

= Colross =

Colross , (also historically known as Belle Air and Grasshopper Hall) , is a Georgian mansion in Princeton , New Jersey ; it was built as the center of an estate in the Old Town neighborhood of Alexandria , Virginia . Colross is currently the administration building of Princeton Day School . The Colross property originally occupied the entire 1100 block of Oronoco Street ; Alexandria merchant John Potts developed it as a plantation and began building the mansion in 1799 ? 1800 . In 1803 , Jonathan Swift ? also an Alexandria merchant and a city councilman ? purchased the property and during his ownership continued constructing the mansion . After Swift 's death in 1824 , Colross was purchased by Thomson Francis Mason (1785 ? 1838) , son of Thomson Mason (1759 ? 1820) and grandson of Founding Father George Mason (1725 ? 1792) of Gunston Hall . Mason served as a judge of the Criminal Court of the District of Columbia and as mayor of Alexandria . During his ownership , Mason made Colross his chief homestead ; he substantially modified and added to the mansion . After successive ownerships , the area around Colross became heavily industrialized . The mansion was bought by John Munn in 1929 ; between that year and 1932 it was transported brick @-@ by @-@ brick to Princeton , where in 1958 it was sold to Princeton Day School , which uses it as a school administration building housing its admission and advancement offices .

The Colross mansion is a two @-@ story , brick , Georgian @-@ style structure that features an architectural plan similar to those of Mount Vernon and Woodlawn , and was originally flanked by two wings . The front entrance is covered by a spacious Neoclassical portico supported by wooden doric columns . The roof is topped by a balustraded deck and is further embellished by three Dormer windows .

Following the 2005 purchase of the original Colross site by a real estate development company , an archaeological excavation was undertaken between March and June that year at the behest of the city of Alexandria . Archaeologists uncovered an underground domed brick cistern and evidence of slave outbuildings , in addition to the foundations of the estate 's peripheral walls and several ancillary structures . The excavation of the Colross site resulted in 79 condominium buyers abandoning their purchase agreements because of the delay in construction of a luxury Monarch Condominium project .

Colross served as the venue for several significant Mason family events , including the wedding ceremonies of Thomson Francis Mason 's daughters Sarah Elizabeth Mason (1819 ? 1907) and Virginia Mason (1830 ? 1919) . According to local tradition , two children in the Mason family died on the property and were interred in the estate 's burial vault . Successive owners of the Colross estate claimed it was haunted by the deceased Mason children .

= = History = =

= = = Virginia = = =

The land on which Colross was first located was originally part of the Northern Neck Proprietary , a land grant that Charles II of England awarded to seven of his supporters in 1649 and renewed by an official patent in 1688 . One of these seven supporters , Thomas Colepeper , 2nd Baron Colepeper , acquired the entire area in 1681 ; his grandson , Thomas Fairfax , 6th Lord Fairfax of Cameron , inherited it in 1719 .

John Potts , a prominent Alexandria merchant , developed the Colross property as a plantation . He began building a brick mansion on the property between 1799 and 1800 . Potts encountered financial difficulties and placed the unfinished mansion on the market in 1801 . In December 1803 , Jonathan Swift , a merchant and Freemason , bought the property for \$ 9 @,@ 000 . Swift purchased Colross for his bride , Anne Roberdeau , daughter of Brigadier General Daniel Roberdeau (1727 ? 1795) . Some sources say Swift 's wife reportedly named the estate Belle Air ; according to other sources , Swift referred to his estate as both " Belle Air " and " Grasshopper Hall " . Swift presided over Alexandria City Council from 1822 through 1823 . His wife , two daughters ,

and three sons lived with him at the mansion . As Alexandria expanded , Colross evolved from a rural plantation into an urban estate . Between 1791 and 1847 , the city of Alexandria was a part of Alexandria County within the District of Columbia . Swift continued to construct the mansion . After his death in 1824 , the estate transferred to the ownership of Lee Massey Alexander and his sister , Mrs. Chapman . The Alexander family owned the estate for a brief period ; they renamed it " Colross " .

