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## Sweet Briar, 1800-1900: Palladian Plantation House, Italianate Villa, Aesthetic Retreat

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## Introduction

### Thesis Statement

Sweet Briar House is one of the best-documented sites in Virginia, with evidence ranging from architectural drawings and extensive archival sources to original furnishings. It is worthy of national recognition, but the significance of this major nineteenth-century house has only now been fully considered. The intent of this dissertation is to examine the evolution of the house during the nineteenth century and to address the three distinct phases of its appearance: the Palladian plantation house (1800-1850), the Italianate villa (c. 1850), and the Aesthetic retreat (1876-1900). As a result of this examination, three theses will be advanced. The first thesis proposes that the double portico motif introduced by Palladio at the Villa Cornaro in the sixteenth century became the fundamental motif of Palladianism in Virginia architecture, generating a line of offspring that proliferated in the eighteenth century and beyond. The second thesis advances the contention that by renovating their Palladian house into an Italianate villa, the asymmetrical style of which broke away from Classical regularity, the Fletcher family implemented an ideal solution between balanced façade that characterized Sweet Briar House I and the fashionable Picturesque advocated by A. J. Downing that dominated American building in the second half of the nineteenth century. The third thesis maintains that the Williams family's decision to transform Sweet Briar House into an Aesthetic Movement retreat was inspired by their visit to the Centennial Exhibition in 1876, where visitors were presented with an unimaginable array of artistic possibilities from countless eras and nations, exactly the conditions that the Aesthetic Movement needed to flourish in America.

## Justification

This dissertation will establish the importance of Sweet Briar House on multiple fronts: as the home of a series of major figures in Virginia history, including Elijah Fletcher (1789-1858), a civic leader and agricultural innovator, and his daughter Indiana Fletcher Williams (1828-1900), who inherited the house and founded Sweet Briar College; as a manifestation of important stylistic movements in architecture and design throughout the nineteenth century; and as a repository of archival collections and original furnishings that make it possible to tell the story of the widely traveled, literate, and educated family who occupied Sweet Briar House from 1830 to 1900. Most importantly, it will answer the question of why this Virginia house looked as it did throughout its three primary periods: the Palladian plantation house, the Italianate villa, and the Aesthetic retreat. These questions will be answered through an examination of issues of national and international importance: Palladianism, the Italianate villa, and the Aesthetic Movement.

Such a study is useful, as there are few scholars actively engaged in the study of Virginia architecture, especially with a focus on “Victorian” taste. Therefore, this project represents the exploration of fresh territory and an opportunity to make significant contributions to the field. It is also distinguished by the extensive holdings of Fletcher family papers available to the author; despite their survival, and the importance of Sweet Briar House to the study of Virginia architecture and to the history of Sweet Briar College, no single study dedicated to it has been carried out until now. The material in the appendices will be useful to those interested in Sweet Briar House and the Fletcher-Williams family as well as in the larger issue of Palladian architecture in Virginia.

## Methods

The methodologies employed in this dissertation include review of primary source materials in the Sweet Briar College archives, application of connoisseurship to the architecture and decorative arts collections of the Fletcher-Williams family, determination of appropriate historical context and attendant social history, and stylistic analysis demonstrating the links between Sweet Briar House, its architecture and contents, and broader national and international movements.

Research began with an assessment of primary and secondary source materials related to the Fletcher-Williams family at Sweet Briar College, including archival holdings and the decorative arts collected by the family during the nineteenth century, as well as twentieth century publications focused on them. As director of the Sweet Briar Museum, the author has been fortunate to have unfettered access to all of these. The depth and richness of these collections demonstrated that a scholarly study of the importance of Sweet Briar House could be supported by examining them in relation to the secondary sources outlined below, as well as those found in the bibliography. The archives themselves have never been fully catalogued or even assessed; the author is the first to conduct a systematic overview of these materials and has organized them according to chronological sequence.

As Deborah Howard memorably remarked three decades ago in her review essay “Four Centuries of Literature on Palladio,” “more has been written about Palladio than about any other great architect.”<sup>1</sup> Within this vast body of literature, the author has examined sources focusing on Palladianism in Britain and America and followed relevant footnotes to a host of useful if sometimes obscure publications. Because the persistence of the double portico motif concerns

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Howard, “Four Centuries of Literature on Palladio,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 39 (1980), 224.

more than the conscious appreciation of its architectural lineage, an attempt has also been made to survey the ways in which these designs and the spaces they created functioned. As individuals tend to overlook the familiar, the author has turned to dozens of travelers' accounts compiled in the following bibliographies:

Clark, Thomas Dionysius. *Travels in the New South: A Bibliography*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962.

Coulter, E. Merton. *Travels in the Confederate States: A Bibliography*. Wendell, N.C.: Broadfoot's Bookmark, 1981.

McKinstry, E. Richard. *Personal Accounts of Events, Travels, and Everyday Life in America: An Annotated Bibliography*. Winterthur: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997.

The specific travel accounts from these sources that contain useful information appear in the bibliography.

For architecture in Virginia, the resources at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources are invaluable and allowed the author to establish the widespread proliferation—if not the exact number—of double portico houses in the state. Files on individual houses are organized by county, and these have been digitized. The author has reviewed thousands of these records, a mind-numbing task were it not for the frequent thrill of discovery. Other useful materials accessible at the DHR include the Ferrol Briggs scrapbooks, the *Virginia Landmarks Register*, and files compiled by the authors of *Lost Virginia*, the important publication on vanished Virginia architecture by Bryan Green, Calder Loth, and William Rasmussen. As stated in the preface to this book, there are “hundreds, if not thousands, of buildings of architectural interest that the commonwealth has lost...[and] a number of these buildings cannot be resurrected

because they were never photographed, sketched, or even described,” and so to determine the exact number of double portico houses built in Virginia is impossible.<sup>2</sup>

Without a doubt, the Edward King House built by Richard Upjohn in Newport, Rhode Island, and published by A. J. Downing in *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850) provided the model for the renovation of Sweet Briar House as an Italianate villa. Two copies of another of Downing’s publications, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America: With a View to the Improvement of Country Residences; with Remarks on Rural Architecture*, owned by the Fletchers survive in the archival collections at Sweet Briar College. In an effort to understand the appeal of this Romantic style, and the ways in which it was perceived by a nineteenth-century audience, the author reviewed the British and American patternbooks, publications, and relevant periodicals in the incomparable holdings of the Winterthur Library from the years 1835 to 1851, when the renovations at Sweet Briar House commenced.

The Williams family visited Philadelphia’s Centennial Exhibition, and their copy of J. S. Ingram’s 700+ page catalogue, *The Centennial Exposition Described and Illustrated: Being a Concise and Graphic Description of this Grand Enterprise Commemorative of the First Centenary [sic] of American Independence* (1876), exists in the Rare Books Collection in Cochran Library at Sweet Briar College. To more fully appreciate the experience of visiting this international exposition, and the impact of the Japanese displays, the author reviewed all of the nineteenth-century Centennial publications available at the Winterthur Museum and in the Philadelphia area. The vast collection of official stereographs at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, as well as scrapbooks and collections of ephemera maintained there and in the

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<sup>2</sup> Bryan Clark Green, Calder Loth and William Rasmussen, *Lost Virginia: Vanished Architecture of the Old Dominion*. Charlottesville: Howell Press, 2001, p. xxiii.

collections of the Winterthur and Hagley Museums and the Free Library of Philadelphia, were also consulted.

### Organization

This dissertation is organized as an introduction, six chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and three appendices. The introduction contains the thesis statement, justification, methods, organization, and a review of background literature. Chapter 1, titled “Elijah Fletcher, 1789-1858: From Vermont to Virginia,” provides the background on Fletcher’s life from his childhood in Vermont to his college education, arrival in Virginia and marriage to Maria Antoinette Crawford in 1813. It will examine the milieu in which the Crawfords and other prominent planter families lived and Fletcher’s rise to prominence in Lynchburg.

Chapter 2, titled “Sweet Briar House I: Palladianism (c. 1800-1850),” establishes, to the extent it is possible without invasive measures, the original form of the house with particular attention to the double portico feature introduced by Andrea Palladio at the Villa Cornaro in the mid-sixteenth century (figure 2.2). This architectural element is a descendent of the first Palladian portico in Virginia, and as such it belongs to an enormous family of such porticos. It is anticipated that this is the first major project to demonstrate the extent to which the distinct Palladian pattern set at the Second Williamsburg Capitol in the 1750s proliferated in Virginia.

Chapter 3, titled “The Fletchers at Sweet Briar Plantation and Abroad,” examines the education and experiences of the Fletcher children, especially Indiana and Elizabeth—and in particular their Grand Tour of Europe in the 1840s—when they viewed firsthand the Italian architecture that provided the inspiration for the renovation plan carried out at Sweet Briar House the following decade.

Chapter 4, titled “Sweet Briar House II: The Italianate Villa (1851-1852),” demonstrates that the renovated façade was derived from Upjohn’s King Villa, which was published and praised in Downing’s *Architecture of Country Houses* (1850). This chapter will trace the metamorphosis of the villa from Italy to England and then to America, examine the question of architectural attribution and sources, and trace the relation of Sweet Briar House II to the national and regional cycles of domestic Italianate architecture. It will include a discussion of the furnishings and interior elements that were added as part of the renovation program.

Chapter 5, titled “The Will, the War, and the Williams Family at Sweet Briar (1861-1875),” refutes the long-accepted notion that Indiana Fletcher inherited Sweet Briar from her father when his property was divided at the time of his death in 1858. Examination of Elijah Fletcher’s will in conjunction with family papers and letters, and deeds in the Amherst County Courthouse, demonstrates that the process by which Sweet Briar became her property was far more complex. It offers new information regarding her experiences during the Civil War, her marriage to James Henry Williams in 1865, their immediate relocation to New York City, and the importance they placed on Sweet Briar as a country retreat through the latter part of the century, a period during which they divided their time between New York and Virginia.

Chapter 6, titled “Sweet Briar House III: Aesthetic Retreat (1876-1900),” documents the history of the Aesthetic Movement, in particular its introduction to America via the Centennial Exhibition held in Philadelphia in 1876, where visitors were presented with an unimaginable array of artistic possibilities from countless eras and nations, exactly the conditions that the Aesthetic Movement needed to flourish in America. It will demonstrate that the Williams family’s decision to transform Sweet Briar House into an Aesthetic Movement retreat



was inspired by their reaction to the Centennial, and in particular by their appreciation for the Japanese objects presented there.

The conclusion will restate the information from the abstract and reiterate the thesis statements. It will also contain a brief summary of the establishment of Sweet Briar College in 1901. The bibliography follows the conclusion, and is followed by three appendices. Appendix I presents the distribution of double portico houses in Virginia by county. Appendix II consists of an alphabetical list of the double portico houses in Virginia dated before the mid-nineteenth century. Appendix III contains a listing of more than one hundred Japanese objects listed in the estate of Indiana Fletcher Williams.

#### Review of Scholarly Literature

The most recent relevant scholarship on Virginia architecture is *Prodigy Houses of Virginia: Architecture and the Native Elite* by Barbara Burlison Mooney (2008), which examines a core group of eighteenth-century houses within the context of elite patronage. In *The Architecture of Jefferson Country: Charlottesville and Albemarle County, Virginia* (2000), K. Edward Lay reiterates the importance of the double portico as a seminal motif of Palladian design. Mills Lane's *Architecture of the Old South: Virginia* (1987; revised 1996) presents a broadly based overview, but its usefulness is marginal compared to the seminal publication *The Making of Virginia Architecture* (1992). This work by four scholarly authorities accompanied an exhibition at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts which included the unattributed architectural rendering of Sweet Briar House, and research carried out for this dissertation has made it possible to revise the information in the catalogue entry.

The literature focused on the Fletcher-Williams family has been of varying quality. In 1957, a college employee published an article on Elijah Fletcher in a local magazine, and in 1965, she edited and published his letters. The article was reprinted, without revision, as a booklet by the Sweet Briar Museum in the late 1990s. The former museum director wrote two more books to accompany it, one on Indiana Fletcher Williams and one on her daughter Daisy. While the rich holdings of the family papers in the Sweet Briar College archives were consulted for these, the result is of a decidedly antiquarian nature. Several scholarly manuscripts by college faculty, including members of the history, English, classics, anthropology, and environmental sciences departments, have considered the nineteenth-century plantation history of Sweet Briar.

Despite these sporadic incursions, the Sweet Briar archives present an extensive and largely unmined resource for scholarship. Included in it are the family's books and hundreds of papers, ranging in date from 1810 to 1900, and comprising all manner of documents such as letters to and from family members, diaries, receipts, business records and photographs. One oral history exists, by Signora Hollins, a woman who worked for the Williams family and remained at Sweet Briar throughout the nineteenth century and during its transition to a college.

There are several nineteenth-century sources on the Fletcher family. Elijah Fletcher was profiled in John Livingston's *Portraits and Memoirs of Eminent Americans Now Living: With Biographical and Historical Memoirs of their Lives and Actions*. Published in 1854, it details Fletcher's influence as a progressive planter and newspaperman and Sweet Briar House, which was described as "picturesque and imposing." Fletcher also published *The Virginian*, a Lynchburg newspaper, from 1825 to 1841; fifty-four letters sent from Europe by his children Sidney, Indiana and Elizabeth during their Grand Tour between 1844 and 1846 were printed in

it. Elijah Fletcher's brother Calvin was equally influential in Indianapolis, and nine volumes of his diaries covering the period from 1817-1866 have been published by the Indiana Historical Society. In these, Calvin noted his responses to the letters sent from his family in Virginia, including Elijah and Indiana.

The influence of the Japanese displays at the Centennial Exhibition held in Philadelphia in 1876 has been discussed in several scholarly books, including the exhibition catalogue from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Japan Goes to the World's Fairs: Japanese Art at the Great Expositions in Europe and The United States, 1867-1904* (2005) and *The Japan Idea: Art and Life in Victorian America* by William Hosley (1990). For information on the Aesthetic Movement, the author has examined the full range of sources from the most recent, Hannah Sigur's *The Influence of Japanese Art on Design* (2008), to the seminal publication on the Aesthetic Movement, *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* by Doreen Bolger Burke, Jonathan Freedman, Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen and others (1986).

Despite its status as the first campus building at Sweet Briar College, Sweet Briar House did not attract scholarly attention until its inclusion in the aforementioned exhibition catalogue *The Making of Virginia Architecture*. Work over the past few years has brought it out of relative obscurity, as the author has presented papers on Sweet Briar House at the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposia of Architectural History and Decorative Arts organized by Dr. Charles Brownell of the Art History department at Virginia Commonwealth University, as well as at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Cultural Studies and Historic Preservation at Salve Regina University, "Creating and Preserving the American Home." The present work provides an expanded study of Sweet Briar House and the extraordinarily literate, educated, and well-traveled family who occupied it

from 1830 to 1900 and shaped it to reflect their evolving taste for a progression of styles that defined nineteenth-century America.

## Chapter 1

### **Elijah Fletcher (1789-1858): From Vermont to Virginia**

#### Introduction

This chapter encompasses Elijah Fletcher's life from his childhood in Vermont through his college education, arrival in Virginia in 1810, marriage to Maria Antoinette Crawford a few years later, and subsequent rise to prominence in Lynchburg, Virginia, during the decades that followed. The evidence presented suggests that as a result of living in straitened circumstances from childhood through the beginnings of his professional career, Fletcher was motivated to seek out opportunities to improve his circumstances, and by extension, those of his family. An advantageous marriage in 1813 allied Fletcher with one of the oldest and most prominent families in Virginia and provided him with the personal and financial means to establish himself as a family man and city father.

This chapter argues that Fletcher's status as an outsider freed him from many of the social constraints imposed upon the local gentry that hindered their success in the same entrepreneurial, civic, and philanthropic arenas in which he excelled. It is based largely upon the definitive source for his life, *The Letters of Elijah Fletcher*, edited by Martha von Briesen and published by the University Press of Virginia in 1965. Other useful sources are the nine volumes of writings by Elijah's brother Calvin (1798-1866), a compendium of diaries and letters published in chronological sequence between 1972 and 1983 by the Indiana Historical Society under the title *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher* and edited by Gayle Thornbrough. The original set

of Elijah's letters edited by von Briesen, along with additional personal and business correspondence and household accounts, is housed in chronological order in the archives of Sweet Briar College's Cochran Library and in the collection of the Sweet Briar Museum. Additional sources, related to Fletcher's properties and their disposition, are maintained at the Amherst County Records Office among the Will Books and Deed Records.

Fletcher was an individual of some note during his own lifetime, and he was included in the laudatory tome *Portraits and Memoirs of Eminent Americans Now Living: With Biographical and Historical Memoirs of their Lives and Actions* published by John Livingston in 1854. In the book's preface, the author expressed his intention that the life stories of those featured "relate the history of those who have succeeded in buffeting the cold waves of poverty—who have successfully braved the storms and tempests of adversity—whose energy and decision of character have overcome every obstacle which surrounded their pathway to eminence and distinction, and who have become prominent in some profession or calling."<sup>3</sup> Elijah Fletcher epitomized the self-made man of the sort described by Livingston, one who rose from poverty to prominence, and the section in this book devoted to detailing his successes can be found alongside entries on Jefferson Davis and Franklin Pierce. At the time of the publication, Fletcher resided in Amherst, Virginia, and his profession was given as "Planter." While technically accurate, it is critical to note that Fletcher had little in common with the southern planters who saw themselves as natural aristocrats. His roots were in the rocky and thin soil of Vermont, where his family shaped the town of Ludlow out of the wilderness and raised fifteen children in circumstances that are best described as genteel poverty supported by religious piety. Fletcher's

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<sup>3</sup> John Livingston, *Portraits and Memoirs of Eminent Americans Now Living: With Biographical and Historical Memoirs of their Lives and Actions*. Volume III. (New York: Cornish, Lamport and Co., 1854), vi.

reasons for leaving his home, and subsequent success in Virginia, can be traced to his family's struggles, which he felt keenly throughout his life.

### Life in Vermont

In 1782, Elijah's parents Jesse and Lucy Keyes Fletcher migrated from their home state of Massachusetts to Ludlow, Vermont. At that time, only one other family had settled permanently in what was described as "thousands of acres of howling wilderness."<sup>4</sup> Despite the amount of land available, the Fletchers could afford only one hundred acres, and it was there that they established the farm that would remain in their family until the mid-twentieth century. Jesse's role in shaping the fortunes of Ludlow was no less influential; he served variously as selectman, clerk, treasurer, representative to the state legislature, and justice of the peace for the town. These activities may have taken time away from developing successful farming techniques; as described later by his son Calvin, Jesse was "no trader nor very skilful in husbandry, & having thus to overcome these obstacles [sic] before him, he labored hard and lived poor. He was a real Puritan in many things and uncommonly rigid in relations to the Sabbath."<sup>5</sup> Jesse therefore provided a model of civic duty, hard work, and adherence to religion. He seemed less concerned about providing and sustaining opportunities for the education of his children, but the school fees for all of them may have been unaffordable.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Calvin Fletcher, *The Diaries of Calvin Fletcher* ed. Gayle Thornbrough (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1972-1983), xix.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the Fletcher family members and their role in establishing Ludlow, Vermont, see Calvin Fletcher, *The Diaries of Calvin Fletcher* ed. Gayle Thornbrough (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1972-1983); Martha von Briesen, ed., *The Letters of Elijah Fletcher* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1965); and Joseph N. Harris, *History of Ludlow, Vermont* (Charlestown, NH: Charlestown Publishers, 1949). The last of the Fletchers passed away without heirs in the 1960s; the farm established by Jesse and Lucy

Only Elijah, born in 1789, would graduate from college, the cost of which was financed by loans from various friends and relatives. This uncertainty of funding meant that his schooling was sporadic; at the age of fifteen, Elijah was sent to Westford Academy in Massachusetts, which was better equipped to prepare him for collegiate study than the Ludlow school. He then returned to Vermont to spend two years at Middlebury, next a year at Dartmouth, returned to Middlebury for another year, and finally graduated from the University of Vermont in 1810. Two years later, he was still quibbling with the university over the bill from his last term there, in the amount of seven dollars.<sup>7</sup>

As the only child in the family to receive the benefit of a college education, Elijah Fletcher felt acutely the obligation to repay his loans as well as the confidence placed in him. While still in school, he received a job offer of \$600 per year from the Raleigh Academy in North Carolina.<sup>8</sup> In accepting this position, Fletcher improved his financial situation as well as his prospects for social advancement. The primary motivation of northerners teaching in the south was the opportunity to earn a generous salary, up to four times the amount offered in northern academies. Males of a middle-class background often became teachers as a means to pay off debt, to amass a sum of money sufficient to launch other pursuits, or to enter the more prestigious professions such as the clergy, law or medicine.<sup>9</sup>

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Fletcher now operates as the Fletcher Farm School for the Arts and Crafts under the auspices of the Fletcher Farm Foundation, Inc.

