion to the view shed is along the southern boundary, where a modern commercial facility compromises an otherwise relatively intact setting. The nearby correctional facility is sufficiently hidden by the topography of the grounds. The estate enjoys striking views to the west and southwest toward the Hudson River, which gives way to the landscape of Greene County on the opposite bank. This panoramic view shed includes the Town of Greenport, Columbia County, in the foreground, and the Blackhead Range of the northern Catskill Mountains across the river; Mount Merino rises to the immediate south.

The Bronson House is located approximately one hundred and eighty feet above the level of the river on a relatively flat shoulder of land, bounded to the north by a wooded knoll and enclosed on three sides by deciduous trees screening the house from the road throughout most of the year. A circa 1819 watercolor rendering of the property [2] depicts the house and grounds as they appeared under the ownership of Samuel Plumb, for whom the original house was built. Although liberties appear to have been taken by the artist in his depiction of the estate, the view reveals crucial information regarding the early appearance of the house and layout of the grounds. The original balanced hilltop scheme consisted of the main house flanked by outlying dependencies, set within an open landscape bounded to the east by the Branch Turnpike Road, present day Worth Avenue, and to the west by the river. The landscape of the estate appears largely open, with extensive views of the river, Mount Merino, and the Catskill Mountains.
The house and estate were altered under the direction of Dr. Oliver Bronson during his ownership of the

[2] William Guy Wall, "View Near Hudson, New York, looking southwest toward Mount Merino," circa 1820. Watercolor on paper. New York Historical Society. Wall published *Hudson River Portfolio* in 1820, twenty views of Hudson River scenes that were engraved after watercolors he produced. See Ruth Piwonka and Roderic Blackburn, *A Visible Heritage, Columbia County, New York: A History in Art and Architecture* (Hensonville, New York: Black Dome Press, 1996), 76-77.

property between 1838 and 1853. These changes included the dismantling of the dependencies, modifications to the house in 1839 and 1849, the erection of a new carriage house and construction or alteration of the barns, and alterations made to the physical landscape, likely made under advisement by Davis and possibly by Downing as well. A birds-eye view of the property, dated circa 1890, suggests that a far more extensive network of carriage drives existed than what remains today. This network apparently included a spur that encircled the knoll north of the house and a loop that circled the house from the north side and terminated in a turnaround south of where the current terrace is located. Segments of these drives have been retained, though modified from their original winding courses. The current disposition of trees on the east lawn, which largely shields the house from the main approach, is a characteristic Picturesque device, meant to provide only glimpses of the residence until a favorable vantage point has been reached. Screening would also have been utilized to lessen the visual impact of the outbuildings on the approach route. Trees were likely laid out in irregular belts to impart a naturalistic effect, in keeping with the English landscape philosophies then finding expression in the work of Davis and Downing, complemented near the house with ornamental shrubbery and flowers. Open lawns remain to the east, south, and west of the house. Small wayside embellishments were probably built to provide for contemplation of the estate's extensive views.

Following the second redesign phase by Davis in 1849, a new emphasis was placed on the house's west-facing orientation and the expansive view shed that opened south and west of the house. The addition of the west verandah, the three-story tower and projecting window bays on the north and south sides strengthened the interrelationship of the house with its setting by opening new views and framing romantic vistas, providing a harmonious transition from building to landscape. Unlike the earlier Plumb House, which sat conspicuously on an open promontory, Bronson's alterations to the house and estate redefined the relationship between architecture and landscape in the current Romantic tradition. Thus the house emerged as an extension of its surroundings, stylistically conceived in part to respond to its setting, with a deliberately conceived naturalistic landscape treatment forming a bridge between the residence and the distant mountains and river.

Exterior of the House

The Dr. Oliver Bronson House, as originally constructed between 1811 and 1812 for Samuel Plumb, was a two-story timber frame building with a one-bay gabled attic story, oriented with its façade facing east. Built above a limestone foundation laid in random ashlar above grade and rubble below, the building was probably sheathed in narrow pine clapboard. The first story of the house, rectangular in shape excepting projections on either side of the east elevation, measured approximately fifty feet in width by thirty-seven feet in depth. The second story was slightly smaller in width and square in shape, with the narrow, third story rectangular block above. Both the center entrance and central second story window were flanked by sidelights and topped by semi-elliptical fanlights. The house was covered by a shallow hipped roof finished with a balustrade; tall chimneys flanked the intersecting attic story. A tripartite window lit the upper-story and provided harmony with the two center bays below. Vaguely decipherable in the Wall watercolor is what appears to be a full-length front porch carried by attenuated columns. Fenestration on the north and south elevations consisted of four windows on the first story, three of which lit three-sided projections on the extreme east side of either elevation, and two windows on the second story. The configuration of the west elevation is not known but likely reflected the arrangement of the east elevation. Wood fences connected the house with ancillary buildings to the north and south. The Plumb house, details of which survived Davis's modifications, was a sophisticated estate house in the Late Colonial vein, featuring the elegant and attenuated detail characteristic of the Federal style. The remaining original elements attest to the informed execution of Adam-inspired details designed by a talented and as yet undetermined architect-builder.

The east facing façade, as now composed, reflects elements of both the original building and modifications drawn by Davis in 1839.[3] The first-story, minus projections, is punctuated by three evenly spaced bays, with two windows flanking the center entrance.[4] The entrance consists of a wood door with six recessed panels, each articulated by two low-relief arches, extremely delicate in treatment. Flanking the door are generous three-quarter length sidelights, with a paneled treatment below matching that of the door. Paneled jambs flank the door and sidelights. The molded and reeded wood casing enclosing the entrance terminates in four foliated consoles, likewise handsome in execution. Crowning the entrance is an elliptical fanlight with raised molding and keystone, the glazing of which is finished with wood dividers and swag. The windows flanking the entrance are double-hung with six-over-six wood sash; they are currently boarded-up, as is most of the building's glazing. Original louvered wood shutters have been removed. The exterior of the first-story of the façade is sheathed in vertical flush board, unlike the remainder of the building, which is clad primarily with wood shakes; the vertical board suggests the possibility of an earlier board-and-batten exterior treatment. Narrow cornerboards with a finely scaled cable molding finish the corners. All these features, excepting the shakes, reflect the building's original appearance.

Spanning the entire first-story of the façade is the remnants of an ornamental verandah that was unquestionably designed by Davis in 1839.[5] Possibly replacing a previous porch, it measures just under fifty feet in length and rests on a mortared limestone foundation. The roof of the verandah, concave in profile and sheathed with a flat seam metal roof, is currently braced by functional wood posts. The ceiling of the verandah, comprised of narrow board crossed perpendicularly by battens, appears to be original to Davis's 1839 work; a comparison of it with Davis's watercolor view of the verandah at 'Blithewood'[6] reveals an almost identical scheme. A circa 1972 photograph captures the appearance of the verandah and one of the posts as they appeared at that time. The wood supports were comprised of two narrow posts, each pierced by five evenly spaced diamonds, with an open geometric pattern between. The posts carried an open frieze comprised of guilloche, with a molded architrave and lobed curvilinear pattern below. Ghosts of the posts, now removed, remain on the ceiling of the verandah, showing their original location. Portions of these decorative elements have been saved.

The second story of the east elevation follows the fenestration pattern of the first story below, with three equally spaced windows. The center window, from the original construction, is treated with sidelights and elliptical fanlight like the entrance immediately below it, and finished with a handsome architrave, foliated consoles, and keystone. Davis's 1839 alterations included a reworking of the building's eaves, creating a bold overhanging projection, and the application of wood brackets below. Ten brackets, embellished with small crosspieces and acorn drop pendants, are spaced at three foot four inch intervals to correspond with the width of the two outermost windows on the first and second stories. Two are positioned at either corner of the elevation and

[3] This work is referred to in Davis's Day Book. An entry of April 17, 1839 indicates that he had visited Bronson in Hudson, and while there "designed various fixtures and embellishments" at the cost of thirty dollars. A notation in June notes "sketch of stables, barn and ornament for Dr. Bronson," the price given at fifteen dollars. Day Book, 197, NYPL. An entry in his Journal, dated April 17, reads "Refitting house at Hudson for Dr. Oliver Bronson." Office Journal, 61, MMA.

