



## Passion fuels the intense rivalry through the years

SPORTS, 5B

# Poughkeepsie Journal

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## Dutchess site gets national coverage for holiday tour



Today operated by New York State, the Mills family estate in Staatsburg is a popular tourist destination. During the 2000s, its name was changed from the Mills Mansion Historic Site to the Staatsburgh State Historic Site, using the original name spelling of the Town of Hyde Park hamlet. ANTHONY P. MUSSO/FOR THE POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL

### Lavishly decorated for the holidays, attendees experience history

**Nickie Hayes**  
Poughkeepsie Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK

A beloved local State Historic Site was named among the best in the country for their holiday programming.

USA Today's recent 10Best Readers Choice Awards ranked the top holiday winter fun, including historic home tours, botanical garden holiday lights, destinations for snow, holiday markets, holiday parades, hotels for the holidays, ice skating rinks, New Year's Eve ball drops, public holiday lights displays, theme park holiday events and zoo lights across the country.

Dutchess County has a plethora of rich history. However, one location, bringing the public back in time, has taken the spotlight on the national level: Staatsburgh State Historic Site.

Nestled in Hyde Park, Staatsburgh State Historic Site's "A Gilded Age Christmas," within Mills Mansion, was awarded sixth best holiday historic home tour for the second year in a row.

"We're thrilled to be recognized nationally for our Christmas tours," Maria Reynolds, curator at the Staatsburgh State Historic Site, said. "We put in a lot of effort, both staff and volunteers, to get the house decorated for Christmas."

Find out what made Staatsburgh State Historic Site's holiday program stand out nationwide, plus more about what's in store for 2026 at this historic site.

#### Staatsburgh State Historic Site's 'Gilded Age Christmas'

Many in the area use the Ogden Mills and Ruth Livingston Mills Memorial State Park, home to the Staatsburgh State Historic Site, for walks, Reynolds said.

"We're always happy when people eventually do come inside," Reynolds



Staatsburgh State Historic Site, Old Post Road, is decorated for the holidays and open for tours through December. DIANE LANDRO/

continued.

Lavishly decorated for the festive season, Mills Mansion attendees can experience the historic interiors, exhibiting original furniture, art and décor, with holiday extravagance.

This year, Maria noted, there's a travel theme to their holiday decorations, combining Gilded Age opulence with some of the places across the globe the Mills family, their friends and servants, traveled to. In the exhibit room, guests will find a map of all the traveled locations.

Inspiration from the holiday tour's theme stemmed from Ogden Mills, a six month grand tour, of mostly Europe, at 11 years old. The historic site has his diary from it.

The drawing room, for example, represents Greece, as inside you'll find 2,000-year-old Greek vases. Similarly, in the library, a Louis XIV-style room, flaunting French architectural elements, there's a French theme.

"In the Gilded Age, families like the Mills' were traveling around the world," Maria said, "and that was becoming more common because of technological advances."

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Mills Mansion decorated for the holidays. Staatsburgh was the Gilded Age country home of financier and philanthropist Ogden Mills and his wife, Ruth Livingston Mills, a prominent figure in New York Society. Their stately home was redesigned and expanded to 79 rooms in 1895 by the famous architect Stanford White. KARL RABE/POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL FILE

## Educators weigh in on schools phone ban

**Helu Wang**  
Rockland/Westchester Journal News  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Three months after New York schools implemented a bell-to-bell cell phone ban, the state is touting a transformative impact, citing more focused learning and more effective teaching, according to a state survey.

Of the 350 responses submitted, a majority of school administrators reported improvements in teaching and learning, along with a more positive classroom environment. About 92% said the shift to distraction-free learning went smoothly; 83% saw more positive classrooms and stronger student engagement; and 75% reported being able to teach more effectively.

"Our kids are finding greater success in the classroom when they're focused on learning, not scrolling," Gov. Kathy Hochul said in a statement.

#### What to know about New York's cell phone ban

The smartphone ban was enacted through legislation included in the 2026 state budget, with the goal of ensuring a distraction-free learning environment. It restricts the use of any non-school-issued internet-connected device, from cell phones to smart-watches to gaming consoles.

About 1,098 districts and schools are covered by the statewide requirement, including BOCES programs and charter schools. Schools were given the flexibility to design plans tailored to their buildings and student needs.

Parents and students shared mixed reactions early on. Some welcomed reduced screen time and more face-to-face interaction, while others expressed concern over not being able to reach their children in an emergency.

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## After two failures DOJ is on the defensive

**Aysha Bagchi**  
USA TODAY

Dismissed indictments; two grand juries refusing to issue new charges; a judge blocking key evidence from being used for a fresh case: In trying to prosecute key targets of President Donald Trump, the Justice Department has faced failures on a scale rarely seen in federal prosecutions.

The most dramatic recent setback was a second federal grand jury's refusal on Dec. 11 to indict New York Attorney General Letitia James, after an earlier grand jury rejected the Justice

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