<sup>7</sup> See von Brisen, *Letters*, Appendix II: Receipts for Educational Expenses of Elijah Fletcher,” 278.

<sup>8</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Jesse Fletcher, Burlington, Vermont, 20 April 1810, Sweet Briar College Archives, Cochran Library (hereafter cited as SBC).

<sup>9</sup> A fair amount of scholarly attention has been paid to the phenomenon of northern teachers who found employment in the southern states. For particularly salient sources, see Lee Furr, “Antebellum Piedmont Virginia: The Land of Sodom or a Land of Opportunity? The lives and impressions of three transplanted New Englanders” (Master’s thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2003); Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American*



## Arrival in Virginia

While Fletcher intended to fulfill his obligation to the North Carolina academy when he left Vermont in 1810, he quickly found that tolls, hay for his horse, lodging, and the cost of the full meals expected by his traveling companions exceeded the funds he had borrowed to finance his journey. He made it as far as Alexandria, Virginia, where he managed to trade his position in North Carolina with that of a teacher at a local academy. Soon afterwards, he began boarding with the venerable Mason family in exchange for tutoring their children; when he wrote his father of his plans to remain in Virginia, Fletcher explained “There is scarce any object but we can obtain by proper exertion, and prudent means. I have an ambition to make myself respectable. I am sensible I possess no extraordinary gift or talent, and to gratify my ambition nothing will do but industry, labor, and the practice of virtue.”<sup>10</sup> These lines reveal important information about Fletcher’s character and self-perception. Following Jesse’s model, he was willing to work hard and live modestly. He did not see himself as naturally inclined to one profession over another, but the ambition he noted suggests that even in his first few months as a teacher, Fletcher yearned for a more prestigious position in society.

In other early letters Fletcher related several key differences—religious, social, and economic—between the life he was accustomed to and the lifestyle of the genteel southerners among whom he would spend the rest of his life, adjusting to their society without ever thoroughly acclimating to it. These differences provide a way to analyze, in more than miles, the distance that Fletcher traveled from Vermont to Virginia. Although raised as a strict Congregationalist, and noting that every kind of church was represented in Alexandria, Fletcher

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*Society* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); Elizabeth Brown Pryor, “An Anomalous Person: The Northern Teacher in Plantation Society, 1773-1860,” *Journal of Southern History* 13 (Spring 1980): 367-371.

<sup>10</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Jesse Fletcher, Alexandria, Virginia, 11 January 1811, SBC.

wrote “I always attend the Episcopalian and conform to the religion of the family and the Principal of the Academy,” demonstrating a willingness to sacrifice his tradition of worship for the opportunity of social advancement.<sup>11</sup>

Fletcher also carefully provided examples to back up his observation that “[t]he manners, and customs, and conduct of the inhabitants are something different here from what they are in Vermont. The planters and their sons appear and dress with rich and neat apparel. They live in idleness and some dissipation.”<sup>12</sup> He was quick to attribute this to the ubiquity of slaves in appeasing all wants and carrying out all of the labor required by their owners, and noted that General Mason had no particular occupation. Fletcher also recorded with avid attention the central role played by women—“who wear the breeches”—among the Virginia gentry, and quickly determined that the best means by which to attract and maintain the approbation of society was to defer to the women, whose good opinions, by extension, were shared by their husbands.<sup>13</sup> It took him longer to adjust to the role of children in southern society, where they seemed on equal footing with adults.

Despite his initial lack of familiarity with the rhythms of southern life, Fletcher was surprised and gratified to find, as was the case for most private tutors, that he was treated as one of the Mason family, to the extent of having two slaves designated for his use. From his earliest days in Alexandria, Fletcher sent the majority of his salary back to Vermont, and the ease of his circumstances with the Mason family was not enough to dispel his primary concern with establishing financial independence. When the opportunity for advancement presented itself early in 1811, though he acknowledged “My situation was agreeable, my task not laborious, my

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<sup>11</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Jesse Fletcher, Alexandria, Virginia, 1 October 1810, SBC.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Jesse Fletcher, Alexandria, Virginia, 31 October 1810, SBC

salary decent, and a great desire in my employers to have me stay...I had an ambition to be first,” and so Fletcher accepted a position as the president of an academy in New Glasgow, Virginia.<sup>14</sup>

### Life and Marriage in the Virginia Piedmont

This position was offered to Fletcher by David Shepherd Garland, a prominent lawyer, landowner and congressman from Amherst County, Virginia. Garland, who was married to a niece of Patrick Henry, was also known as “King David” due to his wealth and influence, and the New Glasgow Academy was located near his substantial residence, Brick House. As president of the academy, Fletcher was given use of a house, and earned a salary of \$1000 per year.<sup>15</sup>

Almost immediately he began the pattern of financial support that was to define his relationship with his family in Vermont for the rest of their lives. Although he paid off the money borrowed for his education in his first year of employment, Fletcher continued to send large sums to his family to reduce their debts, pay for his siblings’ school fees, and help them purchase houses and farms. In doing so, he was able to live up to the expectations engendered by the investment—financial and otherwise—made when he was singled out as the only child in the family to receive a college education.

Although he lived independently, his status as president of the academy ensured that Fletcher was included in the social pursuits of the local gentry, which included the prominent Cabell and Crawford families. In 1813, he wrote to inform his father of matrimonial plans, relating that “I have long been intimate with a most amiable, accomplished, sensible Lady, of one of the most rich, extensive, respectable families in the State. She is Cousin to the present

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<sup>14</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Jesse Fletcher, Alexandria, Virginia, n.d. March 1811, SBC.

<sup>15</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Jesse Fletcher, New Glasgow, Virginia, 9 June 1811, SBC.

Vice President...the family is generally noted for their talents and respectability. Everything is agreeable. I never have, & I am sensible I never shall, meet with another so interesting.”<sup>16</sup>

Fletcher described in detail his fiancée’s home, Tusculum, the impressive plantation house of her father William S. Crawford, a Princeton-educated lawyer, where the floors were carpeted, there was a silver service for tea and another for coffee, a set of twenty-four Windsor chairs lined the long front porch, and the ladies “dress in their silks daily but have too much good sense to be proud.”<sup>17</sup> The oldest daughter, Maria Antoinette, married Fletcher later that year, and thus he was allied with two of Virginia’s oldest and most respected families, the Penns and the Crawfords.

After two years in Virginia, Fletcher would have been keenly aware of the value of that connection, as family ties and heritage were the currency by which most members of the Virginia gentry calculated their worth. Maria’s grandfather was Gabriel Penn, who fought in the French and Indian Wars under William Byrd, and served as captain of the Amherst County recruits in the American Revolution. He was a magistrate who ran a successful mercantile business, and also a delegate to the committee that crafted Virginia’s “Declaration of Rights” in 1776. His cousin John Penn was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and another relation was the Quaker leader William Penn. In 1761 Gabriel Penn had married Sarah Callaway of Bedford County, and it was their daughter Sophia who married William S. Crawford, who established a successful legal practice in Amherst County where he served as clerk of the court for twenty-five years, until his death in 1815.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Jesse Fletcher, New Glasgow, Virginia, 6 November 1812, SBC.

<sup>17</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Jesse Fletcher, New Glasgow, Virginia, 7 February 1813, SBC.

<sup>18</sup> The genealogical information included here comes from an unpublished manuscript based on records in the Amherst County Courthouse and from private collections by Judith Evans-Grubbs, “Elijah Fletcher and the Amherst Community” (Unpublished manuscript, 2004, SBC). For the

After their marriage Maria joined her new husband at the president's house attached to the New Glasgow Academy, and in addition to the slaves she received as a marriage portion, Crawford gave her two more intended for Fletcher's personal use. Though his fortunes had improved to the point that he was able to send money to Vermont for presents as well as for more pressing expenses, as late as 1813, he was still haggling with the University of Vermont over expenses totaling \$7.50.<sup>19</sup> Although well able to pay the amount in question, Fletcher detailed his side of the argument, referring to letters written in 1810 and afterwards, and eventually prevailed in the matter. This tenacity, ability to follow a paper trail, and scrupulous attention to a sum that could easily have been considered trifling served Fletcher well in a matter that would preoccupy him for the next thirty years.

At the time of Crawford's death in 1815, all of his brothers-in-law were minors, and so Fletcher served as executor of his father-in-law's extensive estate, an undertaking greatly complicated by the fact that Crawford left no will. At this time he resigned his position as president of the New Glasgow Academy, perhaps because he felt that by serving as executor for the estate of a prominent individual with vast holdings he had achieved the respectability he sought to earn from his first weeks in Virginia. From his description of his responsibilities, however, it seems more likely that his attention was completely absorbed by settling the affairs of his in-laws. Fletcher stated a few weeks after Crawford's death that "I hardly have a day I that I can call my own. The management of all Mr. Crawford's affairs devolving upon me makes my

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importance of family ties and social status in Virginia, please see Barbara B. Mooney, *Prodigy Houses of Virginia: Architecture and the Native Elite* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2008); William M. S. Rasmussen and Robert S. Tilton, eds, *Old Virginia: The Pursuit of a Pastoral Ideal* (Charlottesville: Howell Press, 2003); Edward Ayers and John C. Willis, eds., *The Edge of the South: Life in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991); and Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Jesse Fletcher, New Glasgow, Virginia, 7 February 1813, SBC.

tasks arduous. He was a man of extensive concerns and great estate. He left his affairs much deranged and unsettled, which renders the settlement of his concerns doubly troublesome...

I have to manage all the Plantations, or at least visit them now and then to see if the overseers are going on well.”<sup>20</sup>

Although Fletcher had described the Crawfords to his father in 1813 as among the richest families in Virginia, the knowledge he gained of their financial situation in his role as executor made clear that the family had few liquid assets as most of their holdings took the form of slaves, acreage, and debts owed to the family. Fletcher, whose reconciling of the smallest sums has been detailed above, gave the situation his full attention and pursued a sequential campaign of lawsuits against many individuals in Amherst County—the Crawfords’ friends and neighbors—for unpaid debts and unlawful possession of property.<sup>21</sup> Since he had worked hard to clear his own indebtedness, it may have been difficult for Fletcher to comprehend the comfortable way that Virginia planter society existed within a web of mutually dependent debt. When he sought to recover what the Crawford estate was owed, many individuals found themselves unable to pay, and instead offered land or slaves in exchange for settling their debts. Although some of the lawsuits would take decades to resolve, by 1818 Fletcher had amassed the independent fortune that allowed him to purchase for \$3500 a substantial residence in Lynchburg, where he established himself as a businessman and civic leader (figure 1.1).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Jesse Fletcher, New Glasgow, Virginia, 4 July 4 1815.

<sup>21</sup> The Will Books and Deed Books at the Amherst County Courthouse detail these debts, the lawsuits, and their resolutions. Further documentation can be found in the Indiana Fletcher Williams Papers in Special Collections at Duke University and in the archives at Sweet Briar College.

<sup>22</sup> Lynchburg Deed Book, vol. D, 304, Lynchburg City Court House.

## Life in Lynchburg

Fletcher's first decade in Lynchburg was a time of personal and entrepreneurial growth. From his house, described by a visitor as "the pleasantest residence in town," Fletcher continued his work as executor of the Crawford estate (figure 1.2).<sup>23</sup> The success of commercial ventures in Lynchburg depended largely upon the tobacco trade, but Fletcher noted soon after arriving in Virginia that this crop depleted soil and avoided dealing in it. On his various properties he experimented with silkworms and built profitable gristmills and sawmills. Despite an avowal early in his marriage that "We have no children and hope and pray we never shall have any," the Fletchers' first child, Sidney, was born in 1821 and followed by another son, Lucian, in 1823.<sup>24</sup> A daughter, Laura, was born in 1825, the same year that Fletcher bought *The Virginian*, a Whig newspaper he reinvented as one of only two agricultural papers in the United States, and which appealed to a broad readership outside the state. In 1828, a pair of twins was born to the Fletchers; the surviving girl was named Indiana in honor of Fletcher's brother Calvin, one of the founding fathers of Indianapolis.<sup>25</sup>

The 1820s were a period during which Fletcher began to assume his own role as city father and civic leader. In 1822, he helped found the city's first Episcopal church, organizing the congregation and raising funds to engage a minister. St. Paul's opened its doors in 1826, and Fletcher was listed as the largest contributor.<sup>26</sup> Although he noted of slaves soon after his arrival in Virginia that "...to vindicate the rights of that degraded class of human creatures here would

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Williams to Elijah Fletcher, Newark, New York, 1 June 1846, SBC.

<sup>24</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Jesse Fletcher, New Glasgow, Virginia, 2 May 1846, SBC.

<sup>25</sup> Laura died at the age of two, and Indiana's twin died weeks after his birth.

<sup>26</sup> Katharine Brown, *Hills of the Lord: The Background of the Episcopal Church in Southwestern Virginia* (Roanoke: Diocese of Southwestern Virginia, 1979), 42. Fletcher continued his financial support of St. Paul's throughout his life, and after he made Sweet Briar his primary residence in the 1840s, he supported the building of Ascension Episcopal Church in Amherst, donating the land as well as the church bell.

render me quite unpopular,” by the 1820s Fletcher had become accustomed to their importance in all facets of commerce, and engaged in a steady stream of buying and selling slaves as well as hiring them out, tracking their worth in ledgers.<sup>27</sup> But by 1826, Fletcher was secure enough in his standing to serve as the secretary of the Lynchburg Auxiliary Colonization Society, which was dedicated to raising funds to send free blacks to Liberia. Later that year, he was appointed to the Waterworks Committee, which fulfilled its charge to build a pump house in Lynchburg by the end of the decade. In 1828, Fletcher served on the town council, and, in an action showing that he was willing to acquire the material trappings to augment his status as a city leader of wealth and mobility, ordered an expensive carriage from Philadelphia, which was drawn by a pair of matched grays.<sup>28</sup>

The year he was elected mayor of Lynchburg, an office he would hold twice, Fletcher made a more significant purchase, one that was an unequivocal statement of material success. In 1831 he wrote “I have lately bought me a plantation which Maria talks of settling and spending her summers at...It lies this side of Amherst Court House about twelve miles from here with a large brick house on it. It cost about \$7000. It is paid for as well as all the rest of my property.”<sup>29</sup> This house became known as Sweet Briar, and is the subject of the next chapter.

## Conclusion

This chapter has delineated the personal, financial and social distance traveled by Elijah Fletcher over a period of twenty years, from the time he left Vermont as an impoverished schoolteacher to his rise to prominence as a prosperous civic and business leader in Lynchburg,

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<sup>27</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Jesse Fletcher, Alexandria, Virginia, 11 January 1811, SBC.

<sup>28</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Lynchburg, Virginia, 10 August 1828, SBC.

<sup>29</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Lynchburg, Virginia, 29 March 1831, SBC.



Virginia. It has shown that Fletcher's financial acumen, coupled with his alliance with one of the leading families in the Virginia Piedmont, were crucial factors in establishing the respectability he craved. It has also shown that Fletcher was able to transcend both his religious upbringing and initial scruples regarding slavery to adopt positions more in keeping with those held by the majority of the society in which he found himself, thus solidifying his position among them.

## Chapter 2

### Sweet Briar House I: The Palladian Plantation House (c. 1800-1850)

#### Introduction

This chapter will demonstrate that Sweet Briar House I was part of the seminal lineage generated by the Villa Cornaro, where Andrea Palladio, arguably the most influential of Western architects, introduced the double portico that became the fundamental motif of Palladianism in Virginia. Palladio (1508-1580) was a master of architectural practice, producing churches, civic buildings, palaces, and townhouses, but his villas, in which elements of Italy's classical past were blended with features of traditional Italian farmhouses, represent his most important contribution to building typology. Palladio was also a master of architectural theory (figure 2.1). His treatise *Quattro libri dell'architettura* (1570) is his primary legacy; through it, Palladio's genius was transmitted past Venice and the Veneto, into the rest of Europe, and eventually to America. His designs and theories were received and interpreted widely, and the first complete English translations published in the eighteenth century fostered the development of British Palladianism. Thomas Jefferson was the most ardent recipient of these traditions in America, and his devotion to the flawed edition of Giacomo Leoni and Nicholas Dubois (1715-1720) did not hinder his extraordinary architectural accomplishments. Through Jefferson's hand and intellect, the double portico from the Second Capitol in Williamsburg (1751-1753) was reinterpreted at Monticello I (1769-1784). The prevalence of this design in domestic architecture in Virginia, and the reasons for its widespread adoption, will be linked to a discussion of Sweet Briar House I.

## Andrea Palladio and the Villa Cornaro (1552-1554)

Palladio's biographical details are well known; he benefited from close association with a series of architectural mentors and patrons who facilitated his training, scholarship, and first-hand study of classical architecture. Palladio made remarkable contributions in virtually every category of building, but it was as the architect of country houses for wealthy, ambitious and educated landowners, whose villa designs accommodated agricultural necessities along with the features of a noble residence, that Palladio truly excelled.<sup>30</sup> At the Villa Cornaro, Palladio introduced his signature double portico design into the canon of Western architecture. The

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<sup>30</sup> The quincentenary of Palladio's birth in 2008 was celebrated with an international roster of exhibitions, symposia, and commemorative events demonstrating his primacy of place in Western architecture. The Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio in Venice collaborated with the Royal Institute of British Architects on a comprehensive exhibition documenting Palladio and his architectural legacy at London's Royal Academy. The accompanying catalogue, *Palladio*, edited by CISA director Guido Beltramini and Howard Burns (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2008), is a significant addition to the literature on Palladio. Bruce Boucher's comprehensive *Andrea Palladio: The Architect in His Time* (New York: Abbeville, 2007, second edition), first published in 1994, is an invaluable and now updated reference. For Palladio's civic and church architecture, please see Tracy Cooper's *Palladio's Venice: Architecture and Society in a Renaissance Republic* (London: Yale University Press, 2005). For Palladio's villas, the most recent publication is Luca Trevisan's *Palladio: The Villas* (Rome: Sassi, 2008); despite a particular focus on the decorative programs of the interiors, it is most notable for its lavish photography and foreword by the acknowledged Palladio scholar Lionello Puppi. Branko Mitrovic and Stephen R. Wassell's *Andrea Palladio: Villa Cornaro in Piombino Dese* (New York: Acanthus, 2007) is a meticulous technical examination of this most important villa. Deborah Howard's historiography, "Four Centuries of Literature on Palladio," in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 39, No. 3 (October 1980): 224-241, was published to coincide with the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Palladio's death; the theme of this aged but still powerful work is that the sheer number of publications on Palladio, written in a variety of languages, makes a thorough mastery of the literature impossible for any individual. Howard's essay acknowledged the contributions of several English-language sources, including Puppi's *Andrea Palladio*, translated by Pearl Sanders (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), and James Ackerman's *Palladio* for the "Architect and Society" series (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974). A useful tool for navigating the critical mass of literature on Palladio, which has grown exponentially since Howard's essay appeared, is a carefully edited and well organized bibliography of English-language publications maintained on the RIBA website: <http://www.architecture.com/LibraryDrawingsAndPhotographs/Palladio/EducationAndResource/EducationAndResources.aspx>.

double portico that is the basis of this study consists of the pediment from a classical temple placed over a two-story loggia to form a cohesive unit projecting from the principal façade of a house (figure 2.2).<sup>31</sup> The genesis, development, and implementation of this fundamental architectural design are the topics of this section, and delineate the path that will be followed throughout the chapter to the conclusion.