[4] The original first story façade consisted of five windows, as indicated by the Wall watercolor and physical evidence.

[5] Although Davis doesn't specifically mention the verandah as part of his 1839 work "refitting" the Bronson House, the bracketed work he executed for Robert Donaldson at 'Blithewood' in 1836, his bracketed design for a Farmer's House in his own *Rural Residences* of 1837, and two designs he authored in 1842 for bracketed cottages in the Davis collection of the New York Historical Society, all illustrate the importance of this feature to the overall scheme. The verandah, or as Davis termed it the 'umbrage,' was an essential component of the picturesque philosophy, forming a physical link between the house and its setting.

[6] Davis, "View N.W. at Blithewood," circa 1841, Avery Architectural Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, NY. Reproduced in *Alexander Jackson Davis, American Architect, 1803-1892*, ed. Amelia Peck (New York: Rizzoli International, 1992), Colorplate 12.

project diagonally outward.

Rising above the second story is the rectangular dormer block, measuring approximately eleven feet in width, covered by a low-pitched gable roof. A large tripartite window punctuates the attic block, the sidelights of which are covered by wood jalousies; the console treatment is repeated again here. An egg and dart apron, which likely dates to Davis's 1839 work, hangs from the slightly projecting eaves. Flanking the block on either side are two brick chimneys, reworked by Davis in a typically picturesque scheme,[7] with brownstone coping and tall terra cotta pots. Working within the form of the original symmetrical scheme, Davis added to the house's exterior an irregular rhythm reflecting the picturesque-romantic philosophies then new to the American architectural landscape.

In 1849 Davis was engaged again by Bronson, this time in a major reworking of the house that included a one room deep addition with a central tower on the west side of the house.[8] A sketch in Davis's Office Journal [9] indicates the addition as it was more or less executed. The addition consisted of a rectangular block approximately fifty-eight feet in width by sixteen feet in depth, with semi-octagonal ends. One-story semi-octagonal window bays abut either end of the new elevation, yet were not indicated by Davis in his plan or elevation; they were, however, indicated in a small sketch in his Day Book. The new west-facing façade was fronted by an ornamental verandah approximately fifty-two feet in length. A drawing of the elevation by Davis rendered circa 1849 [10] illustrates the house from a vantage point on the open southwest lawn. The new addition, complete with a prominent three-story Italian villa-inspired tower, ornamental verandah with open lattice posts, balustrade and bracketed cornice, rests prominently on the crest of the hill. Drawn quickly and with an economy of line, the sketch reveals the artistic instincts, particularly in the sensitive interrelationship between building and setting, which separated Davis from many of his contemporaries. These later additions brought to full realization the picturesque effect first imparted by the 'Bracketed' work executed a decade earlier.

The west elevation is two stories in height with an engaged, three-story tower that projects slightly from the remainder of the elevation. It is aligned on an axis with the third story dormer block of the original house. Two semi-octagonal bays project from either side of the elevation, designed by Davis as a complement to the original bays on the east façade. Fenestration on the first-story consists of three evenly spaced, segmental-arched openings; the northern bay is now enclosed. The center entrance is comprised of a wood door with four molded recessed panels, flanked on either side by pilasters and full-length sidelights and crowned by a segmental-arched transom. Wood jalousies provided ventilation in the warmer months, as evidenced by a circa 1860s photograph.[11] The entrance is encased by a heavily molded architrave, as are the windows. Paneled wood piers separate the doorway from flanking rounded arch sculptural niches, now enclosed, and carry a broad fascia

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[7] Andrew Jackson Downing highlighted the importance of the chimney as an "expression of purpose," along with the windows, porch, and verandah, in raising "the character of a cottage or villa above mediocrity." Quoting from Loudon, the author cited the chimney as the defining characteristic of a house, distinguishing it from other building types. *Cottage Residences, Rural Architecture and Landscape Gardening* (First edition 1842, repr. Watkins Glen, New York: Century House, 1967), 12.

[8] A notation in his Day Book in early October 1849 indicates that Davis had completed a set of nine drawings and specifications for Bronson at the cost of thirty dollars. These designs followed trips to Hudson in September. Entries of September 24, 26, and October 3, 1849, Day Book, 388, 390, 389, NYPL.

[9] Davis, Office Journal, 112. Pen and ink on paper. MMA. A more elaborate version of this plan, executed in ink with wash, is also in the collection of the MMA, 24.66.1405.

[10] Davis, untitled sketch. Alexander Jackson Davis Collection II, Avery Architectural Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York. Pencil on paper, 32-2.

[11] Photograph taken during the residence of Mary Phoenix. Courtesy of Rowles Studio Collection.

across the elevation below the roof of the verandah. The second story consists of three sets of well proportioned, paired square-shaped windows encased by molded wood architraves. The windows rest on projecting sills and are currently boarded. The projecting eave is ornamented with brackets, spaced closer than those on the east elevation, with acorn drop pendants.

The tower rises above the second story and is covered by a shallow pyramidal roof with brackets set below the eaves. The west, north, and south sides of the tower featured a faux tripartite window treatment with surrounds formed by paneled wood piers that carry the wood fascia upon which the brackets rest. The west facing treatment featured two double-hung windows flanking a jalousied blind center bay; the north and south treatments had single double hung windows flanked by blind jalousied bays. A blind balustrade spans the west side of the tower; the remainder, which ran around the second story roof, has been removed. The finely scaled cable molding of the cornerboards is repeated along the cornice.

Originally spanning the west elevation was a fifty-two foot long verandah carried by four open latticework posts. Foliated ornamental crowns set on the concave roof corresponded with the posts below and have since been removed. Running the length of the verandah below the projecting eaves is an open frieze of interlaced Norman arcading, with finely crafted acorn drop ornaments. The verandah was enclosed early in the twentieth century with fixed sash resting on a brick skirt with a paneled wood treatment above. An enclosed west-facing terrace was likewise added at that time, enclosed by a mortared rubble wall with concrete coping giving way immediately to a steep drop in elevation.

The north elevation continues to reflect the building's appearance following the second phase of modifications planned for Bronson by Davis. Projecting from the corners of this elevation are the original one-story 1812 bay and the two-story semi-octagonal projection of the 1849 addition. A small one-story window bay abuts the center of the semi-octagonal end of the addition. It is finished with thin paneled pilasters, a bracketed cornice, and paneled wood skirts. The windows of the first and second story, minus the addition, lack architraves. The windows of the addition, finished with molded wood surrounds and bracketed sills, are similar in character to those used by Davis and published by Downing in association with designs in the 'Italian' and 'Bracketed' styles. The north facing second story window was blind and covered with jalousies, like that opposite it on the south elevation; it is now clad in shingles. The projecting eave of the second story is embellished, like the east elevation, with brackets. The attic of the original section runs from the east elevation and terminates at the tower, punctuated by two small windows. The egg and dart apron continues from the front elevation around the sides of the dormer block. A second brick chimney with brownstone cap and terra cotta pots is situated where the old building and the addition meet. The chimneys are currently covered to prevent further damage.

The south elevation is consistent, for the most part, with the north elevation. The one-story semi-octagonal bay that terminates the end of the 1849 addition is considerably larger than that on the opposite elevation. Below the projecting bay of the original 1812 house is a below-grade entrance to the basement, shielded by a hood carried by wood brackets which appears to have been added in 1839. Between these bays is the only major exterior alteration to the building, a one-story addition added in the early twentieth century. Semi-octagonal in shape, it is pierced with windows on three sides and rests on an above-grade brick foundation. A brick chimney with terra cotta pots on the roof of the addition, reflecting the character of the four main chimneys, has fallen over. A below grade garage was also added in the twentieth century, with brick retaining walls parged with cement.

