

= Virginia House =

Virginia House is a manor house on a hillside overlooking the James River in the Windsor Farms neighborhood of Richmond , Virginia , United States .

The house was constructed from the materials of the sixteenth @-@ century Warwick Priory in Warwickshire , England , and shipped over and reassembled , completed several months before the stock market crash of 1929 . Virginia House is in the Tudor architectural style but incorporates a range of designs from other English houses and has modern facilities such as ten baths and central heating .

Virginia House was built by Alexander and Virginia Weddell , salvaging many materials from the Priory and other old English manor houses and adding further elegant English and Spanish antiques , oriental carpets , silks , and silver . Today Virginia House is operated by the Virginia Historical Society as a house museum , although it largely remains as it was in the 1940s during the Weddells ' tenancy . Immediately to the west of the property is Agecroft Hall .

= = History = =

The façade of Virginia House was originally located on the grounds of the former Augustinian Priory of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem (Warwick Priory) in Warwick , England , founded in 1109 . In 1536 , at the Dissolution of the Monasteries , the priory was shut down and the land later bought by a politician named Thomas Hawkins alias Fisher , during the reign of Edward VI . Fisher demolished most of the monastic buildings and erected the house which he named " Hawk 's Nest , " set among gardens . He entertained Elizabeth I at the house . The property was bought in 1709 by Henry Wise , Royal Gardener to Queen Anne . In the mid @-@ nineteenth century , it was purchased by the Lloyds Bank family who put the manor up for sale at auction in 1925 .

The auction of the Warwick Priory was to take place on September 23 , 1925 , and was described in the catalogue as a " Highly Important Unreserved Demolition Sale " offering such items as " rare old oak doors , large quantity of floor boards , the whole of the joists and other timbers , and enormous quantities of excellent brick , sandstone , old oak and other beams , timbers and girders " . Alexander W. Weddell , a wealthy American diplomat and his wife Virginia Chase Steedman , however , offered a lump sum of £ 3 @,@ 500 for the entire remaining structure and secured a deal before it was held . The purchase by the Americans caused an outrage in the British press and the Weddells were heavily frowned on given that the heritage property was to be demolished . The objection to the purchase was also backed by a member of the House of Commons who proposed that the sale be invalidated in order to prevent this " act of vandalism " . However , it was rejected and important persons in Britain gradually learned what their intentions were , and on April 13 , 1926 , another member , F.G. Rye , sent a letter to Alexander Weddell saying , " Had you not stepped in and bought the materials of the partially demolished structure , they would have been lost for all time , whereas now they will be utilized in the erection of a new building . "

The Tudor mansion was dismantled , but concerned that the stone would swiftly disintegrate during the demolition phase , Weddell 's advisers ordered that a small explosive device be triggered off in the centre of the house and to salvage the remaining stones . However , the explosion had the effect of splitting the walls intact meaning that much of the building could be salvaged and shipped to the United States . The first shipments arrived in Richmond , Virginia in early 1926 , but were soaked in seawater and had to be dried in a barn for up to six months . From the very beginning , the Weddells planned on deeding the house to the Virginia Historical Society and to allocate the west wing of the structure as a museum once it was rebuilt in Virginia . The Weddells also intended the structure to become the society 's new headquarters .

Virginia House was constructed in the Windsor Farms neighborhood of Richmond by the General Contracting firm of Allen J. Saville , Inc . , although several different architects were employed during the rebuilding . Foundation work began on November 6 , 1925 and the structure was officially turned over to the Weddells on January 1 , 1929 . The total cost of the construction of Virginia House was \$ 236 @,@ 968 @.@ 83 , with an additional \$ 15 @,@ 000 spent on buying the lot .