In Book Two of the *Quattro libri*, Palladio explained his decision to unite elements from a temple with a domestic dwelling:

In all the buildings for farms and also for some in the city I have built a tympanum [*frontespicio*] on the front façade where the principal doors are, because tympanums accentuate the entrance of the house and contribute greatly to the grandeur and magnificence of the building, thus making the front part more imposing than the others; furthermore, they are perfectly suited to the insignia or arms of the patrons, which are usually placed in the middle of facades. The ancients also employed them in their buildings, as one can see from the remains of temples and other public buildings; from what I have said in the preamble to the first book it is very likely that they took this invention and its forms from private buildings, that is, from houses.<sup>32</sup>

Although Palladio was mistaken in his belief that the temple portico was a feature of ancient houses, his use of it embedded a tangible link to the classical past in his designs, and the resultant union of functionality and beauty bestowed on villas incorporating the feature was masterful. The full potential represented by this design, achieved only at the Villa Cornaro, where the projecting double portico is harmoniously integrated with the rest of the building, was the result

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<sup>31</sup> The double portico sunken into the body of the building, though developed simultaneously and applied to the garden façades of the Villa Cornaro and the Villa Pisani is not part of this study.

<sup>32</sup> This quotation is from Robert Tavernor and Richard Schofield, translators, *The Four Books of Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 147. *Frontespicio* is the word used by Palladio, and can be translated variously as pediment, gable, or tympanum.

of Palladio's incremental experimentation with its various elements and his receptiveness to the conventions of vernacular building tradition in the Veneto.<sup>33</sup>

The portico was well established by the sixteenth century, and its prevalence was tied to its usefulness, since this area provided shelter for people and animals as well as storage for agricultural tools and produce (figure 2.3).<sup>34</sup> It also provided a point of access into the house, and Palladio's elegant solution for separating the agricultural functions from the living spaces of his villas created convenient but unobtrusive areas related to farm use. To further differentiate these areas, he elevated the primary entrance of the villa to the piano nobile and applied a temple front directly above it. Even from a distance, the placement of a pediment over the portico conveyed an aura of grandeur and indicated the proper way to enter the house. As one approached, the arms of the owner could be distinguished in the pediment, and as the focal point of the façade, its presence reinforced the family's nobility, prominence, and their ownership of the villa. Despite his affinity for the pedimented portico and conviction of its utility, Palladio was not the first to adopt it for use on a domestic dwelling; Giuliano da Sangallo had incorporated them at the Villa Medici in the late fifteenth century, which offered a regional precedent for this feature (figure 2.4).

The inclusion of a loggia centered in the façade of a house, where it created an open yet shaded room, was another established regional design used at the Villa Medici as well as at the Villa Porto Colleoni (figure 2.5). In the early sixteenth century, another important precedent for

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<sup>33</sup> For an account of sixteenth-century life in the Veneto, and the importance of shared functionality between agriculture and the villa, please see Howard Burns, *Andrea Palladio, 1508-1580: The Portico and the Farmyard* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975).

<sup>34</sup> For the vernacular sources from which Palladio drew, please see Martin Kubelik, "Palladio's Villas in the Tradition of the Veneto Farm," *Assemblage* No. 1 (October 1986), 90-115. Kubelik makes the point that the wooden cottages and traditional, pre-Palladian farmhouses in the region typically included a portico across part of the façade.

the Villa Cornaro design was implemented at the Villa Giustinian, where a two-story loggia applied to the façade was crowned with a gable (figure 2.6). Palladio must have recognized that the elevation of an element traditionally consigned near the ground floor had several advantages: it added visual interest to the façade, and cooling breezes reached the second level, which provided an elevated point from which to view the landscape or monitor the comings and goings of the household and its visitors. The persistence of these spaces in domestic structures was testament to their usefulness, and they gained the imprimatur of a printed authority when the elevation of the Villa of Poggioreale was included in Serlio's *Third Book* published in 1540 (figure 2.7). A decade later, Palladio began to consider ways in which he could retain the functionality of these outdoor areas while endowing them with the beautiful, harmonious, and rational effects of architectural elements derived from classical antiquity.

Palladio first explored the projecting temple portico and loggia combination in a drawing for the Palazzo Chiericati (1551), in which baseless Doric columns on the lower level support the tier of Ionic columns (figure 2.8). In a related study, the upper order is replaced with the Corinthian, but in the final design the temple portico was abandoned, perhaps because the demands of the site required a horizontal, rather than vertical, emphasis across the façade (figure 2.9). Nonetheless, Palladio's initial experimentation with these elements soon found form. By 1552, construction was underway at both the Villa Pisani and the Villa Cornaro, which were distinguished by their status as the only two houses at which the double portico motif was fully realized. Palladio used it on the garden façade of each, though the Villa Pisani featured the Doric and Ionic Orders on four pairs of columns, while the Villa Cornaro featured the Ionic and Corinthian Orders on six pairs (figures 2.10 and 2.11). However, the most significant difference between them was the masterful integration of the projecting double portico at the Villa Cornaro,

which asserts itself against the primary façade of the house, creating another plane for the dynamic play of light and shadow among the columns. The resultant design, a perfect balance of utility, harmony, and beauty, was Palladio's great innovation, and it traveled far beyond the Veneto as a result of his next great accomplishment, the masterwork in which his knowledge of correct architectural principles and his own designs for buildings, both private and public, were buttressed by the finest examples of classical antiquity.

### Palladio's *Quattro libri* and Inigo Jones (1573-1652)

Palladio's placement of the woodcut illustrations for the Villa Pisani and the Villa Cornaro on facing pages in the *Quattro Libri* suggests they were to be studied together, perhaps as variations on a theme, but it is critical to understand that neither house existed as depicted at the time of its publication in 1570 (figure 2.12). The wings of the Villa Pisani were impossible to implement given the constraints of the plot of land on which it stands, and those at the Villa Cornaro were not added until decades after publication. These discrepancies are not anomalous in the *Quattro libri*; it may be that the intervening years between construction and publication fueled Palladio's desire to revisit and update some of his works, adjustments more easily done on the printed page than through actual remodeling. It is also possible that, realizing the audience for his publication was geographically disparate and thus would have scant opportunity for first-hand scrutiny of the buildings, Palladio was less concerned with recording detail than in documenting his most current architectural ideas.<sup>35</sup>

In the *Quattro libri*, Palladio clearly traces the threads of classical theory, architectural practice, and examples of buildings from antiquity that defined his career, espousing the

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<sup>35</sup> Boucher 219.

Renaissance viewpoint that the truths of architecture known to “the Ancients” and lost during the Middle Ages were in the process of being rediscovered. The result is a masterwork, liberally illustrated with useful woodcuts, which could be understood and its principles implemented by everyone from educated and sophisticated patrons to working architects, whose skills in building might be stronger than their ability to interpret complex passages of specialized vocabulary. In Book I, Palladio presents the fundamentals required for building and a detailed examination of the five Orders, the Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite. Book II, devoted to houses, continues to establish the connection between ancient and modern domestic architecture. Hierarchical in organization, Palladio’s designs for his city patrons are followed by the houses of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and his villas, which he considered lesser projects than his palaces, conclude this section. Book III is focused on urban public spaces, in particular roads, bridges, squares, and buildings dedicated to the pursuits of law and exercise that Palladio believed should be adjacent to these areas. Book IV is dedicated to reconstructions of ancient temples, for which Palladio employed meticulous attention to the ornamentation of antiquity, hoping to inspire the design of modern churches, which he considered to be the most important in the hierarchy of buildings. Despite the clarity with which Palladio discussed theoretical and practical matters throughout the *Quattro libri*, the consistency with which he demonstrated the correctness of the ideals governing proportion and form, and the care with which he drew connections between the text and the accompanying, carefully prepared woodcut illustrations, his masterwork served only as a pictorial reference unless one read Italian. It was not until 1580 that the first non-Italian edition of the *Quattro libri* was published, but this translation was in Latin, and limited to Book I. The complete work was not available in a language other than Italian until Roland Fréart de Chambray’s complete French translation of 1650.



The language barrier did not prevent the English architect Inigo Jones from becoming heir to the classical tradition fostered by Palladio.<sup>36</sup> Jones made two trips to Italy; on the second, between 1613-1615, he closely studied Palladio's architecture, annotated his 1601 edition of the *Quattro libri* accordingly, and purchased Palladio's drawings from his son, Silla, and from his fellow architect, Scamozzi.<sup>37</sup> On his return to London, Jones was appointed Surveyor of the King's Works, a position that required him to design various types of architecture befitting the status of the Royal family and its court. Despite first-hand familiarity with Palladio's buildings, ready reference to the *Quattro libri*, and an extensive collection of Palladio's drawings, all of which provided multiple examples of domestic architecture featuring the double portico, and although Jones served the court for almost thirty years, giving him ample opportunity to explore its potential, he never transferred it from a design idea onto a building.

When Jones considered using a pediment and portico in tandem, the result was generally restricted to a single level, and attached rather than freestanding. Only a few of his drawings, including the preliminary design for the Banqueting House (1619) incorporate the double portico (figure 2.13). The penultimate version shows the architect's reconsideration of its inclusion, and the additional straight balustrade that negated the use of the pediment (figure 2.14). Jones' resistance to the double portico cannot be explained by the fact that the combined use of a projecting portico with pediment and columns was strongly associated with Royal authority and

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<sup>36</sup> For general sources on Jones, please see Giles Worsley, *Inigo Jones and the European Classicist Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) and John Summerson, *Inigo Jones* with a foreword by Howard Colvin (New Haven: published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2000); for a source focused on the architect's library and critical responses to sites visited on his travels, please see Christy Anderson, *Inigo Jones and the Classical Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For his drawings, please see John Harris and Gordon Higgott, *Inigo Jones: Complete Architectural Drawings* (New York: The Drawing Center, 1989).

thus reserved for use on their buildings; as Surveyor of the King's Works, Jones would have been more than justified in his use of it.<sup>38</sup> Rather, his reluctance towards the double portico may have been based on personal choice as well as practicality. First, Jones derived his architectural influence from an exceedingly catholic array of sources; although he has often been paired with Palladio—sometimes literally—Giles Worsley has shown him to be equally receptive to Scamozzi and the French-inspired designs of Serlio, and he also must have been attentive to the ideas of Peter Paul Rubens, who visited the English court soon after the publication of *Palazzi di Genova*, his sole architectural work, in 1626.<sup>39</sup> Next, the top level of the double portico, while increasing the appeal of the design when implemented, does serve a limited practical function. Unlike the lower level, which provides shelter along a dedicated entry for those approaching the house, the top level must be sought out, and the area dedicated to it must be carved from the interior of the house. Jones, who spent considerable time in Italy, was acutely aware of the difference in the climate where the double portico was commonly used. Practicality may have trumped aesthetic considerations if he determined that the notable infelicity of the English climate rendered a double portico of limited use, and that the space it required was better dedicated to another purpose.

Jones' career as an architect was effectively halted by the Civil War (1641-1651), but the collapse of the monarchy did eliminate the convention prohibiting the use of the pediment and portico on non-royal buildings, which makes it worthwhile to scrutinize architectural evidence from the second half of the seventeenth century for signs of the double portico. Credit for the earliest inclusion of the pediment/portico combination in domestic British architecture is given to Jones' pupil John Webb, who presented a proposal for Durham House to the Earl of Pembroke in

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<sup>38</sup> Worsley 124.

<sup>39</sup> Worsley 93-122.

1649, the same year Charles I was executed.<sup>40</sup> This design featured a freestanding portico with pediment supported by a giant order. The presentation of this idea to the earl, who had sided against the king, may have been a political statement, but it also marks the entry of a feature formerly reserved for royal use into the mainstream, where it could be appropriated by anyone with the taste to appreciate it and money to transform it into reality.

Although Webb's proposal for Durham House was not realized, it was the first of a series of related designs he made in the 1650s. In 1654, the first freestanding temple portico in Britain, supported by the giant order with Corinthian capitals, was boldly applied to the façade of the Wyne, a crenellated manor house built in the previous century. The projecting pedimented porticos at Amesbury (1661) and Gunnersbury (1658-63; figure 2.15) were both built; an earlier proposal for Belvoir Castle (1655) was not, but all three of these designs were closely related.<sup>41</sup> Though none fit the double portico model, the frequency with which Webb proposed the motif, and its rate of acceptance, suggests that the architect and his patron were flexing their architectural muscles, perhaps in recognition of the parallel between their situation under the Commonwealth and the freedom in the Venetian Republic that had fostered Palladio's innovations.

It was not until the end of the seventeenth century that a design for domestic architecture approaching the double portico motif was implemented in Britain. Roger North, a lawyer and amateur architect, applied a giant order supporting a pediment to Rougham Hall in 1691, and his inclusion of a gallery projecting from the second story brings the design closer to that of the double portico (figure 2.16). North's service to the court of James II included an appointment as the Attorney-General to Queen Mary of Modena, and his refusal to take the oath of allegiance to

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<sup>40</sup> Worsley 180.

<sup>41</sup> Worsley 128.

the newly installed monarchs William and Mary of Orange after the Glorious Revolution ended his career at court; it was then that he purchased Rougham Hall.<sup>42</sup> Given his situation, North's incorporation of the pediment and portico half a century after the prohibition of non-royal use of the design had been lifted may also have conveyed a message of his independence from royal dictate inspired by his antipathy towards the new regime.

### The Rise of British Palladianism

Within a decade, architectural enthusiasts in eighteenth-century Britain witnessed three major developments. Christopher Wren's monumental construction project at St. Paul's Cathedral, carried out over a period of thirty-five years, was completed in 1710, and its the west façade featured the first fully realized double portico in the country (figure 2.17). Five years later, on 30 April 1715, an announcement for a proposed publication by subscription of Palladio's *Quattro libri* appeared. Book I, to be translated into English, French, and Italian, was promised in a month's time by Giacomo Leoni (figure 2.18). Though Leoni's edition is faulty, primarily due to his attempts to improve upon the original through a series of alterations (which included the addition of plates poached from a French edition that never appeared in Palladio's work), the initial publication was issued a few months later. This was an event of great significance, marking the first time that Palladio's complete treatise was available in English, and the last of the four books was published 1720. However, from 1715, when the first one

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<sup>42</sup> Howard Colvin and John Newman, eds. *Of Building: Roger North's Writing on Architecture*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), xi.

became available, Leoni's publication found a wide readership, and served as a conduit to disseminate the great architect's ideas throughout Britain and to America.<sup>43</sup>

Palladianism forms one end of this chain of ideas, which can be considered a legacy from Palladio as important as the *Quattro libri*. A Palladian worthy of the name assimilated the great architect's legacy in practice, in theory, or through a combination of the two, and the most gifted of his followers could skillfully adapt Palladio's principles to a new purpose, thus generating their own extraordinary architectural legacies. In the eighteenth century, Palladio's most important disciples were the British, who found great appeal in the Humanist belief upheld in the *Quattro Libri*, which stated that the true principles of architecture (and art) could be divined from Nature, Reason, and Antiquity; these tenets anchored the other end of this chain of ideas.

As Palladio had turned to the treatises of Vitruvius and Alberti, so too did the British Palladians seek to uphold, understand, and maintain the natural balance of the divine order in architecture through judicious application of the Classical tradition as explicated in the *Quattro libri*, the contents of which could provide general inspiration or offer detailed instruction. The rational organization of Palladio's villa designs, where the seamless combination of noble residences and agricultural operations conferred beauty and convenience upon a gentleman's estate, had natural appeal for British landowners. The model union of agriculture operations and architectural merit developed by Palladio to support sixteenth-century country life in the Veneto,

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<sup>43</sup> Eileen Harris and Nicholas Savage, *British Architectural Books and Writers, 1556-1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 357. This authoritative reference originated with a bibliography compiled by Rudolf Wittkower; it was finished by his student Eileen Harris, and its organization, based on publication type, allows a reader to trace the generations of these publications through the Neoclassical movement. Translations of Palladio are found in the most extensive section, "Writers and their Books," grouped together under P (author) and then by title; within this category, books are arranged chronologically by publication date, earliest to latest. For instance, Leoni's *Quattro Libri* entry (1715) follows that of Godfrey Richards (1663), and is followed by that of Colen Campbell (1728).

readily adapted to the pastoral requirements of eighteenth-century gentry and nobility, reaffirmed Palladio's genius through the frequency and variety with which it was adopted and interpreted in the English countryside.<sup>44</sup>

The fervor with which the British approached Palladianism would seem to offer propitious circumstances for the inclusion of the double portico in domestic architecture. The Villa Cornaro was reproduced as Plate XXXVIII in Leoni's translation of 1721, and half a dozen additional plates featured the double portico design (figure 2.19). In addition to this widely available printed source, the scale and vitality of the double portico at St. Paul's Cathedral represented a particularly fresh and dynamic application that must have affected all those who saw it. But despite its proliferation in print, and the prominence of St. Paul's as an example of built design, the double portico was as little utilized in Britain in the eighteenth century as it had been during the seventeenth, when it hardly stirred from the pages of the *Quattro libri*.

An engraving by George Bickham published in his *Beauties of Stow* (1750; sic) is often mentioned as documenting an example of a double portico, but this design for the south front of Stowe by the architect Giambattista Borra featured an Ionic portico that was never built; perhaps

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<sup>44</sup> From 2 April through 1 August 2010, the Morgan Library in New York hosted *Palladio and His Legacy: A Transatlantic Journey*, an exhibition to include a catalogue with the same title by authors including Guido Beltramini and Calder Loth. Regrettably, this publication from Venice's Marsilio Press will not be available until after the exhibition closes, but it should prove a strong contribution to the field of Palladianism. For a study focused on the most prominent of the British Palladians, please see John Harris, *The Palladian Revival: Lord Burlington, His Villa and Garden at Chiswick* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). Charles E. Brownell's "Laying the Groundwork: The Classical Tradition and Virginia Architecture, 1770-1870" in *The Making of Virginia Architecture* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1992), 34-81 is the most relevant and comprehensive account of the transmission of Palladianism to America. For a history of the movement in Britain which remains relevant though written in 1954, see "Part Four: The Palladian Phase (1710-1750)" in John Summerson's ninth edition of *Architecture in Britain: 1530-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); 295-376. For a fascinating collection of Palladian and neo-Palladian drawings dating between 1615 and 1750, please see John Harris, *The Palladians* (London: Trefoil Books, 1981).

realizing that Bickham had been hasty with its inclusion, his publisher, J. Seeley, omits any reference to it from the accompanying text.<sup>45</sup> The sole example of the double portico implemented in Britain during the eighteenth century occurred at West Wycombe, where improvements carried out by Nicholas Revett with the assistance of John Donowell between 1761 and 1763 included the addition of a double portico with Greek Ionic Orders based on the Temple of Bacchus at Teos in Asia Minor (figure 2.20). Revett and Sir Francis Dashwood, the owner of West Wycombe, were fellow members of the Society of the Dilettanti and had visited this temple during travels with the society. Therefore, despite the horizontal emphasis that is faintly reminiscent of Palladio's treatment of the loggias at the Villa Sarego and Palazzo Chiericati, West Wycombe, remodeled during the period when British Palladianism was on the wane, earned the distinction of being the location of the earliest manifestation of the Greek Revival style in Britain and thus no kinship with the double portico can be claimed.<sup>46</sup>

The reasons for the double loggia's lack of popularity in Britain is readily explained; a climate zone where the opportunity to utilize outdoor space is never certain, no matter what the season, may have encouraged designers and patrons to enclose the majority of areas where the double portico might be incorporated in order to ensure maximum functionality year round. The disparity between temperate Italy, for which Palladio designed his houses, and the folly of erecting one of them in Britain inspired the poet Alexander Pope to dedicate a satiric verse to his patron, Lord Burlington, who was first among the British Palladians. Pope's *Epistle IV: To Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington*, was intended to commemorate the publication of a planned volume of Palladio's designs for the baths, arches and theaters of ancient Rome from

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Gibbon, "Stowe, Buckinghamshire: The House and Garden Buildings and their Designers," *Architectural History* vol. 20 (1977), 31-83.