Interior

The interior of the Bronson house, like the exterior, combines elements of the original Federal period work with Davis' modifications. Both the 1812 house and the 1849 addition can be read clearly from one another, with the original stair of the Plumb house forming the highlight of the interior space. Plumb's original house utilized a center hall, double pile plan, the first story with paired front and rear parlors, the second story with paired front and rear rooms, and a single room in the third story block. Kitchen facilities were located in the southeast corner of the basement. Davis's single pile addition is formed by a central, octagonal shaped hall adjoining the original center hall of the Plumb house on the first floor that accesses the flanking rooms and the west verandah. Bedrooms flank the central tower room of the second floor; a single room comprises the third story tower space. The interior retains a significant level of integrity of materials and design, notwithstanding damage to many of the marble mantelpieces and an addition to the south side of the first story. Original window sash is retained throughout most of the house, as are period doors, finishes, and trim. Like the exterior entrance details, the Federal period interior displays a high level of craftsmanship and a competent use of Adam-inspired detail, while the 1849 Davis work, while sensitive to the original concept, reflects in both form and detail characteristic Picturesque-inspired elements.

The east façade entrance leads into a large square-shaped vestibule flanked on either side by the front parlors. The interior doorway casing is composed of attenuated colonettes that flank the sidelights, covered by iron grilles. Walls are finished in plaster, currently covered with faded and peeling wallpaper, with molded wood baseboards below. Floors are laid in wide plank pine. The parlors are separated from the vestibule by large six paneled wood doors, approximately nine feet in height, with molded and reeded wood architraves.

The front north parlor, square in shape with semi-octagonal ends, retains its distinguished Federal style details and is highlighted by an exceptional carved wood mantel that rests against the center of the west wall. Attenuated paired colonettes carry foliated consoles that frame the mantel's frieze, comprised of three panels, the center one graced by a large, beautifully carved ellipse. The windows retain their original architraves and paneled skirts; two retain period six-over-six double-hung wood sash. Likewise remaining is the handsome casing and hood that frames the inside of the doorway between the parlor and the hall, graced by an ellipse, thin cable molding, and foliated consoles. Walls, like the ceiling, are finished in plaster on split lath with reeded and molded wood baseboards below. The opposite south front parlor reflects its original circa 1812 layout, modified in 1849 with new baseboards, architraves, paneled jambs, plaster crown molding, and a marble Picturesque mantelpiece. A dumbwaiter in the northwest corner is set behind a paneled wood door and indicates the room's original function. One window retains intact six-over-six sash. Ceiling heights on the first floor average approximately twelve feet.

The vestibule leads through an elliptically arched opening, springing from thin clustered colonettes, into the stair hall. The elliptical stair is set against the south wall and curves upwards uninterrupted to the third story in graceful fashion. The turned newel post and balusters are mid-nineteenth century in character, unlike the remainder of the stair, and therefore likely date to the 1849 work. The face string of the stair is embellished with an intricate carved fan pattern and a delicate, finely scaled cable molding. The wall in the hall is curved to harmonize with the dynamic of the stair, as in the hall above. Behind the stair on the south wall is the entrance to the original rear south parlor, which retains its original architrave, door, and a transom repeating the delicate arch motif likewise used on the front parlor doors. Two doors along the north wall originally led into the rear north parlor; both retain Federal period architraves and one its original paneled door. The north rear parlor, altered with the addition of a bathroom and closet between it and the hall, retains original window sash and a

damaged Picturesque marble mantelpiece. The ceiling has been dropped and the original plaster walls covered with wood board. The south rear parlor was completely reconfigured as a pantry, bathroom, and hall leading into a kitchen addition. The twentieth century kitchen addition is accessed from the hall and is semi-octagonal in shape, with a stone fireplace against the south wall and an L-shaped counter in the northeast corner. The room is lit by three windows and is connected to the semi-octagonal projection of the 1849 Davis addition by means of a short hall.

The stair hall leads into the octagonal shaped hall of the 1849 addition, from which the verandah and the flanking rooms are accessed, and is a highly intact and signature feature of Davis's hand. Although Davis's conception of the floor plan of the addition was restricted by the pre-existing center hall scheme of the original house, which necessitated adherence to a strict east-west axis, he nonetheless added visual variety with the eight-sided hall and semi-octagonal room ends with different sized, yet balanced, window projections. The hall is comprised of four segmental arched doorways: the entrance between the old and new sections, the exterior door to the verandah immediately opposite on the west wall, and the entrances to the north and south rooms. Flanking each of these doorways within the angled walls are rounded arch sculpture niches similar to those on the west elevation exterior. The doorway to the verandah is similar in treatment to that opposite it, with sidelights covered by iron grilles flanking a four paneled wood door. The doorways entering the flanking rooms are finished with molded wood architraves, with original paneled wood doors remaining in their pockets. Walls in the hall are finished in plaster with molded wood baseboards below and plaster crown moldings above. The cable molding used on the interior and exterior of the original Plumb house is repeated on the door casings.

The northwest room is intimately scaled and highlighted by the projecting bay window. The walls and ceiling are finished in the same manner as the adjacent hall with wood baseboards and plaster cornice. Against the semi-octagonal north wall is a small projecting bay, also semi-octagonal in shape. It is divided from the main space by a segmental arched opening with a molded wood architrave and a jamb with a handsome plaster bas-relief floral pattern; the small bay retains paneled skirts and most of its original window sash. Closets are set along the south wall, occupying the space formed by the angled walls of the hall; their wood architraves have been removed. The original marble mantelpiece of the projecting chimney breast has been destroyed, and the generous west-facing window enclosed. An opening provides access to the adjacent rear parlor of the original Plumb house.

The opposite southwest room is similar in layout and size, with a Picturesque white marble mantelpiece. The entrance to the adjacent room is against the east wall; there are closets situated along the north wall; and a larger semi-octagonal one-story bay projects from the south wall. The west-facing window retains period sash and original jalousies that are held in pockets in the walls. Radiating ribs traverse the ceiling of the octagonal bay, the windows of which are encased by thick architraves with paneled jambs and interior shutters. The plaster bas relief jamb treatment is repeated between the parlor and the bay.

The second floor is accessed from the main stair, the railing of which continues around gracefully to form a landing overlooking the hall below. The hall leads east through an elliptical arch and is terminated by the tripartite window overlooking the east lawn. Flanking the hall are two bedrooms, situated on the northeast and southeast corners of the house; the door from the hall to the northeast bedroom has been enclosed. Both rooms are finished in plaster with molded architraves and baseboards. Each has a fireplace situated against the west wall framed by damaged Picturesque marble mantel pieces. The two rear rooms of the original Plumb house have been modified. The north west room has been subdivided into two baths; a simple wood Federal style

mantel survives along the east wall opposite that in the adjacent northeast bedroom. The southwest room has been altered and is now composed of a smaller bedroom with two baths and a back stair against the west wall. The center hall leads west toward the tower of the 1849 Davis addition, with access on either side to the north and south bedrooms through six paneled doors. The bedrooms are finished in plaster with molded wood baseboards, architraves, paneled skirts, and projecting chimney breasts with damaged marble mantelpieces. The northwest bedroom retains its original plaster crown molding; the ceiling of the southwest bedroom has been redone. A segmental arched opening with molded architrave, rectangular transom, and sidelights leads west into a square-shaped room between the bedrooms, subdivided into closet space and lit by the west-facing window. Second floor ceilings average approximately ten feet in height.

The main stair terminates in the third floor gabled block, which includes a bedroom on the extreme east elevation and a bath opposite the stair on the southwest corner. The corresponding space of the third floor of the tower is given over to a large room, measuring approximately nineteen feet by eighteen feet, finished in plaster with molded baseboards and architraves and period six-over-six window sash. There is a narrow hall with closets between the tower room and the stair access in the original dormer block. A six-over-three window lights the third floor landing on the south wall.