Colross was then purchased by Thomson Francis Mason (1785 ? 1838) , a prominent jurist , lawyer , councilman , judge of the Criminal Court of the District of Columbia , and mayor of Alexandria between 1827 and 1830 . Mason was the eldest son of Thomson Mason (1759 ? 1820) , and was the grandson of U.S. Founding Father George Mason (1725 ? 1792) of Gunston Hall . According to Mason 's daughter Virginia Mason Davidge , her father won Colross " at a game of cards " from Lee Massey Alexander . Mason used Colross as his chief homestead and made substantial modifications and additions to it . Mason built a 10 ft (3 @. @ 0 m) high brick wall around the exterior of the Colross property . Around the same time Mason acquired Colross , he built Huntley in Fairfax County , Virginia as a rural retreat and summer villa . Mason 's son , Arthur " Pen " Pendleton Mason (1835 ? 1893) , later inherited the Colross estate . Pen Mason was married to Mary Ellen Campbell , a daughter of John Archibald Campbell (1811 ? 1889) , an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States . Orlando B. Willcox , who later served as a Union Army general , visited Colross on several occasions around 1851 ; he described it as a " fine house and ground and the chief residence of the Masons of Alexandria , much frequented by officers of the army " . Willcox also remarked on the " hospitality and civility of the head of the house " , Pen Mason 's mother , Elizabeth " Betsey " Clapham Price (1802 ? 1873) .

During the American Civil War , Colross was seized by Union authorities . According to local tradition and to Alexandria resident Julian Taylor , at least two Union deserters were executed with their backs against the estate 's high brick exterior wall . In addition , a " famous ' bounty jumper ' " by the name of Downey was also shot and killed against the wall after being captured by his own soldiers . Local traditions also tell of the ghost of a soldier who haunts the former location of the estate 's brick perimeter wall .

William Albert Smoot , a lumber merchant and coal businessman , purchased Colross from the Mason family and lived there with his family between 1885 and 1917 . Smoot 's wife was a member of the Alexander family , and was therefore a descendant of the estate 's former owners . While there , the Smoots ' daughter Betty wrote , " the grounds included a whole square block and were enclosed with an ancient brick wall ten feet in height " . The Smoots ' son William Albert later served as mayor of Alexandria from 1922 to 1930 .

The parents of Cornell University professor and activist Alice Cook (1903 ? 1998) lived at the then @-@ dilapidated Colross with her father 's superior from the Southern Railway . Her father worked for the railroad 's bookkeeping department . Cook spent her early childhood at the house . In c . 1913 , when Cook was about ten , her mother took her to Colross for a visit . She remarked that Colross " had no gaslights , and running water only in the kitchen " , and that the house " stood in the midst of railroad tracks " . Cook also said the house 's adjacent stables still had horses , the " elegant plaster ceilings " remained intact , and " great oak doors " still stood within the house 's main doorway behind the white columns of the front portico .

In 1917 , another lumber merchant , William Hoge , acquired ownership of the mansion . Under similar circumstances to those of nearby Abingdon , properties surrounding Colross underwent industrialization with the construction of a warehouse complex and ancillary industrial buildings associated with Alexandria Hay & Grain . The mansion at Colross became a storage facility within a lumber yard operated by another planing mill owner . In 1927 , the mansion and the adjacent warehouses were substantially damaged by a tornado , making the mansion uninhabitable .

= = = New Jersey = = =

Between 1929 and 1932 , John Munn purchased the mansion , dismantled it , and shipped the structure brick @-@ by @-@ brick to Princeton , New Jersey , where it was restored . Following

Munn 's death in 1956 , Colross was purchased by Dr. Geoffrey W. Rake . After Rake died in 1958 , Colross was sold to Princeton Day School . The mansion became the school 's administrative building , which it remains to this day . As of 2015 , Colross houses the admission and advancement offices of Princeton Day School , and serves as a venue for the institution 's events .

In Alexandria , the mansion 's remaining brick foundation was buried beneath a slab of reinforced concrete for over 50 years . After the mansion 's relocation , its site was the location ? among other structures ? of a large 50 @-@ truck garage , Andy 's Car Wash , a Dominion Virginia Power substation , and the Hennage Creative Printers facility .

= = Architecture = =

The mansion at Colross was built in the Georgian architectural style between 1799 and 1800 . It is a two @-@ story brick house featuring a rectangular architectural plan , which was originally flanked by two wings . Colross features wide halls and spacious rooms . One wing housed facilities for the estate 's service staff ; the other wing served as a carriage shed . Colross ' architectural plan is similar to that of nearby estates Mount Vernon and Woodlawn , and is an example of the country house style of American colonial architecture common in Maryland and Virginia . It has been described as the " largest and most beautiful mansion ever erected in Alexandria " . The Colross property originally occupied the entire 1100 block of Oronoco Street . The grounds of the estate also contained ancillary outbuildings .