<sup>46</sup> Summerson 537.

Burlington's collection. The poem, though satiric in nature, offers an evocative description of the perils of placing fashion before function:

You show us, Rome was glorious, not profuse,  
And pompous buildings once were things of use.  
Yet shall (my Lord) your just, your noble rules  
Fill half the land with imitating fools;  
Who random drawings from your sheets shall take,  
And of one beauty many blunders make;  
Load some vain church with old theatric state,  
Turn arcs of triumph to a garden gate;  
Reverse your ornaments, and hang them all  
On some patch'd dog-hole ek'd with ends of wall;  
Then clap four slices of pilaster on't  
That lac'd with bits of rustic, makes a front.  
*Or call the winds through long arcades to roar  
Proud to catch cold at a Venetian door  
Conscious they act a true Palladian part,  
And, if they starve, they starve by rules of art.*<sup>47</sup>

A thorough analysis of the double portico in Britain during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has proven that, despite the generous availability of published sources for the design and manifest opportunities to incorporate it into domestic architecture, the widespread knowledge of a design does not guarantee its adoption, even within the keenly receptive environment of British Palladianism. Like any seed, it required the right conditions to flourish, and by the eighteenth century America provided the most fertile soil for the proliferation of the double portico.

### The Second Williamsburg Capitol (1751-1753)

The double portico was the central feature of the Second Williamsburg Capitol, known as Williamsburg II. This important public building was shaped by the arrival of British

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<sup>47</sup> Alexander Pope, *Of False Taste; An Epistle to the Right Honourable Richard Earl of Burlington. Occasion'd by his publishing Palladio's designs of the baths, arches, theatres, &c. of ancient Rome*, 3rd edn. (London, L. Gilliver, 1731 [i.e. 1732]); italics mine.



Palladianism in America, and its design, construction and widespread influence illuminate the significant developments of this movement as adapted to the particular conditions of Virginia.<sup>48</sup>

From the time it became the government seat in 1699, the plans made for Williamsburg were ambitious, and its capitol building, filling a role both functional and symbolic, was integral to its advancement as a major colonial center. A student at William and Mary College, in a speech delivered for a May Day gathering in 1699, identified the potential presented by this intersection of education and government. He maintained that opportunities for “seeing and conversing among men and being acquainted with action and business” were as important as mastering the college curriculum, and that this could be achieved by the planners

contriving a good town at this place, and filling it with all the selectest and best company that is to be had within the Government. Providence has put into your hands a way of compassing this without charge. I mean without any more charge than you would necessarily be at on another account, Namely the building of the statehouse, which alone will be attended with the seat of the Government, offices, markets, good company and all the rest. There is one thing perhaps worthy of our consideration, that is, that by this method we have an opportunity not only of making a Town, but such a Town as may equal if not outdo Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charlestowne, and Annapolis.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The most comprehensive and recent scholarship on Williamsburg II (also known as the Sixth Statehouse of Virginia) has been carried out by graduate students at Virginia Commonwealth University under the direction of Dr. Charles Brownell. Their seminar papers are available in the Special Collections and Archives department at the university’s James Branch Cabell Library. Please see Leanne E. Reidenbach, “Reconstruction and Origins of Williamsburg’s Second Capitol Building: 1747-1832” (April 2008); Carl L. R. Smith, “Illustrations and Influence of the Sixth Statehouse of Virginia” (December 2005); Joseph Senter White III, “Samuel Dobie, Thomas Jefferson, and the First Virginia Capitol in Richmond (May 1998). I would like to thank in particular Leanne Reidenbach, who kindly allowed me to include her reconstruction drawing of the Second Capitol as an illustration for this document. Published information of use in understanding Williamsburg II includes James D. Kornwolf, with the assistance of Georgiana W. Kornwolf, *Architecture and Planning in North America, Volume 2* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 567-603; Glenn Patton, “The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, and the Enlightenment,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* vol. 29, no. 1 (March 1970), 24-32.

<sup>49</sup> Patton 27.

The design for Williamsburg reflected its two most important functions; it was a center for learning, and a center for government, and the equal importance of the college and capitol was demonstrated by the sites reserved for them at either end of Duke of Gloucester Street, the main thoroughfare (figure 2.21).

There were two criteria for the design of the capitol: it had to measure up to its prominent location, and the architecture must reflect the importance of the legislative business conducted within it. Each detail received meticulous review, and the architectural specifications followed at the capitol were the most detailed of any building in the colonies by the time of its completion in 1705 (figure 2.22).<sup>50</sup> The design was successful, and the building functioned well until it was lost to fire in 1747. The importance of the capitol to the appearance and function of Williamsburg remained strong, and the eight-member committee appointed to oversee its reconstruction was to determine “the most effectual means for restoring that Royal Fabric to its former Beauty and Magnificence...so well adapted to all the weighty Purposes of Government.”<sup>51</sup>

This directive might have been interpreted as a mandate to rebuild the capitol to its original appearance, thus restoring the familiar vista down Duke of Gloucester Street. The original foundations were determined to be stable, the building was well known, and the extensive architectural specifications still existed, so a reconstruction would have been a straightforward project. But it would not have been a fashionable one, and when the building committee received three thousand pounds “to be employed and made use of in and about such re-building, repairing, and altering the said Capitol,” it was the possibility of alterations that

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<sup>50</sup> Kornwolf 603.

<sup>51</sup> H. R. McIlwaine, ed. *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1742-47* (Richmond: State Library of Virginia, 1909), 236.

sparked their interest. The committee was headed by John Blair, the founder of William and Mary who held a lifetime appointment as its president; as such, he had a vested interest in designing a building to enhance the prestige of Williamsburg, and thus the college. Another member, Carter Burwell, was planning his own house, Carter's Grove, during the same period and would have been well versed in current architectural possibilities. Benjamin Waller and Peyton Randolph served in the House of Burgesses; the other members, William Nelson, Philip Ludwell, Edward Digges, and Beverly Whiting all came from families noted for their wealth or influence.<sup>52</sup> As a group, the committee responsible for determining the course of the project consisted of educated gentlemen; some had traveled abroad, all were members of Virginia's elite, and they were accustomed to wielding a degree of influence that allowed them to shape their world for the better. Perhaps the longstanding connections between the committee members fostered casual discussions in which the building gradually took shape. Lacking careful documentation, Williamsburg II must speak for itself, but it speaks the language of Palladianism, albeit with a Virginia accent (figure 2.23).

The double portico that proved so elusive in Britain is the defining feature of Williamsburg II, its presence providing a direct link to Palladio, whose statement in the *Quattro libri* that "the ancients" used the pedimented portico in public buildings attested to the fitness of the capitol's design. The double portico made its colonial debut between 1738-1742 at Drayton Hall, the architecture of which was characterized by James Kornwolf as "possibly the closest any American had come to Palladio," and thus this house offers a strong link to Palladianism as it emerged in the colonies (figure 2.24). These two links, one ancient and one modern, will be

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<sup>52</sup> William Waller Hening, *The Statutes at Large; being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia from the First Session to the Legislature, in the Year 1619*, Vol. 6 (Richmond, VA: Franklin Press, 1819), 197.

followed as a means to explore the selection and impact of the double portico at Williamsburg II, a design without precedent in Virginia. Although buildings cannot travel, the books that provide inspiration for them, and the craftsmen with the skill to transfer design ideas into reality, can, and in colonial America, where books were scarce and commissions few, mobility ensured the survival of both. Books were shared among patrons seeking inspiration, and craftsmen lived a semi-itinerant existence between building projects, adding to their repertoire of design at each stop.

As previously mentioned, Carter Burwell was engaged with the construction of his own home, Carter's Grove, while serving on the capitol committee. Burwell kept a detailed account book in which he recorded payments to Richard Bayliss, a joiner; this was almost certainly the same Richard Baylis, recently emigrated from England, who advertised his services in Charleston in 1739. Similarities identified in the woodwork at Carter's Grove and Drayton Hall suggest that Baylis was involved in the construction of both houses.<sup>53</sup> He would have had a working knowledge of the construction at Drayton Hall, and been aware of the impact of its double portico; he may have discussed it with Burwell, or suggested a printed source for the design.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Kornwolf 919. A carpenter named John Wheatly (or Wheatley) also worked simultaneously on the capitol project and at Carter's Grove, which offers a more tenuous and less likely route for transmitting the design.

<sup>54</sup> Henry Middleton, a neighbor of John Drayton's, owned a copy of Isaac Ware's and Lord Burlington's 1738-1740 translation of the *Quattro libri* that Baylis saw or consulted during the construction at Drayton Hall. For architectural treatises and builders guides available in colonial America, please see Bennie Brown, "The Ownership of Architectural Books in Colonial Virginia" in *American Architects and their Books to 1848*, edited by Kenneth Haftertepe and James F. O'Gorman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 17-33; Appendix B of Janice Schimmelman's *Architectural Books in Early America: Architectural Treatises and Building Handbooks Available in Libraries and Bookstores through 1800* (New Castle: Oak Knoll Press, 1999) lists these publications chronologically from the date of their earliest documented appearance, but as indicated in the title, the contents of private libraries are

The Palladian design elements implemented at Williamsburg II suggest that a comprehensive translation of the *Quattro libri* was consulted at some point during the project. The projecting double portico was drawn from the design of the Villa Cornaro, while the four sets of Doric and Ionic columns follow the model of the Villa Pisani, which is also the arrangement at Drayton Hall. A wide range of builders' guides was also available in Williamsburg at this period, but as they do not depict either villa, only two printed possibilities for the design exist. A copy of Leoni's edition was among the four thousand volumes inventoried at nearby Westover, where the library of William Byrd II comprised the most valuable and extensive book collection in Virginia. A translation by Isaac Ware and Lord Burlington was published between 1738 and 1740 and advertised in Williamsburg in 1751.<sup>55</sup>

Whatever the original sources used for its design, Williamsburg II was the result of Palladian inspiration rather than devotion. In 1781, Thomas Jefferson, who had ample opportunity to study it over a twenty-year period, first as a student, then as a burgess, and finally as governor, praised it as "the most pleasing piece of architecture we have," but it is clear from his analysis, which acknowledges the success of the design as well as its faults, that the double portico was constructed without consulting Palladio's systems of proportion. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson recorded that

The Capitol is a light and airy structure, with a portico in front of the two orders, the lower of which, being Doric, is tolerably just in its proportions and ornaments, save only that the intercolonnations are too large. The upper is Ionic, much too small for that on

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excluded. Schimmelman's list does not include the advertisements from Williamsburg's *Virginia Gazette* for Isaac Ware's and Lord Burlington's authoritative translation of Palladio's *Quattro Libri*. This omission is shared by Helen Park's *A List of Architectural Books in America Before the Revolution* (Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1973), which does have the advantage of listing the contents of private collections.

<sup>55</sup> Brown 20.

which it is mounted, its ornaments not proper to the order, nor proportioned within themselves. It is crowned with a pediment, which is too high for its span.<sup>56</sup>

Despite these flaws, as one of the largest and most important Classical buildings in the colonies, the influence of Williamsburg II was widespread. Although the building was in decline by the end of the eighteenth century, for almost fifty years it served as a model that inspired countless repetitions of the double portico in domestic architecture. The most important of these inspirations took shape at Monticello, and became the first draft of Jefferson's architectural essay.

### Monticello I (1769-1796)

Thomas Jefferson's comments on Williamsburg II prefaced his discourse on the unfortunate state of architecture in Virginia, which he believed lacked a model for the correct principles of symmetry, taste, and ornament. By appropriating the promising features of Williamsburg II, in particular the double portico, and reworking them with proper adherence to the tenets of classical design, Jefferson planned to create such a model at Monticello I (figure 2.25).<sup>57</sup> As he drafted the initial elevations, Jefferson relied on a publication that he eventually referred to as his "Bible," Leoni's translation of Palladio's *Quattro libri*, but his reverence for it,

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<sup>56</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, William Peden, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 152.

<sup>57</sup> The literature on Thomas Jefferson is almost as extensive as that on Palladio. Sources directly relevant to Monticello I include Kenneth Hafertepe, "An Inquiry into Thomas Jefferson's Ideas of Beauty," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 59, no 2 (June 2000), 216-231; Charles E. Brownell, "Thomas Jefferson's Architectural Models and the United States Capitol" in *A Republic for the Ages: The United States Capitol and the Political Culture of the Early Republic*, Donald R. Kennon, ed. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 316-401; Charles E. Brownell, "Monticello: The First House" (catalogue entry 8), *The Making of Virginia Architecture* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1992), 212; Jack McLaughlin, *Jefferson and Monticello: the Biography of a Builder* (New York: Henry Holt, 1988); Gene Waddell, "The First Monticello," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* vol. 6, no. 1 (March 1987), 5-29.

and for the basic model of Williamsburg II, was not so great that he could not recognize other design possibilities. For instance, Monticello I was to incorporate a pair of projecting double porticos, though Palladio's precedent at the Villa Cornaro featured a portico sunken into the body of the building on the garden façade. This willingness to graft his own ideas with established designs from multiple sources, of which Palladio remained the most important, fostered Jefferson's development of his own strain of Palladianism, which surpassed the limits imposed by Monticello I before it was completed.<sup>58</sup>

The extent to which Monticello I was realized is unclear, but the most useful account of the effect it imparted was offered by the Marquis de Chastellux, who visited in 1782 and observed

The house, of which Mr. Jefferson was the architect, and often the builder, is constructed in an Italian style, and is quite tasteful, although not however without some faults; it consists of a large square pavilion, into which one enters through two porticoes ornamented with columns. His house resembles none of the others seen in this country; so that it might be said that Mr. Jefferson is the first American who has consulted the Fine Arts to know how he should shelter himself from the weather.<sup>59</sup>

Despite this acknowledgement of Jefferson's triumph over the general state of American architecture, and despite his allegiance to the Orders, the most important elements of the double portico remained unfinished. Time and again, Jefferson was forced to choose between a correct interpretation and a practical solution. An error of measurement made during the carving of the stone base for the first of the Doric columns forced him to reconfigure the dimensions of the Ionic columns supporting the portico above; the result was a row of columns that were higher

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<sup>58</sup> Jefferson began a reconstruction at Monticello in 1796 that resulted in the building as it appears today.

<sup>59</sup> François Jean, Marquis de Chastellux. *Travels in North America in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782, Translated from the French by an English Gentleman* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 41-42.

and narrower than planned. To avoid a similar situation on the opposite portico, the Doric columns were made from stuccoed brick. The Ionic columns for both porticos were designed to be executed in wood, but they were never installed and the top porticos instead were supported by temporary posts.<sup>60</sup>

Although the full potential of its plans were never realized in Monticello I, it played an important role in disseminating the double portico throughout Virginia; this design carried with it both the imprimatur of Williamsburg and the approbation of Thomas Jefferson. Builders who worked at Monticello repeated the double portico at other houses, and a steady stream of visitors to Monticello took away their impressions of it. This represents a fundamental building tradition: the use of existing buildings, in part or as a whole, as models for new ones.<sup>61</sup> In an era and region where buildings beget buildings, there was no more prolific union than that of Monticello I and Williamsburg II, the combined influence of which generated dozens of offspring in Virginia, including the home of the Fletcher family.

### Sweet Briar House I

Sweet Briar House I was the centerpiece of a nine hundred acre plantation purchased by Elijah Fletcher at auction on 22 December 1830. The Amherst County property was sold after Thomas Crews (or Crouse), whose family had owned it since at least 1774, defaulted on his

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<sup>60</sup> McLaughlin 167-173.

<sup>61</sup> For the custom of existing buildings used as models for new ones in America, please see Brownell, "Thomas Jefferson's Architectural Models and the United States Capitol," 316-401 and Carl Lounsbury, "The Public Building Process in Early Virginia" in *The Courthouses of Early Virginia: an Architectural History* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 168-215.



mortgage.<sup>62</sup> The appearance of the house at the time of the sale is known through an anonymous watercolor, and the double portico links it to the lineage of the Villa Cornaro, Williamsburg II, and Monticello I (figure 2.26).<sup>63</sup> As Sweet Briar House was altered significantly from 1851-1852, the physical evidence remaining has been examined in order to determine the original plan of the house (figure 2.27).<sup>64</sup>

Sweet Briar House I was built on a T-plan with a central transverse hall illuminated by a pair of windows. The hall was flanked by identically sized rooms, each of which featured a pair of windows on the front and rear walls. The fireplaces were located on the exterior walls at either end of the house. At the foot of the staircase was a door that led to a room of equal size, with one window on each of the three exterior walls of the room. The straight staircase rose from left to right, with a short right angle of five steps that ended in the second floor hallway that was illuminated by a pair of windows flanking the doorway leading to the top level of the portico (figure 2.28).

Directly opposite the doorway to the portico was a door leading to a room with a total of three windows: one on the rear and one on either exterior wall. The rear window is oriented towards the west, leaving room for a fireplace where another window might be located. On either side of the hallway were identically sized rooms, each of which featured a pair of windows on the front and rear walls. The distribution of the fireplaces in these rooms follows those on the first floor. Each floor featured regular fenestration, in which a series of six windows, with a door in the middle, were evenly distributed across the façade. The middle pair of windows, divided

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<sup>62</sup> Amherst County Deed Book, vol. T, 323. Crews' wife, Sarah, was also Maria Crawford's aunt.

<sup>63</sup> The watercolor is dated 1827, and measures 11" w x 6" h. It was acquired by the Sweet Briar Museum in November 2009 from a descendant of the Crews family.

<sup>64</sup> I am indebted to Travis McDonald, Director of Restoration at Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest, for discussing the original plan with me on several occasions.

by the door, were arranged under the pediment. The other two pairs of windows flanked these, and the consistent distribution of solid elements over solid elements and voids over voids provides another link to the classical tradition of architecture.

Although not featuring the double portico motif, the general arrangement of rooms following the T-plan, including the central transverse hall, is shared by two other area houses: Brick House (c. 1810) and Point of Honor (c. 1815).<sup>65</sup> At Brick House, the straight staircase rises from right to left. The dining room is entered through a door in the long side of the hallway, and rooms that are identical in scale but differentiated by the detail of the woodwork on the mantels are distributed on either end of the hallway. On the second level are three chambers that correspond to the rooms below in scale, with a varying amount of detail on the mantels in each room. Point of Honor also follows a modified form of the T-plan in which the central transverse hall contains the staircase. Flanking the hall are two rooms with polygonal ends, a drawing room to the left and the primary bedchamber to the right. The dining room is entered from the hallway through a door at the opposite end of the staircase, which rises from right to left. The second floor features a different pattern of room distribution, with a second staircase connecting the primary bedchamber to the second floor and the division of the space above the dining room into two smaller rooms.

As the plan of Sweet Briar House I (figure 2.29) has been established, the watercolor can be examined for information about the double portico. Although it is the work of an amateur artist, a variety of details depicted in this watercolor reveal the choices made in the design of the house, and an attempt at shading clearly shows that the double portico projects from the façade.

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<sup>65</sup> Brick House was the home of Fletcher's early patron, David Shepherd Garland. Despite the prominence of the families who owned these houses, none have an architectural attribution attached to them. This is the norm with vernacular buildings, but the unusual arrangement of the staircases in these houses suggest that they shared a common builder.