There is a full basement beneath most of the house that includes elements of the original 1812 layout. A stair behind the main stair leads down into a large open space beneath the south east parlor, which was the house's original kitchen and stock room. The corresponding north east side has been reconfigured with a bathroom, two stock rooms, and a bath, yet it does retain the original root cellar on the extreme north side below the projecting window bay. The remaining space in the basement is broken up into various utility areas, including the boiler room. There is an extensive crawl space underneath the 1849 addition and the addition on the south side of the building.

Other Contributing Resources

The property includes three contributing outbuildings, each of which feature details designed by Davis in 1839, forming a tight u-shaped cluster south of the house near the property's southern boundary. The largest of these is the east facing carriage house, composed of a gable-fronted block flanked by gable-ended wings in a symmetrical neo-Palladian scheme. The center block has a hewn timber English frame to which the smaller flankers were added. The main block is accessed by a monumental entrance shielded by a concave shaped hood, carried by scroll sawn brackets which rest on classical piers which frame the doorway. The paired wood doors, hung with their original strap hinges, are composed of diagonally oriented boards that form a chevron pattern when closed. Above the entrance is a louvered Palladian-inspired vent; square shaped louvered vents flank the entrance. The projecting eaves of the entire structure are embellished with brackets, with those on the corners of the main block pierced by a trefoil shaped pattern; a similar trefoil pierced bracket was illustrated in Figure 44 of Downing's *Cottage Residences.*[12] A drop pendant adorns the crest of the gable although its corresponding finial has been lost. Each of the smaller wings is entered on the long side, facing east, with a door treatment echoing that of the main block. Horizontal pine clapboard sheaths the exterior.

Northwest of the large carriage barn is a smaller gable roofed barn with a hewn timber frame clad in pine clapboard. Immediately to the west is a second gable roofed barn, also with a hewn timber frame, with vertical board and batten sheathing. It is abutted on the south side by a twentieth century frame shed addition. Both

[12]Downing, *Cottage Residences,* Design V, 95.

barns are covered by raised seam metal roofs like the carriage house and embellished by eaves brackets. It is likely that one if not both of the smaller barns date to the pre-Bronson occupation of the property.

The landscape, comprised of approximately fifty-two acres, is a contributing site and an essential component of the property. Further investigation will be necessary to fully evaluate the significance of the design, in particular the possible involvement of Downing in the early planning stages.

Non-contributing Resources

There are also four buildings within the landmark boundary which are non-contributing. By far the most interesting of these is a circa 1870 Gothic Revival style cottage that is situated on the northern boundary of the property. The cottage details are clearly derived from Design 8 in George Woodward's *Country Homes,*[13] although the floor plan is not consistent with that offered in Woodward's book. The first story of the small cottage is sheathed in horizontal board accented by chamfered vertical trim; the gables are clad with board-and-batten. The bracketed eaves, window hoods, Gothic windows with lozenges and battered architraves, and exterior sheathing are all taken from the Woodward plate. Situated opposite a steep gully that was at one time linked to the south side of the estate by a bridge, no longer extant, it is unlikely that it served as the gatehouse, considering the current gatehouse was erected at about the same time. The cottage is nonetheless a distinctive example of pattern book Picturesque architecture and is currently in jeopardy of being lost.

Likewise considered non-contributing is the circa 1870 Second Empire style gatehouse and an adjacent frame shed which are situated on the south side of the estate entrance. The gatehouse's original wood board-and-batten siding was lost recently in favor of vinyl siding in imitation of vertical board. Also deemed non-contributing is the concrete block garage situated north east of the main house. The nomination also includes four non-contributing structures that include a picnic shelter, the shooting range, a fence spanning the Worth Avenue boundary and the concrete footings of a bridge on the north side of the estate. The location of all contributing and non-contributing resources is delineated on the enclosed map, entitled "Dr. Oliver Bronson House and Estate, Hudson, New York, National Historic Landmark Boundary."

[13]George Woodward, *Woodward's Country Homes* (New York: George Woodward, 1865), 50-52.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: X Statewide:__ Locally:__

Applicable National Register Criteria: A__ B__ C X D__

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A__ B__ C__ D__ E__ F__ G__

NHL Criteria: 4

NHL Theme(s): III. Expressing Cultural Values
5. architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design

Areas of Significance: Architecture

Period(s) of Significance: 1839-1850

Significant Dates: 1839, 1849

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation:

Architect/Builder: Davis, Alexander Jackson

Historic Contexts: XVI. Architecture
G. Renaissance Revival
2. American Bracketed Villa

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Introduction

The Dr. Oliver Bronson House and Estate, located in Hudson, New York, is nationally significant for its association with architect Alexander Jackson Davis and the early development of the Picturesque movement in America. Modified to the specifications of Davis in 1839, the Bronson house is recognized as the earliest extant example of the architect's domestic work in the 'Bracketed' style, a Romantic mode of architecture Davis pioneered and which was subsequently offered in the publications of his friend and associate Andrew Jackson Downing. In 1849 Davis again drafted alterations for the house in the form of an Italian villa-inspired addition to the west elevation which fully 'romanticized' the original house and brought to complete realization the Picturesque philosophies first imparted with his work the decade prior. The estate gains additional significance in association with Downing, the era's most prominent taste maker, whose Newburgh nursery is documented as having provided plantings for Bronson in 1839 and who likely provided consultation regarding the re-design of the grounds. The Dr. Oliver Bronson House and Estate, situated high above the Hudson River with a sweeping panorama of the Catskill Mountains, saliently conveys the essence of the native Romantic movement which informed the work of Davis, Downing, painter Thomas Cole, and writer William Cullen Bryant. It remains a distinctive example of American Picturesque architecture, sustaining outstanding power of feeling and association.

The American Romantic impulse flowered in the Hudson River Valley and the nearby Catskill Mountains during the 1830s. Davis's close associate Thomas Cole, whose strong reaction to native scenery fostered two generations of American landscape painting, first traveled the Hudson in the mid-1820s on his way to the Catskill Mountains. "From the moment when his eyes first caught the rural beauties of Wehawken, and glanced up the distance of the Palisades," in the words of Cole's friend and biographer Louis Legrand Noble, "Cole's heart had been wandering in the Highlands, and nestling in the bosom of the Catskills."[14] William Cullen Bryant, poet and editor of the New York *Evening Post*, and author Washington Irving had likewise found inspiration in the picturesque qualities the river and the valley provided which found expression in their influential work. The native landscape was elevated to a preeminent position in the work of America's creative community in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and offered itself as the preeminent icon of national greatness. In the same spirit of enlightened naturalism celebrated by Cole, Asher Brown Durand, and Bryant, Alexander Jackson Davis and Andrew Jackson Downing offered an alternative to the faceless and impersonal urban landscape that was rapidly changing the demographics of the nation. Along the banks of the Hudson River, the two men proposed cottages and villas that offered themselves to the needs of an increasing middle class, buildings comfortable, tasteful, and in harmony with the natural environment, clearly bearing the stamp of the individual. Davis and Downing shared a similar vision for the direction of American domestic architecture, evolved along the scenic course of the Hudson River, and there both men left their greatest professional imprint.