The exterior brick walls of the mansion are laid in a Flemish bond pattern , exhibiting a " well proportioned width " of mortar joint between the bricks . Two sets of double inside chimneys extend above the roofline on each side of the mansion 's main structure . The front façade of the mansion 's main structure , which originally faced Oronoco Street in Alexandria , is five bays wide and contains the house 's front entrance at the first floor 's center bay . The front entrance is covered by a spacious Neoclassical architecture style portico , which is supported by two sets of double wooden doric columns at the front and engaged columns on the brick façade . The portico 's frieze is subordinated to the architrave . The mansion 's front door is topped by a leaded fanlight in the shape of a segmented arch . Leaded sidelights flank both sides of the main doorway . All of the mansion 's windows feature colonial @-@ style lintels .

The mansion 's roof is covered by gray slate and is further embellished with three dormer windows facing from the home 's front façade . The roof is topped by a balustraded deck . Similar moulding contours were used at varying scales throughout the mansion 's exterior construction . The mansion 's cornice is composed of ornamented moldings .

To the north of the mansion was a garden , which was purportedly well known for its boxwoods , lilacs , and roses . The garden remained through the ownership of the Smoot family . A winding path led from the mansion to a large burial vault , which was closed by a great iron lock . According to members of the Smoot family , the lock to the burial vault would " never stay locked more than three days " at a time . A vase of urn stood in the front lawn of the mansion ; according to tradition this marked the location where Pocahontas was baptized . The urn remained in its location throughout the American Civil War and was later acquired by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities .

= = Archeological excavation = =

The former Colross land tract on the 1100 block of Oronoco Street , which is bounded by North Fayette , Oronoco , Henry , and Pendleton streets , was purchased in 2003 by Diamond Properties , a real estate development company with plans to build a mixed @-@ use mid @-@ rise luxury condominium project called Monarch Condominium . In 2005 , Alexandria 's Archaeological Protection Code requirement forced Diamond Properties to halt its construction to allow for an archaeological excavation of the Colross site . The excavation occurred between March and June 2005 , as mandated by the city of Alexandria . Diamond Properties paid R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates Inc . , a cultural resource management firm , approximately \$ 100 @, @ 000 to explore

the site for historical artifacts and to ensure all burial plots had been removed .

While only a few artifacts were recovered , historians said the dig offered a clearer view of early 19th @-@ century life at Colross . Discoveries included an underground domed brick cistern that served as a water purification system and evidence that slaves lived in outbuildings on the Colross estate . Archaeologists also discovered the mansion 's original basement floor , which was laid in a herringbone bond . Evidence of the estate 's exterior walls , the foundations of the smokehouse , stables , and a burial vault were also unearthed . In the northwestern portion of the property , what is thought to have been the foundation of a rectangular burial vault was found . No burial remains were discovered . All interments were presumably removed in the early 20th century . Thomson Francis Mason was originally interred at the Colross graveyard in 1838 , as were two of his daughters . Subsequent residents had their remains reinterred at Christ Church Episcopal Cemetery in Alexandria . According to the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership , the delay in construction caused 79 condominium buyers to abandon their purchases .

= = Significant Mason family events = =

The Colross estate was the location for several significant events involving the Mason family . Sarah Elizabeth Mason (1819 ? 1907) , a daughter of Thomson Francis Mason and his wife Elizabeth Clapham Price , married St. George Tucker Campbell at Colross on November 17 , 1841 . Virginia Mason (1830 ? 1919) , another daughter of Thomson and Elizabeth married William Hathorn Stewart Davidge at Colross on February 1 , 1853 . Colross was also the venue for the funeral of Mrs. Virginia King , wife of Dr. Benjamin King , on December 31 , 1850 . Mrs. King was a sister of Mrs. Judge Mason .

According to local tradition , two small Mason children , William and Ann , were playing in the estate 's yard when a storm arrived . William took shelter in the estate 's chicken coop but the wind toppled the structure , killing him . Soon after William 's death , his sister Ann drowned in a bathtub at Colross . Both children were interred in the estate 's burial vault in the garden . Successive residents at Colross , including members of the Smoot family , claimed the estate was haunted by the deceased Mason children ; they reported hearing children " giggling , singing , and talking " , and witnessed apparitions of children in pre @-@ Civil War attire .