Four columns of the Tuscan or Doric order are evenly distributed across both tiers, and connected by a straight railing on the top level that sweeps down the staircase on the lower level. The pediment features a lunette, the muntins of which are carefully picked out, and the pediment motif, without the lunette, is repeated on a smaller scale over the front door.

An integral part of the double portico for almost three centuries, the pediment has received a new treatment. Recommended by Palladio as the area best suited to display the arms of the house's owner, the appearance of the lunette deserves some analysis. Just as the double portico at Sweet Briar House I bore a closer kinship to Monticello I than to the Villa Cornaro, the lunette can also be traced to Jefferson. First used on a drawing for the President's House in 1792, the lunette became a distinct motif of Jeffersonian Palladianism (figure 2.30).<sup>66</sup> Although not used by the British Palladians, Jefferson's innovation with this symmetrical design followed Palladio's standard that combined the beautiful with the functional (figure 2.31). The use of a lunette in a pediment was a more appropriate feature for an American house than a coat of arms, which distinctly evoked an aristocratic tradition that was anathema after the Revolutionary War. The glass of the lunette let sunlight into a space that might have no other source of natural light, and it was fixed to a hinge that allowed it to be opened for ventilation. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the lunette had become a standard feature of American architecture

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<sup>66</sup> Heather A. Foster, "Thomas Jefferson and the Pediment with Lunette," research report, ARTH 544 (Brownell), Virginia Commonwealth University, 1998 and Foster, "Jefferson, Wren, Philadelphia, and the Portico with Lunette," in *The Classical Tradition: From Andrea Palladio to John Russell Pope: New Findings from Virginia Commonwealth University*, Abstracts of the Sixth Annual Architectural History Symposium, 1998, ed., by Charles Brownell, 10-11 (Richmond: Department of Art History, Virginia Commonwealth University, 1998). These items are available in the Special Collections and Archives department at the university's James Branch Cabell Library. Foster traces Jefferson's adoption of the design from Christopher Wren's Sheldonian Library, through English Baroque architecture, and into the vocabulary of vernacular architecture, where Jefferson discovered its use on buildings in Philadelphia.

although it is unlikely that its source was widely recognized, a situation shared by the double portico.

### The Double Portico in Virginia

Thus far this study has documented the persistence of the double portico from the Veneto to Virginia. It will now be shown that the extensive proliferation of the double portico distinguished it as the fundamental motif of Palladianism in Virginia.<sup>67</sup> In assessing the prevalence of the double portico, only those that strictly fit the Villa Cornaro model were included. Accordingly, there must be two fully realized levels on the portico; there must be a pediment; and the entire mass must project from the façade of the house. Even Jefferson, an advocate of the Orders, was unable to fully realize them at Monticello I, and so an adherence to the classical orders is *not* a requirement for inclusion.

The number of double portico houses identified in Virginia to date totals 102, and an analysis of the pattern of distribution by county reflects the relative popularity of this Palladian design in different regions.<sup>68</sup> Given the prominence of Thomas Jefferson and Monticello I, the fact that the majority of double portico houses, totaling 15, are located in Albemarle County is not surprising, but it was unexpected to find that Amherst County, where Sweet Briar House is located, has the second highest total, with 14. This may be explained by the fact that Edgewood, a prominent double portico house in the town of Amherst, provided a ready model (figure 2.32).

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<sup>67</sup> It must be acknowledged that an accurate count of double portico houses is impossible. The feature is easily altered, and much of the state's built heritage has been lost without being recorded.

<sup>68</sup> Please see Appendix I for a map showing the geographical distribution of double portico houses in Virginia. Appendix II lists the houses in alphabetical order and includes the county in which the house is located and its approximate date.

None of the other local houses approached the level of detail at Edgewood; the most restrained, the Oaks, is related only through the double portico (figure 2.33). This disparity is common; an overview of the ornament used on these houses shows there were several standard variations of the designs, revealing a formerly unsuspected degree of variety and individuality among them. Householders most often selected either Doric columns or square supports for the porticos; perhaps had Jefferson, who envisioned Monticello as a museum of ornament, realized his original design for Monticello I, Ionic columns would have been more common. The choice for portico railings tends towards the ornamental Chinese style, or the squared version. Although varying widely in appearance, lunettes often are included in the pediments; though it has been shown that the lunette is an element of Jeffersonian Palladianism, the ease and frequency with which it was adopted was facilitated by the synthesis of use and beauty. Those qualities, which were paramount for Palladio and his followers, provide a platform from which to examine the factors that contributed to the proliferation of the double portico in Virginia.

As the double portico spread throughout Virginia, its association with the Villa Cornaro, and even with Jefferson, began to fade (figure 2.34). It was less valued as an architectural motif that conveyed distinguished associations than as a necessary outdoor living space to be used according to the rhythms of the season or the time of day or the inclinations of individuals. Taken for granted by those who used them on a daily basis, it is found that traveler's accounts, many of which remark upon the activities that took place on these areas, provide a rich source of information.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps the liveliest account is that of the Allan family of Moldavia in Richmond,

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<sup>69</sup> This information is drawn from a variety of traveler's accounts found in three sources: Thomas D. Clark, *Travels in the New South: A Bibliography* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962); E. Merton Coulter, *Travels in the Confederate States: A Bibliography* (Wendell, N.C.: Broadfoot's Bookmark, 1981); and E. Richard McKinstry, *Personal Accounts of Events, Travels, and Everyday Life in America: An Annotated Bibliography* (Winterthur: Henry Francis du Pont

who installed a swing and a telescope on the upper level of their portico.<sup>70</sup> Another account dated 1835 describes the portico as used as an extension of a stable; “horses were grazing around the piazzas, over which were strewn saddles, whips, horse blankets, and the motley paraphernalia with which planters love to lumber their galleries.”<sup>71</sup>

Others emphasize the liminal quality of these spaces, where it was possible to enjoy the benefits of being outside without the dangers that came from being away from the house. At mid-century, the European visitor Frederika Bremer wrote of enjoying these spaces in solitude in the early morning or late evening hours, and others noted the way in with mothers spent time there with their children, who enjoyed the benefits of being outside without being out of sight. Porticos were an extension of indoor living areas; meals were frequently taken there, as in a dining room, or guests were entertained there, as in a parlor.<sup>72</sup> An overview of the uses of these practical and pleasurable spaces reveals four reasons for the widespread adoption and persistence of the double portico. First, the pediment indicates a clear point of entry. Second, they function as outdoor living spaces. Third, the columns, especially of the second tier, provide a picturesque

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Winterthur Museum, 1997). As writers called these spaces by a variety of terms, including piazzas, verandas, and galleries, and recorded visits made to “Mr. C.” or “Mrs. S.,” it is impossible to determine whether they were speaking of true double portico houses. However, whether these activities took place on a long gallery or the second story portico under a pediment, the accounts related by travelers in southern states illuminate the various uses of these spaces.

<sup>70</sup> See Charles Brownell and Karri L. Jurgens, “Moldavia (Allan House),” in *Lost Virginia*, 41, and George E. Woodberry, *The Life of Edgar Allan Poe*, Volume 2 (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1955), 363.

<sup>71</sup> Joseph Ingraham, *The South-West by a Yankee, Volume 2* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835), p. 97.

<sup>72</sup> For an analysis of the porch in America, please see Joseph Manca, “On the Origins of the American Porch: Architectural Persistence in Hudson Valley Dutch Settlements,” *Winterthur Portfolio* vol. 40 nos. 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 2005), 91-132; Barksdale Maynard, “On the Piazza” in *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 167-218 and Jay Edwards, “The Complex Origins of the American Domestic Piazza-Veranda-Gallery,” *Material Culture* 21 (Summer 1989): 2-58.

framing device for the surrounding landscape and a vantage point from which to observe daily activities. Lastly, there was a profusion of built examples from which to choose.

### Conclusion

This chapter advanced the first major thesis of this dissertation: that the double portico introduced by Andrea Palladio at the Villa Cornaro in the sixteenth century became the fundamental motif of Palladianism in Virginia architecture. Palladio, the most influential of Western architects, transmitted a lasting legacy of his architectural theories and designs through the *Quattro libri*. Although English translations of his masterwork in the eighteenth century fostered the rise of Palladianism, the double portico remained dormant until it reached America. It was introduced to Virginia via inclusion on a significant public building, Williamsburg II. Thomas Jefferson recognized the possibilities of the double portico and made it the dominant feature of Monticello I. From its initial implementation in Albemarle County, the double portico proliferated in domestic architecture throughout Virginia, and was a central feature of the Palladian plantation house purchased by Elijah Fletcher in 1830. The double portico is a grand design feature with an august lineage, but its innumerable and varied offspring would not have survived and proliferated in Virginia were it not truly and beautifully functional.

## Chapter 3

### The Fletchers at Sweet Briar Plantation and Abroad (c. 1840-1850)

#### Introduction

The decade that is the focus of this chapter was one of great significance for the Fletchers. It is the period in which the family, following the retirement of Elijah Fletcher from his active position in civic affairs in Lynchburg and as publisher of *The Virginian* newspaper in 1841, adopted Sweet Briar House as its primary residence. There are two primary topics in this chapter. The first concerns the domestic education of Fletcher's daughters Indiana and Elizabeth, as the 1840s represent the formative years in which they became literate and academically accomplished young women. The second examines their Grand Tour of Europe and the Near East from 1844 to 1846. This chapter marks the first time that the Fletchers' foreign itinerary has been fully delineated. Family letters, many of which were published in *The Virginian* between January 1845 and August 1846, form the core material for this chapter. Volumes from the Fletcher-Williams Collection in the Rare Books holdings in Cochran Library at Sweet Briar College have also been consulted, as well some titles listed in the *Inventory and Appraisement of the Personal Estate of Mrs. Indiana Fletcher Williams* (1901) that are no longer in the collection.

#### The Education of the Fletcher Children

Given his own career as a schoolteacher, it is not surprising that Elijah Fletcher considered the education of his children an issue of paramount importance, and he took as much



care with plans for his daughters' schooling as with those for his sons. The educational institutions in which his four children were enrolled, and the progress of their studies, were frequent subjects of discussion in the correspondence between Fletcher and his brother Calvin. In 1839, Sidney was enrolled at Yale and Lucian at William and Mary, in programs of study designed to conclude at the same time so that together they might, according to Fletcher's plans, "travel one year in the United States and then two years in the Eastern world before they settle down in Business. That is if they conduct themselves well so that I can trust them abroad. For should they turn out badly—as they may—I would soon withhold from them the means of extravagance and dissipation."<sup>73</sup>

This statement contains a sentiment to which Fletcher was deeply committed: that so long as his children earned his approbation through dedication to their studies and the cultivation of prudent habits, he would draw upon his considerable financial resources to support their chosen endeavors and encourage their pursuit of enriching cultural experiences. Fletcher's assessments of his children's potential betray little sentiment, and read almost like academic reports. In 1840, before her twelfth birthday, he determined to send Indiana to Georgetown Visitation in Washington, D.C., the Catholic school that her cousin Mary Fletcher of Medina, New York, also attended. Although this might be seen as a way to foster closer ties between branches of the family separated by considerable geographical distance, it was also a vote of confidence in his daughter's intellect and independence, and it provided an opportunity for her to study subjects that were not available at academies in Lynchburg.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Lynchburg, Virginia, 14 January 1839, SBC.

<sup>74</sup> For the education of young women in the South, please see Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994) and Catherine Clinton, "Equally Their Due" in *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon, 1982).

Indiana did not disappoint while at Georgetown Visitation, which she attended for two years, graduating in 1843, although she defied the nuns continually by using an Episcopalian prayer book during the daily chapel services. Her course of study demonstrates the academic rigor of the school, and in her time there Fletcher returned to his theme of good behavior and educational achievement meriting financial support and encouragement, noting that “My children are becoming expensive, but while they conduct themselves well, I cannot spend my money more pleasantly than affording them the opportunity for improvement...A good education is the best fortune we can give our children.”<sup>75</sup> He must have felt that Georgetown Visitation paid an excellent return on his investment. At a time when the standard curriculum at boarding schools for young women included basic instruction in reading and writing as well as in the social arts such as music, dancing and singing, Indiana’s record shows that her classes at Georgetown Visitation included rigorous subjects like philosophy, Latin, and astronomy. Her education did include also a measure of artistic accomplishment, as she also took lessons on the harp and in oil painting, as well as a course on tapestry.<sup>76</sup>

Elizabeth joined her sister at the school in 1842, where Fletcher described her as “pursuing her studies diligently...but with perhaps a more discriminating mind and better natural

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For the educational systems available to Southerners in the antebellum period, please see Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Steven M. Stowe, “Coming of Age: Duty and Satisfaction” in *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 122-159. In particular, please see “A Moral Terra Incognita,” in *Conjectures of Order* for the experiences of Southerners educated in the North, 27-51.

<sup>75</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Lynchburg, Virginia, 13 March 1842, SBC.

<sup>76</sup> Letter from Records Office at Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School to Ann Whitley, 15 September 1993, SBC.

sense, she does not progress in her studies as rapidly as Inda.”<sup>77</sup> The sisters’ enrollment overlapped for only a few months before Indiana graduated with distinction. She was one of two students receiving academic honors, including a ticket of merit in bookkeeping and prizes in history, botany, astronomy, chemistry, and philosophy, as well as in the aforementioned art classes. Her academic success did not come as a surprise to her father, who informed Calvin that she often penned letters home in “very neatly and correctly written French” and predicted that “She will excel either of her Brothers in Learning,” stating further of Indiana that “She is shrewd and sensible, very ambitious and intelligent, but will not be very showy”; this last was a characteristic of which Fletcher did not approve in his children.<sup>78</sup>

That fall, Fletcher reported to Calvin that Indiana had enrolled at St. Mary’s Hall, the female academy founded in 1837 by Bishop George Washington Doane in Burlington, New Jersey, explaining that “though receiving highest honors and completing the course at Georgetown, she still wished to pursue her studies...Inda is disposed to be a scholar. She is very anxious of excelling.”<sup>79</sup> There are no extant records documenting her studies there, but the general curriculum included geometry, astronomy, and history as well as Greek, Latin, Italian, and French. Students, who were drawn from prominent Episcopalian families from the length of the Atlantic coast, rose at 5:30 to attend chapel, which was required again in the evening.<sup>80</sup> It is possible that one experience had great resonance for Indiana. As a student, she would have almost certainly visited Riverside, the bishop’s home designed by John Notman, the noted Philadelphia architect, in 1837, and the earliest manifestation of the Italianate Villa style in

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<sup>77</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar Plantation, 26 December 1843, SBC. Indiana was known as “Inda” to her family, and Elizabeth as “Bettie.”

<sup>78</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Tusculum Plantation, 10 January 1843, SBC.

<sup>79</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar Plantation, 26 December 1843, SBC.

<sup>80</sup> 1840s page from the historic timeline of St. Mary’s Hall, accessed 11 December 2009 ([http://thehall.org/about\\_us\\_historic\\_timeline.php#](http://thehall.org/about_us_historic_timeline.php#)).

America. This style, and the Fletcher family's implementation of it in the substantial renovation of Sweet Briar House carried out in 1851-1852, is the subject of the following chapter.

As 1844 dawned, Fletcher predicted that after spending the winter at St. Mary's Hall, Indiana would be inclined to spend a year of study in Philadelphia. It does not appear that she ever formally entered a school in this city; instead, Indiana returned to New Jersey after a summer spent at Sweet Briar that must have been full of planning for an experience that would expand her knowledge in a way that even the finest school could not match: a Grand Tour of Europe in the company of Elizabeth and her brother Sidney. In Fletcher's eyes, three of his four children could be trusted to make the most of such an extraordinary opportunity. Much as Fletcher's parents had assessed the potential of their ten sons almost half a century before, and deemed Elijah the one most likely to parlay a college education into a lucrative profession, he weighed the character and potential of each of his children, and his position in 1844 had changed from when he first raised the topic of a trip abroad for his two sons. Lucian's academic career and conduct proved a disappointment, but by dint of educational achievement and responsible habits, Indiana and Elizabeth earned the right to embark upon a life-changing experience that would literally expand their horizons.

Although Fletcher's initial plans for his sons' trip abroad centered around his intention that they follow an exotic itinerary of travel in Eastern lands, the scope of the trip—although not the length—changed when it was determined that Indiana and Elizabeth, sixteen and thirteen at the time, were to be included. In September 1844, Fletcher wrote to Calvin that Elizabeth had returned from the summer semester at Georgetown Visitation, continuing:

She will not attend that school any more, but will sail with Sidney and Inda for Europe in the latter part of October or 1<sup>st</sup> of November. They will take a Havre Packet, go directly to France and make their first location in Paris, where they will

spend some twelve months, then go to Italy and spend perhaps six months, and then spend six months in Switzerland, Germany, and return home by way of England in about two years. Sidney intends to pursue and complete his medical studies in Paris. Inda and Bettie will enter some school there. Inda can now speak the French pretty fluently, as well as the Italian, and will have to be for a while Interpreter as Sidney and Bettie can only read French. Inda will not return home and I shall not see her before she starts. She has found an excellent school in Burlington and has much improved. I anticipate much pleasure from her Foreign Correspondence. She writes with care and some elegance, is very happy in describing Scenery and passing events. Her mind is bent on improvement and little occupied by the light Frippery and Foolish fashions of the day.<sup>81</sup>

### The Family Library

An inventory taken at Sweet Briar House at the time of Indiana Fletcher Williams' death contains twenty-six pages of titles, totaling almost 1500 books.<sup>82</sup> The extensive contents of the family library, the majority of which belonged to Indiana, are those of an inquisitive and wide-ranging mind, and include popular works of literature such as Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1830), Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1837) and the J & B Williams edition of *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights* (1837), as well as numerous volumes of poetry. Etiquette books, manuals on horsemanship, and James M. Garnett's *Lectures on Female Education* (1825) are also

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<sup>81</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Lynchburg, 1 September 1844. The itinerary as mentioned here by Fletcher was unremarkable; Americans traveling abroad before the mid-nineteenth century considered their time in Europe incomplete without visiting France, Italy, and England. Once overseas and left to their own devices, however, his children determined to visit Greece, Egypt, and the Holy Lands, destinations that were rarely frequented by women other than diplomats' wives until several decades later.

<sup>82</sup> Please see *Inventory and Appraisal of the Personal Estate of Mrs. Indiana Fletcher Williams* (Lynchburg: J. P. Bell Company, 1901) 8-9, 13-36, 84-85. Of these, only three hundred volumes in the Rare Books Collection of Cochran Library at Sweet Briar College have been identified as originally belonging to members of the Fletcher-Williams family. This designation has been made through the presence of a bookplate or an inscription bearing the name of a family member found in these books.

represented. There is also a collection of textbooks for arithmetic, history, English grammar and rhetoric, as well as for Latin, French, and Italian, all of which Indiana studied, the latter two well enough to serve as an interpreter, according to Fletcher's comments above.

Indiana's working knowledge of foreign languages was augmented by well-worn phrase books in French, a French-Italian dictionary, and a German-English dictionary. Although the first American guidebook to Europe was produced in 1838, following the popularization of the genre in Britain a few years earlier, there is no evidence of these mass-market publications among the family's books. Published accounts by travelers were also a popular means by which to prepare for trips abroad, and widely available at the time. However, only two examples remain in the Fletcher-Williams collection that might be consulted during their peregrinations: Chateaubriand's *Travels in Greece, Palestine, Egypt and Barbary* (1814) and Alexander Kinglake's *Traces of Travel Brought Home from the East* (1845). The fact that both of these deal with countries much less frequently visited by Americans than Europe suggest that even the intrepid Fletchers wished for guidance when traveling in less frequented locales.