The Picturesque movement in American architecture came of age along the banks of the Hudson River, where Davis and Downing developed and espoused the Romantic ideals that revolutionized the native scene in the decades preceding the Civil War. In an age of heightened national self-consciousness the Hudson Valley region nourished the American Romantic movement, lending itself readily to comparisons with the picturesque qualities celebrated in the Rhine while providing the ideal backdrop for the buildings conceived by Davis and popularized by Downing in his highly influential books. Alexander Jackson Davis provided the Hudson Valley with numerous outstanding picturesque designs, among them the preeminent expression of the Romantic architectural movement, the Gothic Revival villa 'Lyndhurst.' It was along the course of the Hudson that Davis

[14]Louis Legrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole,* ed. Elliot S. Vesell (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1964), 34.

fully evolved his concepts of domestic architecture, in a context well suited to his artistic temperament and sensitivity to setting. Here the ideal balance between house and landscape fostered by Downing was first cultivated by Davis, who authored seminal designs for 'Bracketed' and Gothic Revival cottages and villas in the mid- to late 1830s, and whose work ultimately embraced the river from Tarrytown north to Troy. Davis likewise was the first to offer these ideas in published form, with his *Rural Residences* of 1837, a little-distributed but nonetheless landmark work in the history of American domestic building practice. His picturesque designs in the Hudson Valley, many of which have been lost,[15] powerfully conveyed the energies of a limitless imagination and one of the periods brightest romantic minds.

The Dr. Oliver Bronson House embodies the essential principles that guided Davis's work in the Romantic-Picturesque vein and informed the designs he first authored in the mid-1830s. The striking situation of the original house and grounds allowed Davis the opportunity to twice design alterations that enhanced the interplay between the building and its location, revealing his profound comprehension of dramatic effect. The Bronson House and Estate remains an outstanding resource that dramatically encapsulates the formative decade in the development of the American Picturesque movement and chronicles Alexander Jackson Davis's contribution to the evolution of domestic architecture in the United States. It likewise recalls the heightened spirit of the period, when families of considerable means turned to Davis and Downing to provide them with villas and landscapes reflecting the prevailing romanticism of the era.

Alexander Jackson Davis, Andrew Jackson Downing, and the Development of Picturesque Architecture and Landscape Design in America

Beginning in the late 1830s, Alexander Jackson Davis and Andrew Jackson Downing shared an informal association that left a significant imprint on the direction of American residential design at the mid-point of the nineteenth century. Davis, who gained note as the junior partner of Ithiel Town in the highly influential New York City architectural firm of Town and Davis, collaborated with Downing, a nurseryman by training and a native of the Hudson River hamlet of Newburgh, on the publication of the latter's books. Unable to translate his designs into a suitable form for publication, Downing turned to Davis, a skilled draftsman, for illustrations that he rendered directly onto wood blocks in preparation for engraving. Downing's books, *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, 1841, *Cottage Residences*, 1842, and *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 1850, melded the Romantic attitudes toward residential architecture and landscape design then forming in America and helped carry these ideas into the mainstream currents. His ideas were widely embraced and gained him significant fame at home and abroad. Davis, in association with Town in 1832, collaborated in the design of Glen Ellen in Baltimore, Maryland, a landmark Gothic Revival villa, and working independently in the mid- to late 1830s began formulating Romantic domestic designs that were finding an attentive audience in the Hudson Valley. Davis's work proved seminal to the development of American Picturesque architecture and his own book, *Rural Residences*, was the first native publication to offer these ideas in printed form. Following a visit to Davis's Blithewood, a 'Bracketed' house which Davis designed for Robert Donaldson and which enjoyed a striking Hudson River setting, Downing engaged Davis and the two men began their nearly twelve year association. Sometime around 1850, Downing proposed a full professional association, an offer declined by Davis, and during a subsequent trip to England took into partnership Calvert Vaux, which brought to an end the Davis-Downing relationship.[16]

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[15]The list of Davis designed Picturesque residences lost in the Hudson Valley alone is extensive. Notable among these are the Gothic Revival villa 'Kenwood,' south of Albany, which was published in Downing's *Cottage Residences;* 'Blithewood,' Barrytown, which was the first of Davis' 'Bracketed' designs; 'Ericstan' in Tarrytown, a remarkable Castellated Gothic Revival villa; 'Linwood Hill,' the prototypical *cottage orne* in Rhinebeck; and the board-and-batten Gothic Revival cottage-villa 'Millbrook,' also in Tarrytown. These five designs alone comprise a substantive catalog of American Romantic domestic architecture.

[16]Francis R. Kowsky, *Country, Park and City: The Architecture and Life of Calvert Vaux* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 12-13.

Overview of the Samuel Plumb-Dr. Oliver Bronson Estate

The settlement and growth of the city of Hudson, known in the eighteenth century as Claverack Landing, commenced fully in the final decades of the eighteenth century. Thomas Jenkins, acting in association with other speculators, purchased extensive tracts of land bounding the east bank of the river in 1783 from Peter Hogeboom, Jr. and the Hardick and Van Alen families. A street grid was proposed the following year and in 1785 Hudson was chartered as a city.[17] An account published in the *New York Journal* in 1786[18] indicates that the settlement grew quickly, and by that year counted several wharves, warehouses, upwards of one hundred fifty dwellings, and fifteen hundred citizens, primarily from Rhode Island and Massachusetts. In 1811 Samuel Plumb acquired two hundred sixty-three aces of land from the heirs of Thomas Jenkins, bounding the southern most portion of Hudson's street grid just within the city limits. The property, described in the deed as "a certain farm and piece of land," is indicated on the 1799 'Penfield Map' of the city. Two farmhouses are delineated on the map, one likely the 'Appletree' house that remains, altered, on the southern boundary of the estate.

Between 1811 and 1812 Plumb engaged an unknown architect-builder to erect for him an elegant estate house in the Federal style, finished in the finest manner with Adam-inspired details likely derived from an English source such as the works authored by William Pain (c. 1730- c. 1790). A comparison of decorative features in the Plumb house with those of the James Vanderpoel house in Kinderhook, built circa 1816-1820, suggests the possibility of a single builder, Barnabas Waterman (1776-1839). A native of Bridgewater, Massachusetts, Waterman was active as a 'master mechanic' in Hudson during the period.[19] The Plumb house, however, unlike the Vanderpoel house and the majority of Federal style residences in New England and New York, deviated from the conventional, self-contained five-bay gable-ended or hipped roof prototype, and instead employed comparatively lively massing. Plumb's house appears in the circa 1820 Wall watercolor likely as it was completed in 1812, the main house flanked by outlying gable-fronted dependencies with arcaded openings along their long sides, connected to the main house by fenced walkways. The watercolor captures a southwesterly view, the landscape of the estate largely open in character, with small copses of trees set immediately south and west of the house. Open agricultural fields extend into the distance and mark the early land use patterns of the area.

In 1835 the Plumb house and associated acreage were sold to Robert Frary, who in 1838 sold the house and eighty acres to Dr. Oliver Bronson (1799-1875). Bronson was the brother-in-law of Robert Donaldson (1800-1872), arguably the most important of Alexander Jackson Davis's many clients. Over the course of Davis's career Donaldson, a native North Carolinian with business interests in New York, proved a loyal patron and close friend. He commissioned Davis to redesign two Hudson River estates for him, 'Blithewood' and 'Edgewater,' gained commissions for Davis at the University of North Carolina, and supported Davis in his efforts to publish his book, *Rural Residences*.[20] Earlier he had likewise aided Town and Davis in extending their influence into North Carolina.[21] Donaldson acknowledged what he perceived as Davis's role in the evolution of American domestic architecture and the Picturesque movement in a letter to the architect in 1863:

> Downing stole your thunder for awhile- but I always, on suitable occasion, claimed

[17]Piwonka and Blackburn, *Visible Heritage*, 74.
[18]Ibid.
[19]Ibid., 69.
[20]*Rural Residences, Etc., Consisting of Designs, Original and Selected, For Cottages, Farm-Houses, Villas, and Village Churches: With Brief Explanations, Estimates and a Specification of Materials, Construction, Etc.* (New York: 1837). The significance of this work is discussed by William H. Pierson in *American Buildings and Their Architects: Technology and the Picturesque* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980), 296-298. Donaldson also gained Davis's commission for the Sarcophagus of Judge William Gaston in New Bern, North Carolina; Gaston was the father of Donaldson's wife and was a North Carolina Supreme Court Justice.
[21]Jean Bradley Anderson, *Carolinian on the Hudson: The Life of Robert Donaldson* (Raleigh: The Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina, 1996), 149-50.

for you the seminal ideas which have been so fruitful.[22]

Donaldson's 'Blithewood,' a Federal period estate house in Barrytown overlooking the Hudson River, was modified by Davis in 1836 in the 'Bracketed' style and with the addition of an ornamental verandah. The first residence executed by Davis in this vein no longer remains. His design for one of the 'Blithewood' gatehouses, published in *Rural Residences* as "Gatehouse in the Rustic Cottage Style," likewise proved a landmark conception, as it presented the prototype for the board-and-batten Gothic Revival cottage that became a staple of Picturesque design and is commonly associated with the books of Andrew Jackson Downing.[23] 'Blithewood' was a watershed moment in nineteenth century American domestic architecture, completely removed from the then current mode of Greek Revival classicism that prevailed and of which Davis had earlier proved an innovator. It likewise offered itself as a stylistic model for the Bronson house.