The Weddells lived at Virginia House until their deaths in a train accident in 1948 . The house became the permanent residence of the historic society . On June 13 , 1990 , Virginia House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places , due to it being considered " a noteworthy representative of a peculiar residential building type prevalent in the late @-@ nineteenth and early-twentieth @-@ century period of American architecture . "

= = Structure = =

= = = Exterior = = =

Virginia House is a large , asymmetrical , two @-@ story long rectangular stone building with massive sandstone walls , small medieval windows , characterized by two high Dutch gables that date to the 1620 remodeling of the Thomas Hawkins @-@ era Priory in Warwickshire , England . The adjacent cross @-@ gable roofs and crenelated balustrade over the carriage entrance provide a horizontal cross @-@ axis on either side of the gabled central bays . Two rear ells of the house project into the garden terrace , one of them containing the two @-@ story cathedral @-@ ceilinged library , and the other a drawing room and the master bedroom wing . Polygonal bays and oriel windows project from the north and south sides with heavy perimeter walls constructed of recycled sandstone . Over a window on the west side of the north elevation of Virginia house is a copy of a coat of arms commemorating the visit of Queen Elizabeth I to the Priory in England in 1572 . The original coat of arms is currently on display inside . The leaded @-@ glass , quarrel @-@ paned casement windows widely used in Virginia House also salvage authentic crown glass dating from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century from the English priory . The interior of the property is richly embellished with oak furnishings .

Although many stones and materials were salvaged and used to rebuild the Hawkins priory in Virginia , the reconstructed house incorporated other designs and influences . Following the acquisition of the property , the Weddells hired chief architect Henry Grant Morse and scouted the English countryside , surveying properties and considering various designs they could incorporate into the rebuilding process . As a result , the reconstruction is not a replica of the original building . The west wing of the house is actually a replica of Sulgrave Manor , a small manor house in Northamptonshire , England , which once belonged to Lawrence Washington , an ancestor of America 's first president , George Washington . However , the center of the house is a reproduction of the original Warwickshire priory and uses the curvilinear gables , strapwork design , and balustrades that the English commonly adapted from the Low Countries in the early seventeenth century . The east wing of the house , however , is based on Wormleighton Manor , a Spencer @-@ Churchill family estate in England .

The original boundary of Virginia House property , recorded in the Clerk 's Office of the Circuit Court of the County of Henrico , Virginia , is described as lot 9 , Block 41 , Windsor Farms , in the plan of Windsor Farms made by Allen J. Saville , Inc . , dated September 15 , 1926 . In 1928 , Virginia Weddell requested that a two @-@ story porch be added to expand the master bedroom suite and to build a second @-@ floor sunroom . This was constructed in January 1932 by the contracting firm of Claiborne and Taylor , and was designed again by Henry Morse using Briar Hill sandstone . Further developments were made in the 1930s . On May 29 , 1935 , a shipment of Cotswold Stone Roofing Slate arrived from England , thicker , heavier and lighter in color than Virginia Buckingham Slate , and were used to emphasize the height of the steep roof . On April 14 , 1936 , an adjacent 7 @. @ 77 @-@ acre (31 @, @ 400 m2) lot was purchased to accommodate an expansive landscape plan .

In 1941 , Virginia Weddell hired architect William Lawrence Bottomley and purchased antique stone columns from the Spanish Duke of the Infantado to reconstruct an ancient Spanish loggia on the southwest elevation of the house . Bottomley was able to incorporate the existing parapets , finials and pierced railings and posts from the north library bay windows into the loggia design , with a ceiling reconstructed from a sixteenth @-@ century house on the grounds of a manor in Knole ,

Kent , England . Wall tiles were used which indicated use of gunpowder on the original property . Bottomley , however , was quite critical of his work and believed his loggia was too symmetrical and lacking in the quality of picturesqueness and romance that the rest of the house displayed and proposed an octagonal stairway be added on the outside corner of the loggia . However , his idea was rejected by the Weddells , and it was completed in 1946 . Bottomley was paid \$ 10 @, @ 764 and received a ten percent commission for his drawings and construction .

= = Interior = = =

The interior to Virginia House is elegant with oak furnishings and an assortment of English and Spanish antiques , oriental carpets , silks , and silverware . The first floor consists mainly of large , elaborate rooms , intended for social meetings and to house the functions and exhibits of the Virginia Historical Society . The second floor was restricted and used for the living quarters of the Weddells and their staff although it features a large library , intended to function as the boardroom and research facility of the Virginia Historical Society .