### Foreign Correspondents

Before their departure, the editor of *The Virginian*, Richard Toler, solicited regular letters from the Fletchers detailing their travels for the purpose of publication in the newspaper under the heading *Foreign Correspondence*. A total of fifty-four letters, all but two written by Indiana, were featured on the front page of the newspaper between January 1845 and August 1846. Although the Fletchers occupied a position of privilege in Lynchburg, they were not unique in having the opportunity to travel abroad. There were at least two other families from the city who visited Europe prior to 1840. Burton Henry Harrison, a contemporary of Fletcher's and fellow

member of the African Colonization Society, accepted a scholar's residency at the University of Göttingen in 1829. He arrived there after several months in Paris and a tour through Holland, and returned by way of Italy in 1831.<sup>83</sup>

William Cabell Rives, a native of Amherst County who resided in Lynchburg, was appointed Minister to France in 1829, a position he held until 1832. During their time in Paris Rives and his wife befriended members of Louis-Philippe's court, especially the queen, Marie-Amélie, who served as godmother and namesake to their eldest daughter.<sup>84</sup> The courtesy of these connections was extended to the Fletchers, who carried letters of introduction from the couple to present at the French court. John C. Calhoun, then secretary of state, wrote a letter for them to the American minister of France, William Rufus Devane King, as did Virginia senator William Segar Archer. Letters to Robert Walsh, the counsel general, and to a series of private physicians on behalf of Sidney, who planned to continue in Paris the medical studies he had started at Yale, rounded out the lot. Together, these were testament to the connections upon which the Fletchers could rely for entrée to Parisian society and to the community of Americans living in the city.

Letters of introduction were not all that were written by the Rives family. Upon her return to Lynchburg, Judith Walker Page Rives penned an account of her time abroad called *Tales and Souvenirs of a Residence in Europe* that was published 1842. In so doing, she joined a growing cadre of American women writers who published travel accounts. Others included Catherine Maria Sedgwick, who edited the letters she sent home to her family while traveling in Europe in 1839 into a two-volume publication, *Letters from Abroad to Kindred at Home*, which

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<sup>83</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 114.

<sup>84</sup> Judith Walker Page Rives, *Tales and Souvenirs of a Residence in Europe* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1842), 53-54.

appeared in 1841. In late 1846, the *New-York Herald Tribune* sent Margaret Fuller to Europe as the country's first female correspondent; she published *At Home and Abroad or, Things and Thoughts in America and Europe* a decade later.<sup>85</sup>

Although Indiana's letters were never bound as a book, nor was she paid for her efforts by the newspaper in which they appeared, her writing followed standard convention: accounts of visits to widely noted points of interest, anecdotes of the foreign people and their customs, and impressions of scenery, architecture and artworks of aesthetic merit. The publication of these letters helped legitimize her travels, which otherwise could have been seen as an extravagance. As William Stowe has pointed out, "The nineteenth-century American traveling class was also a writing class: bourgeois travelers often used the production of texts to justify what might otherwise have seemed the sinful self-indulgence of travel."<sup>86</sup> Mary Schriber has estimated that 691 travel books written by Americans appeared between 1800 and 1868, and she takes Stowe's observation further, asserting that these provided a forum in which the authors could publicly claim membership in a privileged class, and demonstrate their refined sensibilities on the written page. Daniel Kilbride concurs, offering several examples of letters written by another young woman from Virginia in 1850, whose name is unknown, in which she carefully described architecture and its historical context while visiting French churches, although with not nearly the fluency and confidence that Indiana's letters contain.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> For the letters of American women travelers in the nineteenth century, please see Jane Robinson, *Unsuitable for Ladies: An Anthology of Women Travellers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Mary Suzanne Schriber, *Writing Home: American Women Abroad, 1830-1920* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1997) and *Telling Travels: Selected Writings by Nineteenth-Century American Women Abroad* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995).

<sup>86</sup> Stowe x.

<sup>87</sup> Stowe xii; Schriber 4; Kilbride 555.



## Young Americans Abroad

After a month-long voyage, Sidney, Elizabeth, and Indiana arrived in Paris on 28 November 1844 (figure 3.1). By the time they returned to America two years later, they had visited all the major cities of Europe, as well as Alexandria and Cairo.<sup>88</sup> This period represents a time in which their education was enhanced through formal study in foreign schools, and their cultural horizons expanded through first-hand experience of the sights, natural and artistic, in a vast range of locales. All of this was carefully recounted by Indiana in a series of lively and articulate letters so that her family and readers of the Lynchburg newspaper were included in the experience as “armchair travelers.” This section will provide an overview of the Fletchers’ itinerary, focusing on the artistic and aesthetic encounters described by Indiana.

The Fletchers’ first impressions of Paris were described by Sidney, who wrote “It was past mid-day when we arrived at the gates of Paris, the emporium of fashion, learning, science, and everything tasty and refined... we turned a corner, when there burst upon our astonished view the grandest scene in the world—the palace, the gardens, fountains, statues, and a thousand sights so new and so unlike what we have been accustomed to, that one hardly knows what to think of, or in other words, he ceases to think, and all the senses are absorbed in the faculty of sight.”<sup>89</sup> The Fletchers were greeted at their hotel by the American counsel-general Robert Walsh and his wife, whose interest and attention greatly eased their transition into life in Paris.

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<sup>88</sup> For the experience of Southern travelers in Europe in the antebellum period, please see Daniel Kilbride, “Travel, Ritual, and National Identity: Planters of the European Tour, 1820-1860,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 69 (August 2003): 549-584; Michael O’Brien, “European Attachments,” in *Conjectures of Order*, 90-161; Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982). For the experience of nineteenth-century Americans in Europe, please see William W. Stowe, *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to “Culture”, 1800-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>89</sup> Sidney Fletcher to Elijah Fletcher, Paris, 28 November 1844, published 3 February 1845.

Mrs. Walsh found places for Indiana and Elizabeth at Mlle. Villeneuve's, "one of the most distinguished female schools in the city," and procured a harp for them, along with lessons from the "Harpiste de Reine."<sup>90</sup>

Sidney began attending medical lectures, and when they could, the Fletchers embarked upon a program of systematic sightseeing. Before Christmas, they had been to the Tuileries, the Louvre, the Pantheon, Notre Dame, the Place de la Concorde, the Champs Elysées, the Jardins des Plantes, and the Gobelins textile manufactory, where they marveled at the life-like quality of the tapestries and the painstaking labor that created them. The streets of Paris continued to provide a source of wonder as well; the city was illuminated at night so that one might "view for a mile or two a wide street bordered with the most brilliant lights as far as the vision can reach, and millions of people and splendid carriages passing to and fro, while the spacious windows and extensive stores reflect to the view every variety of the most rich and costly goods. One never tires in Paris...every thing you wish to see is here."<sup>91</sup>

On New Year's Day, the Fletchers were able to marvel at the palatial splendors of the French court when they were presented to the queen, who invited them to return for a ball a few days later. Indiana and Elizabeth resumed their studies, including daily music practice and sketching, which were punctuated by regular attendance at plays and concerts until Easter, when they returned to the Louvre for an exhibition by modern academic painters, where Indiana was pleased to see the work of her drawing master—though not enough to name him. While visiting the Greek and Egyptian galleries, she admitted that "my historical knowledge of these countries

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<sup>90</sup> For the experiences of Americans in France, please see Harvey Levenstein, *Seductive Journeys: American Tourists in France from Jefferson to the Jazz Age* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>91</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah 28 December 28 1844, published 3 March 1845.

in ancient times is too limited for me to duly appreciate them,” but the large painted and gilded porcelains of Sèvres elicited great admiration.

After six months in Paris, the bustling mercantile town of Lynchburg was relegated to the status of “village” in the Fletchers’ internal accounts, and they made public recommendations for its improvement: “It is astounding that a town of its size and destined commercial importance cannot afford to appropriate one or two acres for a public square. These things deserve some attention, for they exercise a moral influence upon a community; and unless a share of the industry and commercial enterprise for which she is so distinguished are directed to ornamental improvements, literature and the fine arts, her acquired wealth will not save her from taking her place in the background of the rest of the civilized world.”<sup>92</sup> After visiting Versailles, and the circus, and perusing an elegant shop where exquisite shawls were priced from \$300-\$500, Indiana concluded of Paris “It is indeed like a terrestrial paradise.”<sup>93</sup>

In the summer of 1845, Indiana’s letters take on a tone of confidence in her assessment of the artistic and architectural merits of the sites she visited. Of the abbey-church Saint Denis, now regarded as the birthplace of Gothic architecture, she wrote “It is said to be the finest specimen of architecture at that epoch. It is a uniform building, with double aisle and circular termination... The sun shone beautifully, and the reflection of the different colors presented a very pretty prospect upon the large marble pedestals of the church.” She preferred the Gothic to the avant-garde; upon visiting Jacques-Ignace Hittorff’s church, St. Vincent-de-Paul, which had

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<sup>92</sup> Sidney Fletcher to Elijah Fletcher 1 June 1845, published 14 July 1845.

<sup>93</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah Fletcher 23 March 1845, published 29 May 1845.

opened to much acclaim in 1844, she admitted that she found the combination of the strongly polychromed program of frescoes and ceiling paintings, stained glass, and sculpture jarring.<sup>94</sup>

The Fletchers departed for the Alps on 1 August 1845, traveling through Cologne and Brussels, where Indiana dutifully reported on the marvels of lace production. Their visit coincided with that of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, and to escape the crowded streets, they took a day trip to the countryside in search of restful scenery that could be enjoyed from the comforts of a carriage. Indiana faltered somewhat in trying to frame these scenes in a way to impart their impact to her readers, relying instead upon a brief description followed by a few lines of the third canto from “Childe Harolde’s Pilgrimage” by the British Romantic poet Lord Byron:

This is the most beautiful spot I ever beheld, situated on a high eminence just on the banks of the Rhine. At the foot of it is a flourishing little village, surrounded by lofty hills and lovely vales. I could not describe it to you. Its beauty, grandeur and sublimity surpass any description words could give. We had a view of the Castle, the Rhine and surrounding scenery, at sun set. The sun gradually shone and tinged the summit of the lofty turrets and distant hills with declining day’s golden color—the waters rested tranquilly, and looked like a silvery mirror—the sky was without a cloud—gradually the last rays departed and night came on.

*The haughtiest breast its wish might bound  
Through life to live delighted here;  
Nor could on earth a spot be found  
To nature and to me so dear.*<sup>95</sup>

By invoking poetry to augment her impressions of the scene before her, Indiana fit Malcolm Andrews’ characterization of “picturesque tourists,” travelers in search of scenery that could be matched to depictions in familiar works of art or literature. Annamaria Elsdon has

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<sup>94</sup> Hittorff was the first to make the discovery that Greek sculpture had originally been polychromed; please see D. D. Schneider: *The Works and Doctrine of Jacques-Ignace Hittorff, 1792–1867*, 2 volumes (New York and London, 1977).

<sup>95</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah Fletcher, 9 August 1845, published 6 October 1845. This poem was published between 1812 and 1816; there are several editions of Byron’s poetry in the Fletcher-Williams collection.

characterized the fear of finding words inadequate to convey one's experiences as standard among travel writers as "the trope of antidescription, in which travel writers abstained from lengthy descriptions with the assertion that words would not suffice," a convention that Indiana occasionally employed.<sup>96</sup> This was Indiana's first attempt at describing the unfamiliar landscape; once she became accustomed to romantic ruins, towering mountains and plunging valleys, her writing became more confident, clearly evoking the scenery before her. In these descriptions, she often used the terms "romantic" and "picturesque;" though the latter term is never capitalized in her prose, its use derives from the larger movement of the Picturesque. With its origins in eighteenth-century Britain, the primary objective of this movement was the composition of a good picture, be it in a natural landscape or in a painting.<sup>97</sup> Picturesque landscapes were characterized by a wild harmony of nature and manmade structures, scenes of surpassing beauty worthy of immortalization in artworks, and these scenes were frequently sought out by tourists.

The Fletchers continued up the Rhine to Heidelberg Castle, where Indiana deployed her increasing descriptive powers for the benefit of the readers in Lynchburg:

It is a most romantic spot...As you ascend, the old ruins present themselves in great magnificence and beauty. The ivy has found its way up to the old watch towers and windows...these old ruins are surrounded by extensive and splendid walks; we took in a good view of everything. It is immense in extent, and presents nothing but one wild mass of dilapidated ruins. The old staircases and chimney pieces seem as ancient as time itself. Moss and ivy and wild flowers

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<sup>96</sup> Annamaria Elsdon, *Roman Fever: Domesticity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), 8

<sup>97</sup> The literature on the Picturesque is extensive; in particular, please see Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); John Archer, *The Literature of British Domestic Architecture, 1715-1842* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985); Nikolaus Pevsner, "The Genesis of the Picturesque" in *Studies in Art, Architecture and Design*, vol. I (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), 79-101; Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View, with a new preface by the author* (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1967).

intermingled, grow and flourish among magnificent columns, and here and there are seen little grass plats, that once were beautiful parterres. As to the origin of this wondrous structure no one knows. The statuary and emblematical arms are very ancient, and are now crumbling into decay. There is attached a chapel, which is as old and romantic looking as the rest...I never beheld so enchanting a spot, or even could realize that there were really such places—and now I do not wonder that so many romantic legends are connected with the old castles and the silvery bend of the Rhine.<sup>98</sup>

These dazzling accounts appeared in each of the letters recounting their travels through Strasbourg, Basel, Zurich, Berne and Interlaken, but such was the inspiration of the extraordinary scenery that Indiana's writing was never repetitive—nor were her experiences. At one location near a waterfall of uncommon beauty, an enterprising lady had erected a viewing pavilion outfitted with colored glasses and waterproof cloaks, which enabled visitors to stand behind the falls and enjoy a multicolored, multisensory experience. The Fletchers did not only take advantage of conveniently situated sites of beauty; they also exerted themselves in ascending the celebrated Rigi mountain in Switzerland, arriving in time for sunset and spending the night so as to witness the spectacular sunrise.

Indiana's letters also demonstrated her extensive education; in addition to the initial lines of Byron's poetry, she recorded an account of their visit to the site that inspired his poem "The Castle of Chillon," as well as to the house in Lausanne where Edward Gibbon wrote *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and she noted Jean-Jacques Rousseau's association with the Swiss town of Vevay. She does not explicate the importance of these writers, assuming perhaps that it should be self-evident. However, she harbored no illusions about her educational achievements in comparison to the Europeans, noting that while she thought it quite an accomplishment to know French and Italian when she arrived, she soon realized that the norm of

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<sup>98</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah Fletcher, n.d. August 1845, published 29 October 1845.

an educated person in Europe was a working knowledge of English, German, Spanish, Italian and French.

As winter approached, the Fletchers proposed spending it on the Mediterranean, traveling from Rome to Greece, Egypt, and the Holy Land. They set out for Italy in September 1845, traveling over the Alps through Milan, where they visited the Duomo, and Verona, where they saw the Roman amphitheatre and Juliet's tomb, to Venice, where they toured St. Mark's and the Doge's Palace. They took a steamer from Trieste to Athens, which was the point at which Indiana noted that the divide between West and East became evident, writing "We are looked upon as great strangers here, and have almost entirely left even the English behind us. Every thing begins to wear an oriental aspect—Turks with their wide trousers and red turbans throng the streets."<sup>99</sup>

On arriving in Athens, Indiana initially was disappointed to find no trace of Euripides or Socrates, but instead extreme poverty and desolation. The exotic nature of camel caravans, carts of wineskins, and women in local attire drawing water were a consolation, but it was the veritable museum of architecture presented by the ancient ruins that caused her to lapse once more into antidescription. Although she recounted that "the Acropolis is the first object that strikes the eye from a distance, and is the grand presiding wonder of Athens, but this and other monuments of antiquity here of greater magnificence than even my imagination of fancy had ever conceived, which strike the view on every side, I will defer to describe until I have an opportunity to examine them minutely."<sup>100</sup> Unfortunately, no letter exists describing her detailed impressions of classical architecture.

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<sup>99</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah Fletcher, 27 September 1845, published 4 December 1845.

<sup>100</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah Fletcher, 8 October 1845, published 12 January 1846. In this letter she also mentions that she completed her fourth journal detailing their travels. These apparently

Indiana's powers of description had returned by the time the Fletchers disembarked in Alexandria on October 19, 1845. Her first impression was that

The novel and singular appearance of every thing in the streets as we passed along awakened sensations which I shall never forget. The countenance, costume and look of the natives first attracted my attention—not a white face was seen before me—all either negroes, the dark mulatto, colored Egyptians; savage looking Turks or Arabs, almost naked, with a few clothed in costumes of the gayest colors. The women were closely veiled, wearing jewels on their ankles as well as on their toes, which are exposed to view by the peculiar fashion of their sandals...then the bazaars, the narrow streets crowded with camels, dromedaries, and donkeys, made me feel as if I was a stranger in a strange land.

The American counsel was away, but had left orders for their ship to be met by janissaries, the imperial guards who escorted them to their hotel and then to the seaside palace of the pasha, where Indiana was dazzled by the décor, “said to surpass in rich splendor any thing of the kind in Europe...they are formed of the most exquisite rose wood [sic] and ebony, inlaid with pearl, which are formed into stars, flowers, etc., reflecting every object so brilliantly that the large mirrors were useless, except as ornament.” The rich divans were silk-upholstered, with foot-long fringe, and they were shown four enormous Sèvres vases, a gift from King Louis-Philippe of France, which stood in one room; two enormous mosaic tables, a gift from the pope, were in another. They were shown the pasha's bedchamber, the dining room full of live exotic birds, and the ornate set of bathing rooms. The glories of the city of Alexandria were largely confined to the pasha's palace, and, disappointed in the lack of the antiquities on offer in the city, they departed for Cairo a few days later.<sup>101</sup>

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contained commentary and private reflections that were omitted from the letters intended for publication in *The Virginian*. Regrettably, these are not in the college archives and their whereabouts are unknown.

<sup>101</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah Fletcher, 19 October 1845, published 5 February 1846. For the experiences of women who traveled beyond the European continent, please see Barbara Hodgson, *No Place for a Lady: Tales of Adventurous Women Travelers* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2002).



The American consulate arranged for a sailboat to take the Fletchers up the Nile, which afforded them the opportunity of taking in the passing scenery, including Bedouin camps and crocodiles. Upon arrival, they found the city much more to their liking than Alexandria; as Indiana reported, “Cairo fully comes up to the romantic notions of an oriental city, which I had formed from reading the interesting stories of the Arabian nights, and is in reality the scene of many of them. It is said to have more of the true characteristics of Orientalism than Constantinople or any eastern city—still, you can form no idea of the noise, dirt and crowd within the city. It is almost impossible to get along through the streets without being run over or knocked down by the camels and dromedaries.”<sup>102</sup> They immediately embarked on a series of extraordinary activities, which included a visit to the pasha’s private garden with topiaries trimmed in the shape of furniture, ships, and animals; a mosque (for which Indiana and Elizabeth received special dispensation on account of their sex); a harem (where they were received by the head of the harem, with whom they smoked a pipe); and desert excursions aboard dromedaries.

The culmination of their Egyptian experience was a trip to the top of the pyramids, a thrilling venture that started at 5 a.m. when they awoke in time to see the sun gild a landscape of minarets and domes. They went by donkey to the Nile, where they—and the donkeys—boarded a sailboat to the pyramids. Once on land, Indiana and Elizabeth were carried across flooded zones by Bedouins who made chair seats of their arms, and rode on to the pyramid of Cheops, where the same helpful Bedouins hauled them the 500 feet to the top. Once there, Indiana described the scene as follows:

On reaching the summit more than five hundred feet from its base—what a sublime prospect appeared to our astonished view. To the far east, rise the sterile chain of Mount Mokattan [sic] and the Arabian Desert, while nearer the same view, you see the tapering minarets and city of Grand Cairo. The solitary

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<sup>102</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah Fletcher, 26 October 1845, published 12 February 1846.

towering Obelisk of Heliopolis, which alone marks the spot of this ancient city. To the South, the fertile Nile threading its way through a narrow verdant plain—and in the distance, other Pyramids towering with their colossal structures above the horizon. To the West, the vast Desert of Lybia [sic]—and to the North, the green plain of the Delta situated between the mouths of the Nile. After passing around the Pyramids and viewing them on every side, my wonder was much increased that such gigantic structures would be the work of men.<sup>103</sup>

Although this was an exotic panorama, Indiana was no less moved by it than she had been by the grandeur of the European mountains, and the familiar surroundings of Lynchburg seemed further away than ever before. When they returned to their lodging, the Fletchers learned that the political situation in Jerusalem made it impossible for them to realize their plans to travel into the Holy Land, and they determined instead to spend the winter in Italy.