The Bronson family had longstanding ties to America dating to the mid-seventeenth century, having originally settled in the Hartford, Farmington, and Waterbury areas in Connecticut. Dr. Oliver Bronson was the son of Isaac Bronson, born in 1760 and a major figure in post-Revolutionary War real estate and securities speculation who amassed a considerable fortune and likewise gained note as an authority on banking theory.[24] His money lending proved critical to the development of Oneida and Jefferson counties in the early-nineteenth century. Oliver Bronson was the eldest son of Isaac Bronson and Anna Olcott, the latter also of early Connecticut lineage. Oliver Bronson married Joanna Donaldson (1806-1876), sister of Robert Donaldson, and while in Hudson was listed among the city's first superintendent of schools and a shareholder in the Hudson Gas Company. Like many affluent gentlemen of the period, Bronson chose to settle along the banks of the Hudson River, on an estate reflecting the prevailing Romantic philosophies of the era.

Alexander Jackson Davis and Dr. Bronson were likely introduced by Robert Donaldson, perhaps at 'Blithewood,' where Bronson would have been personally familiar with the modifications Davis designed for his brother-in-law. Following Donaldson's lead, and likely at his suggestion, Bronson retained Davis's services in 1839 in a similar project, the modification of the Federal style Plumb house in a more 'appropriate' rural fashion. Davis's first recorded visit to Bronson's Hudson house was in April, 1839,[25] during which time he "designed various fixtures and embellishments." He returned again in June, at which time he provided sketches for the stables, barn, and unspecified ornament.[26] Of note is a purchase made by Bronson the week prior to the Davis visit in April, which indicates a transaction between Bronson and Charles and Andrew Jackson Downing.[27] This purchase undoubtedly consisted of trees and other plant materials from the Downing nursery in Newburgh, the planting of which Davis likely commented on and possibly oversaw. A notation in his Day Book[28] indicates that as early as 1830 Davis had begun to familiarize himself with the theories associated with English Picturesque landscape design, and, as the decade wore on, drew increasingly from the influential work of John Cladius Loudon (1783-1843). Davis returned to stay with Bronson in Hudson in early October following a visit to his friend Thomas Cole's house in nearby Catskill, and spent three or four days there likely in superintendence of ongoing construction.[29] No drawings are known to exist for Davis's 1839 work on the

[22]Letter to Davis from Donaldson, 12 May 1863, Davis Collection, Avery Library.
[23]The significance of the 'Blithewood' estate is also discussed by Pierson in *American Buildings,* 300-307.
[24]Grant Morrisson, "A New York City Creditor and His Upstate Debtors: Issac Bronson's Moneylending, 1819-1836," *New York History* LXI/3 (July 1980), 257.
[25]Davis, Day Book, 197. Entries dated 17 and 18 April. A cancelled check in Box 28, Bronson Family Papers, Manuscript Division, NYPL, indicates that Davis received thirty dollars payment from Bronson for his initial services on the 18th.
[26]Ibid., entry dated 7 June. Davis noted he received fifteen dollars for the work.
[27]Box 28, Bronson Family Papers. A cancelled check dated 9 April 1839 in the amount of ninety-three dollars is signed by Bronson and made out to C. and A.J. Downing.
[28]Davis, Day Book, 101. Entry dated 19 September 1830. "Study of Repton-Whately-Marshall on landscape gardening."
[29]Ibid., 204.

Bronson house. In addition to drawings for architectural modifications, an entry in his Day Book indicates that Davis also produced a "landscape view" of the estate in late-1839.[30]

The Donaldson-Bronson patronage was of pivotal significance to the development of the 'Bracketed' style, of which the Dr. Oliver Bronson House is the oldest known extant example,[31] and Davis's early work in the Picturesque vein. After commissioning Davis to design the Gothic Revival villa that, though unbuilt, was offered in *Rural Residences*,[32] Robert Donaldson engaged Davis for the 'Blithewood' design which undoubtedly inspired Bronson's work in Hudson. Davis was likewise commissioned by Isabella Donaldson to produce designs for a bracketed country church and school in Annandale-on-Hudson in 1836, similar in form to the board-and-batten "Design for a Model School House" included in *Rural Residences.* The concept of these economical yet effective designs, well suited to picturesque locales by virtue of their irregular rhythm and, in the cases of the domestic work, generous verandahs, was later acknowledged by Downing in his *Cottage Residences* of 1842 in design V, "A Cottage in the Bracketed Mode:"

> This bracketed mode of building, so simple in construction and so striking in effect, will be found highly suitable to North America…Indeed, we think a very ingenious architect might produce an *American cottage style* by carefully studying the capabilities of this mode, so abounding in picturesqueness and so easily executed.[33]

Downing again revisited the bracketed mode in his *Architecture of Country Houses* of 1850, and in that work offered two designs of the bracketed – verandah type, which he felt were particularly well adapted to the needs of domestic architecture in warmer climates.[34] Many of his smaller cottage examples were likewise embellished with boldly projecting, bracketed eaves. Although the 'Bracketed' style never achieved the popularity enjoyed by the Gothic Revival and the Italian villa-Tuscan styles, Davis's work in this mode in the mid- to late 1830s was nonetheless of great consequence, informed by romantic sentiment and the Picturesque ideals of harmony, variety, and irregularity. The east facing verandah of the Bronson house, part of the 1839 modifications, is likely the earliest extant feature of its type designed by Davis. Though, as pointed out by William H. Pierson, the idea of a sheltered area was not new to native architecture,[35] the concept of the verandah as a bridge between house and setting had romantic connotations which made it a characteristic feature of picturesque design carried into the mainstream by Downing's books:

> The larger expression of domestic enjoyment is conveyed by the veranda…In a cool climate…the verandah is a feature of little importance…But over almost the whole extent of the United States, a veranda is a positive luxury…But the moment the dwelling rises so far in dignity above the merely useful as to employ any considerable feature not entirely intended for use, then the veranda should find its place.[36]

Of considerable interest in the development of the estate is the involvement of Downing, whose Newburgh

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[30]Ibid., 205. An entry of December 9 reads "Drawing Dr. O. Bronson's villa, H. Whitney's, J.A. Hillhouse, landscape views."
[31]Jane Davies, "Works and Projects," in *Alexander Jackson Davis*, 108-9. The Bronson house was predated by two other domestic 'bracketed' designs, 'Blithewood,' and the Issac Lawrence House in New Haven, 1836, which was patterned after the *cottage orne* with ornamental verandah he designed in 1835 for David Codwise and published in *Rural Residences*. 'Blithewood' has long since been destroyed; the Lawrence House has been altered beyond recognition.
[32]See Pierson, 298-300.
[33]Downing, *Cottage Residences*, 89.
[34]Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (First edition 1850, repr. New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), 312-317, figs. 139,142.
[35]Pierson, *American Buildings*, 301-302. Pierson also points out that Washington Irving, in remodeling his small Dutch house into an irregular Gothic cottage, employed a verandah. Both Donaldson and Davis knew Irving and Pierson therefore surmises that the verandah at 'Blithewood' may have been inspired by 'Sunnyside.'
[36]Downing, *Country Houses,* 120-21.