The main entrance hall is a grand , high ceilinged room using oak paneling salvaged from the Warwick Priory . The ornate , " L " shaped staircase is actually a reconstruction of the original sixteenth @-@ century staircase of the priory repurchased from an antique shop in London and includes an acanthus leaf newel cap and overscaled newel posts in its design . The floor in the entrance hall is fashioned from a composite made up of terracotta , asphalt and wood shavings known as zenitherm , with tiles arranged in an irregular rectangular formation . The room beyond the entrance hall also uses oak paneling , but uses materials derived from another English manor house in Warwickshire . The floor is made of wide @-@ plank oak and has a fifteenth @-@ century stained glass oval window in the south wall using leaded glass from the Warwick Priory . A Tudor rose motif is located on the plaster ceiling , and the Weddells hired Italian artisans to complete it in 1925 @-@ 26 . Adjacent to this room to the east is a smaller drawing room , this time with heraldic reliefs on the plaster ceiling and featuring a cylindrical Florentine soapstone fireplace .

The rear hall again uses old oak high paneling and has small six by nine inch oil portraits of Renaissance figures . Freestanding Corinthian columns in the hallway form an ornamental gateway and stained glass doors at the end enter the rear porch arcade . The dining room was furnished with oak from Redbourn Manor in Hertfordshire which was bought later and has an imposing Portland stone fireplace positioned midway in the room . The floor is made of old re @-@ sawn pegged oak and the Tudor rose ceiling motif is repeated in the room . The gallery room is located in the northwest corner of the house , furnished with vertical oak paneling and a zenitherm floor which was to be used for the exhibition of artwork and historic artifacts from the Virginia Historical Society collection . In the southeast wing of the house is the Sulgrave Room , a reproduction of the great hall from the Washington family 's Sulgrave Manor . The fireplace mantel is made of an oak beam , once used at the original priory . Heavy oak timbers are used to construct the open beam ceiling in this room , with mottled plaster walls .

The grand second floor library room is also of major note , with a high cathedralesque ceiling and a grand conference table previously used for board meetings by the Virginia Historical Society . Again , as with the Sulgrave Room , the mantelpiece is made from the Hawkins manor oak and is notably carved with an Old English inscription that reads , " O ye fyre and heate bless ye the Lord . " Behind the library panelling is a secret hidden passage , added at Alexander Weddell 's request , leading to his private study . The rest of the second floor consists of living quarters and bathrooms , including many rooms of staff of the Virginia Historical Society and Virginia Weddell 's bedroom , bath , and study .

= = Gardens = =

Virginia House is set in carefully planned landscape gardens , which contain a diversity of plants and plantings . Virginia Weddell hired the noted landscape architect Charles Gillette in 1927 , and over some twenty years he built more than 8 acres (32 @, @ 000 m2) of scenic gardens containing

close to 1 @, @ 000 types of ornamental plants ? from formal spring displays to wisteria , roses , and sprawling hydrangea that drape balconies and garden rails . The first phase of the plan was to create an informal Tudor @-@ style garden on the original 1 @-@ acre (4 @, @ 000 m2) site that the Weddells purchased for the house site , using a steeply sloping southern hillside by creating interconnecting cascading ponds , flagstone walkways and terraced garden beds . In 1932 , the second phase reworked the original concept by overlaying a cross @-@ axis and planting further beds for flowers such as tulips and iris . The third phase of the plan took place in 1939 , when the Weddells purchased a large adjacent piece of land on the southern side of the house down towards the James River . Gillette extensively planted grass and positioned evergreens in an asymmetrical pattern which he believed would demonstrate a romantic mirroring of the rambling architecture of the house . As of 1990 , Gillette 's original blueprints and notes are preserved in a collection at the Fiske Kimball Fine Arts Library at the University of Virginia . Garden Week tours are held in Virginia House gardens in the spring , attracting thousands of visitors annually .