### The Fletchers in Italy

The Fletchers reached Naples on 26 November 1845, after two weeks spent in quarantine in Malta. The bay of Naples worked its charms; as Indiana reported on arrival, “I involuntarily said to myself, there is no spot on earth so charming and beautiful as Naples.” They hired guides and horses to take them to Mt. Vesuvius, where they trudged through volcanic ash a foot deep to reach the top, where their guides roasted eggs for lunch over the steam escaping from the vents in the mountain as they stood

on the very edge of the great crater and looked down into that fearful, profound abyss of horrors.—The sides were everywhere encrusted with beautiful crystals of green and yellow sulphur, the smoke partially obscuring the view. We could only remain a minute on account of the great heat and the frequent explosions which take place, throwing out large quantities of red hot stones and lava...we had no sooner reached the bottom of the cone than an explosion, which is always attended with a loud noise resembling thunder, took place, and the stones flew in every direction.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

A torch-lit, subterranean visit to Herculaneum and Pompeii, where Indiana found the remaining marbles, frescoes, columns and statues haunting, rounded out their stay in Naples, and the family left for Rome in early December.<sup>104</sup>

The Fletchers' stay in Rome coincided with their reentry into a community of Americans, which they had not experienced since leaving Paris over a year before.<sup>105</sup> The appeal of Italy for Americans has been well documented, and Indiana was not immune to its manifest charms, declaring that "I have never found the country I would exchange for *Amerique*—but after it, Italy would be my choice." They toured the expected sites, including the Coliseum and the Capitol, and spent two days at the Vatican Museum, described as "the most rich and choice depository for the objects of the arts I have ever seen. It is of immense size and contains the most beautiful specimens of Greek and Roman sculpture perhaps in the world. It is really astonishing to what perfection the ancients arrived in this art."<sup>106</sup>

They attended High Mass with Pope Gregory XVI at the Sistine Chapel, where they received his benediction, and later received a private interview where Indiana told him about the convent at Georgetown Visitation, "in which...it is said he takes much interest." Although they had considered spending the remainder of the winter in Rome, it was at this interview that the Fletchers learned it would not be possible for Indiana and Elizabeth to enroll in a school in Rome, as they did not admit non-Catholics, and so conceding that "Living is very expensive, and to my taste not very good. Frogs and mushrooms are favorite dishes in Rome, and the meat of

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<sup>104</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah Fletcher, 5 December 1845, published 16 March 1846.

<sup>105</sup> For Americans in Italy during the nineteenth century, please see Elsdon, *Roman Fever*; Leonardo Buonomo, *Backward Glances: Exploring Italy, Reinterpreting America, 1831-1866* (London: Associated University Press, 1996). For American artists in Italy, please see Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., *The Lure of Italy and the Italian Experience, 1760-1914* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992); Regina Soria, *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century American Artists in Italy, 1760-1914* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982).

<sup>106</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah and Maria Fletcher, Naples, 5 December 1845, SBC.

the wild boar is in high repute, and great abundance,” the Fletchers moved on to Florence, which quickly superseded Rome in their estimation.<sup>107</sup>

When they reached Florence a few weeks later, the travelers were entranced by their surroundings. Dubbing Florence “the fair” in comparison to Rome, “the gloomy,” Indiana nevertheless felt that its antiquities did not compare to those in Rome, though its paintings, displayed at the Pitti, Uffizi, and Ducal Palaces, exceeded it. Florence was truly a city for artists, and Indiana struck up a friendship with the American painter George Loring Brown, whose wife accompanied them around the city, and whose landscapes of Italy won great acclaim among American patrons and the expatriate community in Florence. As Indiana wrote of her new friend, “Few have more celebrity as a landscape painter, and his room is filled with beautiful paintings, which are mostly engaged by American gentlemen. All his pieces have a melancholy shade over them, which render them so attractive and beautiful, when I go to his studio, I scarcely know when to leave it. One never tires in examining fine paintings and sculpture. The more you view them, the more fascinating they become—These, with music, never disappoint in the end...the oftener you see the former, the more you admire its excellence.”<sup>108</sup>

Brown and his wife became friends of the Fletchers, and traveled with them to observation points outside the city from which they could enjoy views of Florence; after one excursion, Indiana reported that “These hills are covered with villas and country seats of surpassing beauty...it is the favorite city of everyone.” Singled out for particular attention was a palace belonging to a Florentine noblewoman. Although she did not mention it by name, Indiana

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<sup>107</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah Fletcher, 12 December 1845, published 23 March 1846; Indiana Fletcher to Elijah Fletcher, 14 December 1845, published 2 April 1846.

<sup>108</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah Fletcher, 16 March 1846, published 25 May 1846, SBC. In 1858, Brown sent two of his works to Indiana at Sweet Briar, *Bay of Naples* and a *Head of Christ*. These works are no longer at the college, and their whereabouts are unknown.

wrote “It is in a lovely sequestered spot—affording a fine view of the surrounding picturesque country. It is said she has not enough taste to prefer this romantic retreat to her palace in the city, because it is so lonesome, and that she spends but little of her time at it.”<sup>109</sup> With this commentary, expressing appreciation for the scene before her, Indiana may suggest that *she* possessed the taste that eluded the Italian noblewoman.

Their months in Florence also provided ample opportunity for Indiana and Elizabeth to enrich their artistic accomplishments and enhance their cultural sensibilities. They attended the opera on a regular basis, though they preferred the ballet, and eagerly debated the relative merits of the dancers. Indiana clearly enjoyed the opportunities to resume instruction in these arts, writing “There is, perhaps, no place in Europe where there are better advantages in learning music and painting than Florence—particularly music on the Piano and Guitar...In painting here, we not only have opportunities to receive instructions from the able masters, but we have access to so many galleries of paintings of the first merit in ancient times, and a chance to visit the studios of the distinguished painters of the present day.” These rarefied pursuits were tempered by the amusements of the flea circus, but Indiana soon redeemed herself with an account of a visit to the Laurentian Library, the result of Medici patronage and Michelangelo’s architectural prowess. Remarking particularly upon the staircase and Michelangelo’s decorative program, she noted that “This library is little known and rarely visited by travelers—but certainly they could not visit a more interesting and instructive place,” a comment that again serves to demonstrate

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<sup>109</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah and Maria Fletcher, Florence, 19 January 1846, SBC; Indiana Fletcher to Elijah and Maria Fletcher, Florence, 16 March 1846, SBC.

her enjoyment of something others failed to appreciate.<sup>110</sup> Both Indiana and Betty noted separately that they left the city only with regret to complete the rest of their itinerary.<sup>111</sup>

In late April 1846, they departed for Nice in a carriage, traveling over land and enjoying a ceaselessly unfolding series of fishing villages, harbors, and beaches. Their route took them through Toulouse and Marseilles, and on to Barcelona and Madrid, where they spent most of their time in the Prado, “indeed a great treat. There are, besides the finest paintings of the old Spanish school, many master pieces of Raphael, Guido, Carracci, &tc.” Their plans to tour the queen’s country palace were prevented by a call from the U. S. Minister to Spain, Washington Irving, who was in the last weeks of his appointment there. Indiana reported “We found him quite familiar and perfectly plain in his manners and dress, and it...was a treat to hear him converse...in such simple and beautiful language. He said he was tired of courts and longed for the day when he should walk into his own little cottage and hang up his hat. He paid quite a long visit and one would never think, from his appearance, that he was a man of whom the proudest nobles would be honored to make the acquaintance.”<sup>112</sup>

That the Fletchers were singled out by Irving for a call, on top of the solicitude extended on their behalf by the American consulate in Cairo, and the attentions of the expatriate community in Italy, suggest that they were far from anonymous tourists; although the numbers of American travelers visiting Europe steadily increased from mid-century onwards, it was still far from common or comfortable. As Indiana noted of Madrid, even the best hotel was “quite destitute of elegance or even many of the comforts a traveler looks for—But through the country it is vastly worse—no one who has not tried it, can form any idea of the hardships and privations

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah and Maria Fletcher, Florence, 11 April 1846, SBC; Betty Fletcher to Elijah and Maria Fletcher, Cogoleto, 23 April 1846, SBC.

<sup>112</sup> Indiana Fletcher to Elijah Fletcher, n.d. May 1846, published 22 July 1846.

a traveller [sic] encounters in this country, particularly females—so much so that it is rarely one is met on the road...Even the adventurous English are scarce here—and as for American ladies, we are probably the only ones in Spain.”<sup>113</sup>

Although the letter of May 1846 is the last published in *The Virginian*, there are some in the Sweet Briar archives that detail the Fletchers’ travel as it continued for several months more, and they spent the summer visiting Copenhagen, Holland, Finland, Sweden, Russia, Scotland and England. In August, the siblings had a debate: Indiana and Elizabeth wished to remain for another winter, perhaps returning to a school in Paris, while Sidney advocated bringing their trip to a close. Fletcher himself had mixed emotions about his children extending their stay, confiding to Calvin “Yet as they have gone so far, I wish them to enjoy every opportunity for improvement that they may return content and not have to regret that they had not staid [sic] longer to see this or learn that.”<sup>114</sup> In the end, the sisters wrote to their mother, asking her to join them for the winter, as those were the only terms under which Sidney agreed to extend their stay. It may have been that the responsibility for shepherding his indefatigable sisters was wearing on him, or that he was simply ready to return home after an extended time away. In any event, Maria Fletcher declined to join her children in Europe.

In her last letter before they returned home, Betty enthused “I have seen but two spots in Europe on my travels where I could be content to dwell—and these are in fair Florence and gay Paris. In the former I could make myself happy taking lessons in music...[and] in visiting the numerous galleries of painting and sculpture—but then in the summer I should want a little villa where I could cultivate the vine and silk and make Tuscan braid;” here, it seems clear that she

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Lynchburg, 15 May 1846, SBC.

longs to blend two worlds, one of sophistication and one of pastoral idyll.<sup>115</sup> Her comments indicate that Italy, in particular the vistas punctuated by romantic villas, made a great impression on both young women, and their affinity it may have influenced their eventual selection of the Italianate villa style for their own home. In October 1846, the travelers embarked on a 40-day crossing from Le Havre to New York, arriving in New York in late November. Fletcher wrote “They came directly to this Plantation wishing to enjoy a little retirement after so much fatigue. S. is the same old thing and the girls as simple and unaffected as I could wish, school children with polish of manners and intellectual improvement,” which amply repaid his monetary and emotional investment during their extended time from home.<sup>116</sup>

### Conclusion

This chapter examined the education and exceptional experiences of the Fletcher daughters, Indiana and Elizabeth, during the 1840s. After proving their academic aptitude at rigorous boarding schools, they set forth on an extraordinary and lengthy international adventure during which they drank in the splendor of the Amber Room, scaled the Great Pyramids, strolled the gardens at Versailles, and explored the ruins at Pompeii and Herculaneum. Along the way, they made the most of what their considerable resources of time and money afforded, demonstrating cultural curiosity and intrepid spirit, fitting in visits at all art galleries of note, public and private, and viewing Picturesque scenes throughout Europe and the Near East just as avidly as they did artistic masterpieces. These activities were documented in a series of fifty-four letters sent to Lynchburg and published in *The Virginian* newspaper, and their itinerary has been definitively determined for the first time through scrutiny of these letters. In the course of

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<sup>115</sup> Elizabeth Fletcher to Maria Fletcher, Christiana, Norway, n.d. August 1846, SBC.

<sup>116</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar, 20 December 1846, SBC.



this chapter, it was demonstrated how Indiana's writings revealed the sisters' expanding knowledge of art and architecture and the attendant acquisition of cultural sophistication that made them specific to their time and place. These cumulative experiences molded the sisters, and by extension, their family, into the ideal patrons for the Italianate villa that is the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

### Sweet Briar House II: The Italianate Villa (1851-1852)

#### Introduction

Between 1851 and 1852, the Fletcher family renovated their Palladian house into an Italianate villa, the asymmetrical style of which marked a departure from the Classical regularity that had characterized fashionable American architecture until the 1840s, and Western architecture for four hundred years. In this way, an ideal solution was implemented between the balanced façade and axially symmetrical plan that characterized Sweet Briar House I and the fashionable Picturesque advocated by the architectural tastemaker A. J. Downing that exerted a powerful influence on American buildings from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The proposed front elevation for Sweet Briar House II is based upon the façade of Richard Upjohn's King Villa, which was published and praised by Downing in his *Architecture of Country Houses* (1850). This presentation drawing still exists in the college archives and will be evaluated and compared to the house that resulted from it. The furnishings that date from this period, as far as they can be determined, will also be assessed as examples of mid-nineteenth century taste following Downing's recommendations.

#### From Italian Villa to Italianate Villa: The Style, its Origins and Typology

By the mid-nineteenth century, the balanced façades of the Palladian buildings traced in Chapter 2 receded in importance as asymmetrical massing, which provided great freedom in the design of façades, fenestration, and the internal arrangement of rooms, became an accepted

alternative for domestic architecture. This development was rooted in the British Picturesque Movement, which demonstrated great affinity for Classical houses and the compositional possibilities seen from different points in their setting. By the end of the eighteenth century, adherents of the movement adopted irregular design in country houses, often based on medieval tradition, to better blend the building with the landscape. The Italianate villa that rose to prominence as an architectural style in America between 1840 and 1860 had its origins in the vernacular Italian villas that punctuated the compositions of European landscape paintings (figure 4.1).<sup>117</sup>

From this pictorial tradition, celebrated in influential books such as John Claudius Loudon's *Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture* (1833), came the impetus for the adoption of the villa style in England. Loudon reproduced large sections of an illustrated text by G. L. Meason, *On the Landscape Architecture of the Great Painters of Italy*, first published in 1828, in which the original author proclaimed "The Beau Ideal of the Italian Style of Villa Architecture is to be found in the landscapes of the great Italian painters, and more especially in the backgrounds of their pictures."<sup>118</sup> The fourteen buildings shown in Loudon's text, details from works by artists such as Raphael and Claude, have in common the asymmetrical massing of voids and solids broken by the irregular towers and turrets, in which part of the structure is informed by the Classical tradition with medieval additions. Nineteenth-century architects, builders and patrons were encouraged to use these works as inspiration for

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<sup>117</sup> For examples of the overlap between the Classical and Picturesque, please see Charles E. Brownell, "Laying the Groundwork: The Classical Tradition and Virginia Architecture, 1770-1870" in *The Making of Virginia Architecture* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1992), 37-38 and 45-46 and "The Italianate Villa and the Search for an American Style, 1840-1860," in *The Italian Presence in American Art, 1760-1860*, edited by Irma B. Jaffe (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 208-210.

<sup>118</sup> John Claudius Loudon, *Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture* (London: A. Spottswode, 1833) 777.

their designs, in which they could create their own painterly effects through the mingled application of elements like the campanile towers, projecting roofs, and irregular massing that characterize this architecture.<sup>119</sup>

The adoption of the irregular arrangement of geometrical forms as an acceptable architectural choice was a major departure from the symmetry that characterized buildings in the Classical tradition. Cronkhill, a house in Somerset designed by the English architect John Nash in 1802, was the most important early manifestation of the mixed style, an architectural composition consisting of an asymmetrical grouping of a cylinder, blocks, and arches related to medieval tradition. The façade was enlivened with the addition of an Italian loggia, and the placement of the windows offered a departure from the Classical tradition in which those on different stories line up vertically, void over void (figure 4.2). However appealing clients found this fresh interpretation, elements of which came to define the Italianate villa, the unalterable fact is that the low rooflines were incompatible with heavy snows and the season in which the arcaded loggia could be enjoyed was short. The style was perfectly suited, however, to the mild climate of the Mid-Atlantic states; as William Ranlett, the American author of *Cottage and Villa Architecture*, observed in 1851,

the climate of England will not allow anything like a close approximation to an Italian villa, which, with very slight alterations, might be adopted in our middle States; so that when the Anglo-Italian villa was transplanted here, it immediately began to revert back to its original type, as our climate and the habits of the people bore a stronger resemblance to those of Italy than those of England.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> For a discussion of the history, typology and nomenclature of the Italianate villa, please see Charles E. Brownell, “The Italianate Villa and the Search for an American Style, 1840-1860,” 208-230.

<sup>120</sup> William Ranlett, *The Architect: A Series of Original Designs, for Domestic and Ornamental Cottages and Villas Connected with Landscape Gardening, Adapted to the United States*, Volume II (New York: Dewitt and Davenport, 1851) 13.

“Italianate villa” is now the preferred term for American houses built in this architectural style, as it effectively acknowledges their kinship with Italian architecture, without giving the impression that they are of Italy.<sup>121</sup>

As manifested in America, the Italianate villa may be divided into types according to the composition of their facades.<sup>122</sup> The most revealing type is the “Downing Pattern,” so called for its inclusion in books by the exceedingly influential tastemaker A. J. Downing. His extensive writings on landscape and architecture went into multiple printings, and the widespread adoption of the principles he promoted through books and journal articles shaped the appearance of nineteenth-century America.<sup>123</sup> From his origins as a nurseryman, Downing became the foremost proponent of villa architecture in America, and a constant theme in his writings emphasized the need for harmony between the style of a house and its setting. The first type, labeled “An Irregular Villa in the Italian Style, Bracketed,” appeared in Downing’s *Cottage Residences*, published in 1842 with illustrations by the architect Alexander J. Davis (figure

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<sup>121</sup> Brownell, “The Italianate Villa and the Search for an American Style, 1840-1860,” 210.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-219

<sup>123</sup> Downing’s first publication was *A Treatise and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America, with a view to the improvement of country residences...With remarks on rural architecture* (1841). *Cottage Residences* (1842) was followed by *Fruits and Fruit Trees of North America* (1845) and *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850). He also edited *The Horticulturalist*, a monthly periodical, from 1846-52. Publications on Downing, while not quite as numerous as those on Palladio, have been published in a variety of fields, including architectural history, landscape history, and cultural history. For publications focused on the architectural influence of Downing, please see Kenneth Hafertepe, “Downing’s Readings—and Readings of Downing” in *American Architects and their Books, 1840-1915*, edited by Hafertepe and James F. O’Gorman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 2-30; David Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste: Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Adam W. Sweeting, *Reading Houses and Building Books: Andrew Jackson Downing and the Architecture of Popular Antebellum Literature: 1835-1855* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996); George B. Tatum and Elisabeth Blair MacDougall, eds., *Prophet with Honor: The Career of Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990); Arthur Channing Downs, *Downing and the American House* (Newtown Square, Pennsylvania: Downing and Vaux Society, 1988).

4.3).<sup>124</sup> This pattern is distinguished by the organization of three primary units, as two wings intersect a tower in a “benthouse” plan of carefully distributed geometric masses. A second type is the “Wightwick-Downing” formula, also a three-part façade with a corner tower, and so named because the design originally appeared in *Palace of Architecture* (1840) by George Wightwick, an English architectural writer, and was adapted by Downing as Design VIII in *Cottage Residences* (figure 4.4).<sup>125</sup>

The most important type of Italianate villa for the purpose of understanding the lineage of Sweet Briar House II is the “Loggia-Villa with Corner Towers,” represented by the Edward King House (figure 4.5). Designed by the American architect Richard Upjohn in 1845, the King House follows a formula established in Italy (figure 4.6). Additions and alterations to an existing house over time, as dictated by need and fashion, contributed to the Picturesque quality of Italian villas. This convention was followed at Sweet Briar House, where the Palladian double portico was replaced with an arcaded double loggia, and towers were added to either end of the house (figure 4.7). These alterations, carried out between 1851 and 1852, followed the façade of the King House, which had been published in Downing’s *Architecture of Country Houses* the previous year.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> The collaborative relationship between Alexander J. Davis, who was a noted architect and author in his own right, has been documented by Jane Davies in her essay “Davis and Downing, Collaborators in the Picturesque,” in George B. Tatum and Elisabeth Blair MacDougall, eds., *Prophet with Honor: The Career of Andrew Jackson Downing* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990) 81-123. Davis published *Rural Residences* in 1837. For the secondary sources on Davis, please see Amelia Peck, *Alexander Jackson Davis: American Architect, 1803-1892* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992).