nursery is documented in 1839 as having provided Bronson with nearly one hundred dollars worth of plants for the grounds. Downing, like Davis, was in all probability introduced to Bronson by Robert Donaldson, whose 'Blithewood' estate had captured Downing's interest, and, according to Pierson, led Downing to contact Davis in anticipation of his coming work *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*.[37] 'Blithewood' must have made quite an impression on the young landscape designer, as he included it as the frontispiece for his book,[38] and offered his praises of the house, "one of the most charming villas residences in the Union,"[39] and its picturesque surroundings:

> The natural scenery here, is nowhere surpassed in its enchanting union of softness and dignity- the river being four miles wide, its placid bosom broken only by islands and gleaming sails, and the horizon grandly closing in with the tall blue summits of the distant Kaatskills [sic].[40]

The late 1830s were pivotal years in the young nurseryman's meteoric career, as he acclimated himself with the current trends in landscape architecture that by the early 1840s had gained him renown in America and abroad.[41] Strikingly similar in layout to the Bronson Estate is a design offered in his *Treatise*, Figure 20,[42] which, when compared to the historic layout of the Estate, reveals numerous similarities, including the alignment of the primary entrance and gatehouse, the relationship between the house and stable complex, the layout of carriage drives, the location of the pond, and the extensive tract of agricultural land located south of the property. Although it is not possible to chronicle the extent to which Downing participated in alterations made to the estate, it is certain that he at the very least consulted on the specific species of trees and plants ordered, and possibly corresponded to some extent with Davis. If such a correspondence took place, the Bronson Estate would represent one of the earliest known collaborations between the two men.

Alterations made to the Bronson landscape in the late 1830s would ultimately have imparted the Romantic landscape spirit first addressed at length in America by Downing, drawing from the influence of Loudon and other English sources. The estate enjoyed a tremendous vista, similar to that described by Downing while at 'Blithewood,' with the house commanding an extensive panorama of the Hudson River framed to the west by the "tall blue summits of the distant Kaastkills." South Bay, spread out before the estate to the south and west, captured the imagination of landscape painters of the Romantic tradition, among them Thomas Cole, Sanford Robinson Gifford and Frederic Church, and provided a thoroughly dramatic setting for Davis' work. Modifications likely recommended by Davis, informed by the English landscape theory of Loudon, Brown, Repton, and possibly under the advisement of Downing as well, would have included the realignment of carriage drives to make them "more abrupt in their windings,"[43] taking full advantage of the diverse characteristics of the land. The addition of irregularly placed copses of trees would likewise have imparted a picturesque and highly naturalistic quality. "The picturesque in Landscape Gardening," according to Downing, "aims at the production of outlines of a certain spirited irregularity, surfaces comparatively abrupt and broken, and growth of a somewhat wild and bold character."[44] These irregular features of nature were meant to impart a feeling of harmony and interrelationship with the newly conceived house, its bold projecting eaves casting deep shadows playing upon the variegated forms of nature itself. As opposed to typical Neoclassical landscape

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[37]Pierson, *American Buildings,* 351. Downing first contacted Davis in December 1838.
[38]Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (First edition 1841, repr. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1967), "View in the Grounds of Blithewood, Dutchess Co., NY, The Residence of Robert Donaldson, Esq.," engraved by H. Jordan after a drawing by Davis.
[39]*Ibid*., 30.
[40]*Ibid*., 30-31.
[41]Pierson, *American Buildings*, 350.
[42]Downing, *Treatise*, 94.
[43]*Ibid*., 59.
[44]*Ibid*.

schemes, where houses were often set conspicuously upon the landscape, in relative opposition to setting, the Picturesque as espoused by Davis and Downing sought to refine the interrelationship of building and locale in more harmonious terms.

The Hudson Valley provided the ideal setting for the growing strain of romanticism in native architecture, a movement anti-urban and distinctly individualistic in sentiment, [45] where new forms could evolve comfortably and play upon the varied qualities that the river, valley, and surrounding hills and mountains endlessly lent. American cultural figures, among them Cole, Washington Irving, and William Cullen Bryant, had already drawn inspiration from the sublime power of the river and the nearby Catskill Mountains. Davis and Downing were likewise smitten by the opportunities the Hudson landscape afforded American architecture, where appropriately conceived landscape designs could establish a harmonious bridge to striking natural settings. To Davis, the "bald and uninteresting aspect" of native houses lay not in a deficiency of style, but "in the want of connexion [sic] with [their] site." The "appropriate offices- well disposed trees, shrubbery, and vines" were the elements, according to Davis, that "give an inviting and habitable air to the place."[46] These elements, in concert with suitably rendered houses drawing upon the endless complexities and irregular rhythms of the natural environment, provided for unified picturesque schemes wholly removed from the earlier tradition. The growing threats of urbanism and industrial development to the quality of American life, and, as noted by Pierson, to individual identity, were countered by cottages and villas formulated by Downing and Davis to express the tastes and preferences of the individual, developed along the course of the Hudson.

In the fall of 1849, Davis was again engaged by Bronson to provide alterations to his Hudson house. Entries in Davis's Day Book indicate that the architect "arranged [the new] plan" with Bronson during the visit in late September,[47] and a set of nine drawings and specifications were prepared in early October at the cost of thirty dollars. The new scheme, envisioned by Davis in the small pencil rendering of circa 1849, reoriented the house so the façade would face west toward the river and included the addition of a one room deep block cast in the Italian villa or Tuscan mode. The Italian villa, with its characteristic tower and neo-Renaissance details, proved a highly popular style in the Hudson Valley that was likewise popularized by Andrew Jackson Downing. Although, according to Downing in *The Architecture of Country Houses*, the style was not "essentially country-like in character," it was nonetheless "remarkable for expressing the elegant culture and variety of accomplishment of the retired citizen or man of the world."[48] Although Italian villa designs were typically asymmetrical in configuration, the Bronson addition fell within the restraints of the earlier Plumb house and was instead symmetrically composed, similar in that regard to the house which Davis re-designed in collaboration with Samuel F. B. Morse, 'Locust Grove,' (NHL, 1964) also in the Italian style, located in Poughkeepsie.[49] The Italian style offered an alternative to the darker and somewhat more mysterious Gothic, of which Davis proved himself an innovator for domestic conceptions. It carried, as pointed out by Pierson, a "more respectable formality," and offered itself as a conscious continuation of the classical tastes that prevailed in America throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century.[50] Like the Gothic style, it was also inspired by English examples, as noted by Downing following his return from England, where he had viewed "spacious

[45]Pierson, *American Buildings*, 356-357.
[46]Davis, *Rural Residences*, preface.
[47]Davis, Day Book, 388, 390, entries dated 24 and 26 September 1849.
[48]Downing, *Country Houses*, Design XXI, "A Villa in the Italian style," 285-86.
[49]William Rhoads, "The Artist's House and Studio in the Nineteenth Century Hudson Valley and Catskills," in *Charmed Places: Hudson River Artists and Their Houses, Studios, and Vistas* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1988), 80. The Italian style, with its associations with what Downing termed "that land of painters and of the fine arts," proved particularly popular with American artists of the Romantic school, among them Morse and Thomas P. Rossiter. Thomas Cole played with designs for an Italian villa for his own Catskill home, plans that were never realized.
[50]Pierson, *American Buildings*, 362.

Italian villas, more Italian than in Italy."[51]

The 1849 additions allowed Davis the opportunity to develop his ideas regarding interior design, albeit on a somewhat limited scale. The rectangular block of the first story was roughly comprised of three squares, the outer two lengthened by semi-octagonal extensions. The central hall from which the outlying rooms radiated was formed into an octagon by the addition of four angled walls; semi octagonal one-story window bays projected from the semi-octagonal ends of the flanking rooms, further playing on the form of the original Plumb house bays. The surviving sketches indicate Davis's intention to strike a balance between the first story of the existing house and the addition, with two rectangular blocks terminated by semi-octagonal ends joined by the original rear parlors of the Plumb house. Projecting bays and generous windows framed suitably Romantic views, while Picturesque marble mantels and fine finishes and trim lent the new first story an elegance befitting the refinement of the earlier house. Large bedrooms on the second and third stories were likewise offered the extensive western view shed of the river and mountains and appointed with fine finishes and trim. Davis gained internal and external harmony by repeating the sculptural niches of the west elevation in the octagonal hall, yet provided a hint of asymmetrical tension in varying the dimensions of the bays. A second verandah provided a vital link between the new interior space and landscape.

Following the completion of the new elevation, construction of which likely began late in the fall of 1849,[52] the Bronson villa rose dramatically above the crest of the ridge on which it rested, as captured in the quick pencil sketch authored by Davis. Although it remains a matter of speculation, it is likely that a carriage road accessed the house from the west side of the estate along South Bay, where visitors coming north on the Hudson to visit Bronson would likely have disembarked. Picturesque villas as conceived by Davis and Downing relied on approach routes for added dramatic effect, and the new elevation would have been best viewed from a western vantage point. Davis authority Jane Davies, in a visit to the estate in the early 1970s, took notice of an unusual building located on the western edge of the estate that, though long since gone, survives in Historic American Building Survey documentation for the City of Hudson. The building appears to have been a small vernacular residence that was modified with projecting bracketed eaves and an unusual flared gable with a distinctive 'oriental' character. It likewise featured a louvered window in the gable field similar to that used on the Bronson carriage house. If in fact it was associated with the Bronson estate, its stylistic characteristics would suggest it was part of the 1839 modifications.

In 1849 Bronson added an additional twenty-nine acres south of his original purchase, which reunited land originally associated with the Plumb estate that was excluded in the original Bronson purchase. In 1854, following a sixteen-year residence and two modifications to his house by Davis, Dr. Oliver Bronson sold the estate to Frederick Fitch Folger, and returned to Connecticut. In 1904, the house and grounds, then home of Elizabeth and Matilda McIntyre, were purchased to expand the New York State Training School for Girls, established in the 1860s at a site southwest of the estate. The Bronson House served as the residence of the school's director until sometime around 1970, when the facility fell vacant. In 1997 Historic Hudson became involved with the preservation of the house and remaining landscape, and with the cooperation of the New York State Department of Corrections has opened the house for fund raising benefits once a year. The money raised at these events has been used to stabilize the house and fund historic structure and historic landscape reports. Historic Hudson is currently working on establishing a lease agreement with the state, a major step in realizing the future utilization of the site.

[51]Downing quoted in Kowsky, *Country, Park and City,* 32.
[52]Drawings and specifications for the new elevation were drawn in early October by Davis. It is likely that the foundation was prepared in the fall and the wood frame of the superstructure begun the following spring.

National Significance of the Dr. Oliver Bronson House and Estate

Alexander Jackson Davis contributed significantly to the direction of American domestic architecture from the mid-1830s until the eve of the Civil War. Drawing from the Picturesque philosophies popularized in England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and by what he read as the increasing responsibility of his profession to raise the architectural and cultural standards of the nation,[53] Davis proved a seminal figure in the development of the American Picturesque tradition and the evolution of the Romantic styles. His designs for 'Bracketed' and Gothic Revival cottages and villas in the mid- to late 1830s broke radically from the firmly entrenched Neoclassical tradition, while his collaborations with Downing helped carry these and other imaginative conceptions into the mainstream where they established themselves firmly in the 1840s and 1850s. The Dr. Oliver Bronson House and Estate is a remarkable resource in that it captures a decade of progress in Davis's work, from his earliest explorations in the picturesque vein in the late 1830s to the bolder and dramatic forms of the late 1840s, leading towards his culminant domestic design, Lyndhurst. The Bronson House, the earliest extant example of the architect's work in the 'Bracketed' mode, survives largely intact with a full complement of Davis designed outbuildings, and likewise retains a vital relationship with a Romantic setting of considerable distinction. Additional significance is gained through association with Andrew Jackson Downing, whose involvement with the Bronson Estate in 1839 likely involved not only the supply of plant materials from the Downing nursery in Newburgh but specific landscape advice.

The Dr. Oliver Bronson House and Estate is an outstanding architectural and landscape resource that saliently expresses the overriding Romantic sentiment of the antebellum period. Modern intrusions have failed to significantly diminish the vital Picturesque relationship between the Bronson house, the immediate landscape, and the distant Catskill Mountains which frame the western viewshed. The house itself retains a relatively high degree of integrity and numerous features conveying both the elegance of the original Federal style Plumb house and Davis's later Romantically inspired modifications, and remains the earliest extant example of the architect's work in the 'Bracketed' mode. Surviving Davis-designed 'Bracketed' outbuildings likewise document the designer's vision for a new architectural idiom and instinctive grasp of scale and detail. Nestled in the very heart of the American Romantic landscape where both Cole and Church chose to live and work, the Bronson House and Estate is a potent reminder of the Picturesque aspirations of American architecture and landscape design, and conveys the lasting spirit of Davis and Downing.

[53]Davis, "Critiques," Box 1, folder 18, NYPL. "No art deserves more attention than architecture, because no art is so often called into action, tends so much to the embellishment, or contributes more to the reputation of a country."

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

__ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
_X_ Previously Listed in the National Register.
__ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
__ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
__ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
__ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

_X_ State Historic Preservation Office
__ Other State Agency
__ Federal Agency
__ Local Government
__ University
__ Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: Approximately fifty acres

UTM References:		**Zone**	**Easting**	**Northing**
	A	18	600160	4677570
	B	18	600410	4677450
	C	18	600530	4677230
	D	18	600490	4676990
	E	18	599960	4677120
	F	18	599920	4677300
	G	18	599800	4677560

Verbal Boundary Description: The proposed National Historic Landmark Boundary for the Dr. Oliver Bronson House and Estate is delineated on the enclosed United States Geological Survey map of the Hudson South Quadrangle. The boundary is shown as a solid black line.

Worth Avenue, or U. S. Route 9, forms the eastern-most boundary line. The southern boundary is formed by the lot line separating the Hudson Correctional Facility property from the adjacent Kaz commercial development, from Worth Avenue west to the barn complex. From that point the boundary curves behind the west side of the complex and follows the southern edge of the main road to the meeting point with the western boundary. The northern boundary line follows the property to an established corner post, immediately west of the Gothic Revival cottage and east of the railroad bed. From this corner post defining the northern-most edge of the boundary, the boundary moves a short distance in a straight line south through the woods until it meets the 120' elevation contour line as indicated on the United States Geological Survey (USGS) Hudson South quad map. The western boundary has been drawn to coincide with the 120' contour line, following it from the above-mentioned location until the boundary again briefly follows a straight line south (at UTM Point F on the USGS

Survey map) until it meets the south side of the access road.

Boundary Justification: The proposed boundary for the Dr. Oliver Bronson House and Estate National Historic Landmark nomination has been drawn to coincide with the legal lot lines on the north, south, and eastern edge of the property where possible. All the property included within the nomination, approximately fifty acres, is historically associated with the Bronson holdings. The 'Appletree' house, significantly altered from its original form and not part of the original eighty acre Bronson holdings, is excluded. The northern, southern and eastern boundaries roughly coincide with the original Bronson estate. Due to the development of the western part of the Bronson estate, which is now the site of the New York State Hudson Correctional Facility, the entire historic estate has not been nominated. The boundary, as drawn, does however include the open field south of the house, a portion of the woods between the field and the correctional facility further west, and wooded hills to the north of the house. The nominated acreage provides an appropriate context for the house and the outbuildings and may likewise yield future information regarding the estate's mid-nineteenth century layout and appearance.

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DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
July 31, 2003