<sup>125</sup> Charles E. Brownell gave the name to this pattern; see “The Italianate Villa and the Search for an American Style, 1840-1860,” 210. George Wightwick was an English architect and writer; his *Hints to Young Architects* (1846) was edited by Downing prior to its publication in America.

<sup>126</sup> Sweet Briar House has been addressed in a scholarly manner in only two publications to date. For a discussion of the proposed front elevation in the college archives, please see Charles E. Brownell’s entry in *The Making of Virginia Architecture*, 284-285. For a discussion of Sweet

## Sweet Briar House II: The Italianate Villa (1851-52)

In a recent paper, Caren Yglesias likened A. J. Downing's impact on America architecture to the pure elegance of a mathematical formula, "a delicate equation where a proprietor's character plus site geography plus building style equals a harmonious dwelling where architecture and landscape fit well together."<sup>127</sup> Downing described the villa as a country house best suited for a person of taste, leisure and education, possessed of the means to furnish it elegantly, and to maintain it with the assistance of several servants. The Fletcher family admirably fulfilled these criteria; in the years immediately before the renovations commenced, Fletcher wrote frequently of their contentment with country life, stating that his daughters were "well reconciled to retirement," spending hours at their harp and piano, and reading, writing, and sewing in quiet company. Outdoor pursuits included nature rambles and riding with their father. Only occasional trips were made to their Lynchburg house so that they could attend church services at St. Paul's; most of their time was spent at Sweet Briar, with extended stays in Philadelphia and New York in the winter months.<sup>128</sup>

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Briar House in relation to the architecture of Lynchburg, Virginia, please see S. Allen Chambers, *Lynchburg: An Architectural History*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 189-192.

<sup>127</sup> Caren Yglesias, "Authentic Materials: A Pornographic Question," from a paper presented at "Intersense: Madness and Method" conference held at Penn State University, October 23-24, 2003. Yglesias is the author of the forthcoming *The Complete House and Grounds: Learning from Andrew Jackson Downing's Domestic Architecture* (Chicago: The Center for American Places at Columbia College, 2010).

<sup>128</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar, Virginia, 9 May 1847; 18 July 1847; 24 October 1847, SBC.

In Downing's eyes, beauty and taste converged in the villa, and "[n]ature and art both lend it their happy influence."<sup>129</sup> His delight in the possibilities it afforded had been apparent with the publication of his first book, in which he presented the "Loggia Villa with Corner Towers" design as the epitome of rural architecture, using it to introduce his chapter on the subject (figure 4.8).<sup>130</sup> When building a country house, Downing delineated its most important characteristics, stating

such a dwelling...not only gives ample space for all the comforts and conveniences of a country life, but by its varied and picturesque form and outline, its porches, verandas, etc., also appears to have some reasonable connexion, or be in perfect keeping, with surrounding nature. *Architectural beauty* must be considered conjointly with the *beauty of the landscape or situation*.<sup>131</sup>

Sweet Briar House, situated in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, was in a location blessed by nature, and by 1851, the Fletchers had adopted a renovation plan designed to apply an equal amount of art to create a fashionable Italianate villa.

When selecting the new style for their home, the Fletchers were more familiar with the lineage of the Italianate villa than most. Indiana and Elizabeth had firsthand knowledge of Italian architecture, having spent a great deal of time in and around Florence during the winter of 1845-1846, which provided ample time for them to soak up its language, art and architecture at a time when the family apparently was discussing improvements to Sweet Briar House. In response to Elizabeth's stated desire that a balcony be added to her bedroom before she returned, Fletcher had replied to his daughters

All I want of you when you get home is to be satisfied with home as you find it. You know I am willing to improve and not niggardly in spending money for that purpose, but you know I have not had much time, if I had taste, since you have

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<sup>129</sup> Downing, *Architecture of Country Houses*, 258.

<sup>130</sup> Downing, *Landscape Gardening*, 368. This formula also found favor in the design of public buildings, but an examination of those falls outside the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>131</sup> Downing, *Landscape Gardening*, 320.



been gone, to devote to that purpose and after all, I think those things can be as well done when you return. I will then have more leisure and the improvements can be made after your own wishes. And it will be an amusement for you to assist...As to improvements, I say I want your taste and acquired information about them...I think, as I wrote you before, we must make a genteel home in Lynchburg for a centre [sic] and then our rural establishment we will make and adorn as becomes simple rural establishments. Your mammas [sic] present plan is not to do much this fall in the way of Improvement, but for her and Ina & Bettie to spend the next summer in the north and buy such articles of Furniture as she may want. I hope, I say, you will be contented with home. It is an interesting place to me and I have no wandering notions and never shall be induced to leave it.<sup>132</sup>

Even more germane in exploring the reason behind their adoption of the Italianate villa, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Indiana attended St. Mary's Hall in Burlington, New Jersey, from 1843-1844. Thus she was aware of Riverside, the first Italianate house in America, built by John Notman for the school's esteemed founder, Bishop George Washington Doane in 1839 (figure 4.9).<sup>133</sup> Notman was a Scottish architect based in Philadelphia after 1831, and his first major commission, the design of the city's Laurel Hill cemetery, brought him into contact with Doane, one of the project's backers.<sup>134</sup> Riverside was marvelous in its massing; Notman skillfully explored the Picturesque possibilities of light and shadow with a clustered group of pavilions joined around a central core that united the design.

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<sup>132</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Indiana, Elizabeth and Sidney Fletcher, Sweet Briar, 22 August 1846, SBC. This is one of only two letters written by Fletcher to his children that survives, suggesting that it may have been of special import. The other letter, full of fatherly advice and encouragement, was delivered to Indiana at the Georgetown academy on the Fletcher returned to Sweet Briar having escorted her away from home for the first time.

<sup>133</sup> For the definitive, if outdated, source on Notman, please see Constance M. Greiff, *John Notman, Architect: 1810-1865* (Philadelphia: Athenaeum of Philadelphia, 1979).

<sup>134</sup> Adolf Placzek, ed. *MacMillan Encyclopedia of Architects* (London: Collier MacMillan, 1982), 306. Doane was a progressive architectural patron; he also commissioned the Gothic Revival church at St. Mary's from Richard Upjohn, which was built in 1846.

In addition, the Fletchers almost certainly knew Upjohn's King House firsthand, having visited Newport during its construction and again in 1849 after it was completed.<sup>135</sup> Although the design was not published until the following year, they must have been struck by the same features that caused Downing to praise it as "one of the most successful specimens of the Italian style in the United States, [uniting] beauty of form and expression with spacious accommodation, in a manner not often seen."<sup>136</sup> Upjohn's design, though perhaps exceeding the "simple rural establishment" that would have satisfied Fletcher, is a triumph of harmony and variation.<sup>137</sup> The irregular towers call to mind the feature of the Italian campanile, the diverse fenestration signifies the varied purposes of the rooms behind the windows, and the rhythmic application of round-arched doors, windows, and loggias unite the façade.<sup>138</sup> Downing's description of the ideal owner of such a house also would have appealed; certainly Fletcher, as described in Chapter 1, could be classed among

... the men of imagination—men whose aspirations never leave them at rest—men whose ambition and energy will give them no peace within the mere bounds of rationality. These are the men for picturesque villas—country houses with high roofs, steep gables, unsymmetrical and capricious forms. It is for such that the architect may safely introduce

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<sup>135</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar, 1 June 1849, SBC. The family also had a glancing connection to Richard Upjohn, who designed a house in Newark, New York, for their cousin Fletcher Williams that was built between 1855-56. A drawing of a cornice detail for this residence (NYDA.1000.011) is in the Upjohn Collection of Architectural Drawings by Richard, Richard Michell, and Hobart Upjohn at the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library at Columbia University.

<sup>136</sup> Downing, *Architecture of Country Houses*, 317.

<sup>137</sup> Upjohn later published his own book, *Rural Architecture* (1852). It featured affordable designs for churches, schools and cottages; there was nothing as elaborate for the King Villa, the cost of which restricted its design to a limited clientele. For secondary sources on this architect, please see Judith S. Hull, "The 'School of Upjohn: Richard Upjohn's Office,'" *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 52, No. 3 (September 1993): 281-306; Everard M. Upjohn, *Richard Upjohn, Architect and Churchman* (New York: Da Capo, 1968).

<sup>138</sup> For the round-headed arch in American architecture, please see Kathleen Curran, "The German Rundbogenstil and Reflections of the American Round-Arched Style," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 47 No. 4 (December 1988) 351-373.

the tower and the campanile—any and every feature that indicates originality, boldness, energy and variety of character.<sup>139</sup>

### The Presentation Drawing and the Problem of Architectural Attribution

The influence of Upjohn's Edward King House is manifest in the presentation drawing of the proposed elevation of Sweet Briar House II, most particularly in the asymmetrical towers, triple arched loggias, and fixed awning (figure 4.10).<sup>140</sup> However, the Sweet Briar drawing shows significant variation from the Upjohn façade, especially in the arrangement of the towers, which as built were reversed in height. At Sweet Briar, the West tower, on the left-hand side of the house, was made higher than the East tower on the opposite side (figure 4.11). This change was made in order to derive the maximum benefit from the site of the house, which features a dramatic slope away to the west, opening a vista to a lake that reflects the Blue Ridge Mountains. That this Picturesque characteristic of the property was not considered as the elevation was drafted suggests the architect never visited the location, for had he done so, he certainly would have come to the same conclusion as the builders: the view to the west of the house was unparalleled and the corresponding tower should be raised to make best advantage of it. The process of making adjustments between the plan and the project is not unusual; architectural drawings function as a record of an architect's thoughts, but often the ideas that fill the page are revisited once construction is underway. As the plan for Sweet Briar House was implemented, the oculus that was to replace the Palladian lunette in the portico was omitted, so the window was filled in rather than replaced; the lunettes above the doors on both levels of the portico were

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<sup>139</sup> Downing, *Architecture of Country Houses*, 263.

<sup>140</sup> This drawing was included in the 1992 exhibition and catalogue by Charles E. Brownell and others, *The Making of Virginia Architecture* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1992) 284. The catalogue entry may be updated to include the information that the original towers were asymmetrical in height; they were rebuilt to an even height following a fire in 1927.

also retained, though their absence in the proposed elevation suggests they were to be removed as well.

In another change, wrought iron, rather than masonry, balconies were attached to the façade on the top two floors of the West tower. Another Italianate villa recommended by Downing, Design VI from *Cottage Residences* (see figure 4.3), inspired the proposed treatment of the lower stories of the East tower.<sup>141</sup> As executed on the West tower, the columnar screen proposed for its first floor was replaced with a bay window, but the treatment of the windows on the second floor and third floors remained. The arched canopy design on the second floor, which followed a plate published in 1852 by Philadelphia architect Samuel Sloan in *The Model Architect*, was retained but placed on the East tower (figure 4.12).<sup>142</sup>

Despite clear associations between the drawing and well-known architectural sources, it is not possible at this point to identify the individual responsible either for the design or the supervision of the renovations. A tantalizing reference comes from the description of Sweet Briar in Livingston's *Portraits*; after describing the plantation in detail, the author falls just short of offering this information, stating "All these buildings, excepting the family residence, have been erected by his own servants, having amongst them almost every description of

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<sup>141</sup> An anonymous architectural sketch found inside the Fletcher family's copy of Downing's *Landscape Architecture*, closely follows this design, albeit with reversed massing, though the floorplan does not.

<sup>142</sup> Sloan published *The Model Architect: A Series of Original Designs for Cottages, Villas, Suburban Residences, etc.* in 1852. For secondary sources on Sloan, please see Elspeth Cowell, "Samuel Sloan, Pattern Books, and the Question of Professional Identity" in *American Architects and their Books, 1840-1915*, edited by Kenneth Hafertepe and James F. O'Gorman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 95-128; Harold N. Coledge, Jr., *Samuel Sloan: Architect of Philadelphia, 1815-1884* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986) and Coledge, "A Sloan Checklist, 1849-1884," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 19, No. 1 (March 1960), 34-38.

mechanic.”<sup>143</sup> However, recent research has eliminated two candidates proposed in the past. The nomination prepared for The Glebe, a house in adjacent Nelson County, suggests that Stephen Harding, the farm manager for Sweet Briar at the time of Indiana’s death, was responsible for the renovations.<sup>144</sup> Information from the Hamilton College archives, Harding’s alma mater, gives his year of birth as 1848, making it impossible for him either to design or to direct the project that commenced in 1851. Ferrol Briggs, an amateur architectural historian who served as a librarian at the University of Virginia, suggested that James Henry Williams, who married Indiana Fletcher in 1865, might have prepared the elevation plan.<sup>145</sup> This attribution is based on the fact that “Rev. Jas. H. Williams” was written and later erased from the lower righthand corner of the drawing. Recent information obtained from the Trinity College archives shows that Williams graduated in 1854; however, those same records indicate he did not complete divinity school until 1858, so he would not have used the title “Reverend” before that date.<sup>146</sup>

While a firm architectural attribution is unavailable, the second definition of architect, according to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, is “a person responsible for the invention or realization of something.”<sup>147</sup> According to the series of comments offered by Fletcher during the

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<sup>143</sup> Livingston 71.

<sup>144</sup> The Glebe National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 005-0010, listed 5/15/08, Virginia Department of Historic Resources files. This assertion was made based on a connection, not apparent to this author, between the appearance of the porch at The Glebe and the loggia at Sweet Briar House.

<sup>145</sup> Briggs compiled photographs and notes on architecture for twenty-six Virginia counties in scrapbooks that were donated to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. For his notes on Sweet Briar House, please see the Amherst County scrapbook in the Virginia Department of Historic Resources archives.

<sup>146</sup> Email correspondence dated 25 January 2010 with Peter J. Knapp, Special Collections Librarian and College Archivist, Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut. It is possible that the name was added later to show ownership.

<sup>147</sup> Judy Pearsall, ed. *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 69.

building process carried out at Sweet Briar, by this definition it may be acceptable to consider Indiana and Elizabeth the “architects” of Sweet Briar House II. It seems they were responsible for selecting the Italianate style, for which they demonstrated great appreciation as discussed in the previous chapter, and of the three types of Italianate villas previously discussed, the “Loggia-Villa with Corner Towers” plan was the best possible choice for integrating the central block of the existing house. The renovations commenced in April 1851 and followed the presentation drawing prepared by an unknown hand, incorporating the changes previously discussed. While the draftsman was familiar with the conventions of architectural drawing, including the light source emanating at a 45 degree angle from the upper left-hand corner and the appropriate thickness of face lines and shadow lines, the drawing lacks the masterful handling of a professionally trained architect.<sup>148</sup>

### The Renovation of Sweet Briar House

In April 1851, Fletcher wrote “I have commenced building and shall have what is not common, several white mechanics employed here most of the summer in erecting two Towers to this house—one at each end—three stories high, 20’ x 20’. This is a project of my Daughters and as I rarely deny to gratify any of their desires, have consented to this. The Brickmakers have commenced their work and the carpenters are preparing their materials for the wood work.”<sup>149</sup>

Although the towers added to Sweet Briar House, along with the replacement of the Palladian double portico with a double loggia, gave the Lynchburg area its first Italianate villa, its

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<sup>148</sup> Brownell, *The Making of Virginia Architecture*, 284. For a discussion of the conventions of architectural drawings, please see William M. S. Rasmussen, Charles E. Brownell and Richard Guy Wilson, “Idea, Tool, Evidence: The Architectural Drawing as Instrument and Artifact” in *The Making of Virginia Architecture*, in particular 145-167.

<sup>149</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar, 18 April 1851, SBC.

appearance might have caused less surprise than Fletcher's employment of "white mechanics" when he had a corps of enslaved laborers upon which to draw.<sup>150</sup> A discussion of this community at Sweet Briar plantation is outside the scope of this dissertation, but Fletcher owned a number of individuals whose skills as builders were such that he was able to hire them out for construction projects carried out elsewhere, and entrusted them with the erection of an innovative barn complex for his use.<sup>151</sup> The hiring of "white mechanics" to carry out the renovations at Sweet Briar House points to the specialized nature of the construction, in which the towers had to be joined to an existing structure; Downing cautioned in comments he added to Wightwick's *Hints to Young Architects* about the importance of achieving the right bond between old and new construction by making allowances for sinking of the footings and settling of the masonry, and added an instructive illustration showing the result if this advice was not followed (figure 4.13).<sup>152</sup>

Later that summer Fletcher offered Calvin an update on the progress of the tower construction, predicting "The Brick work is not yet finished but will be in a few days. It will take the balance of the year to complete them. I have never done much in the building way,

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<sup>150</sup> Sweet Briar House was the first Italianate villa built in central Virginia, and the only one built to the "Loggia-Villa with Corner Towers" design. It was followed by Hawkwood in Louisa County, designed in 1851 by Alexander J. Davis for Richard Overton Morris and built between 1852-1854; the Sutherlin House in Danville, architect unknown, built for William T. Sutherlin between 1857-1858; in Lynchburg, Thomas Eastlack designed the David Bryce Payne House and the John William Murrell House, both built between 1859-1860; Fairview in Amherst County, possibly designed by Robert Burkholder for Nathaniel Taliaferro and built in 1867; and Mount San Angelo, designed by an unknown architect for Elizabeth Fletcher Mosby and her husband and built on their property adjacent to Sweet Briar in 1870.

<sup>151</sup> The principal building in this barn complex had a stone foundation and measured 100' x 40'. For the southern convention of using black builders, please see Peter Wood, "Whetting, Setting and Laying Timbers: Black Builders in the Early South," *Southern Exposure* 8 (Spring 1980) 3-13.

<sup>152</sup> *Hints to Young Architects, Calculated to Facilitate their Practical Operations, by George Wightwick. With Additional Notes, and Hints to Persons About Building in the Country by A. J. Downing* (New York: J. Wiley, 1851), 150.

always finding it better to buy a house than to build one. My Daughters remain with me this summer, wishing to stay and supervise their building in which they take much interest and about which I permit them to exercise their own taste.”<sup>153</sup> The towers were completed by November, when he issued another progress report on the house, stating of Indiana and Elizabeth that “they have taken a great interest in its improvement and sometimes tell me they will soon make it so attractive that they will never wish to leave it. I take great pleasure in furthering their views and helping them make their home agreeable.”<sup>154</sup>

Although the towers were the most visible addition to the house, there were many other alterations that contributed to the successful realization of the Italianate villa where before had been a distinguished, though unremarkable, Palladian house. The pedimented double portico, that hallmark of Palladianism in the Virginia Piedmont, was updated with a double loggia featuring a triple arcade. The loggias were extended to reach each tower, providing an exterior walkway to either side of the house. However, it is the fenestration that most clearly breaks with the Classical principle of lining up windows on each story, and the pattern followed at Sweet Briar House resulted in an allied though distinctive arrangement, with triple round-arched windows installed on the third floor of each tower. French doors on the first and second floors of the West tower facilitated access to the outdoors, and the middle window on the third floor was designed to open onto the front balcony. On the East tower, the window types are repeated on each floor, though they are correspondingly smaller due to the absence of the balcony. The repetition of the arches, in the windows and on the double loggia, created a series of framing devices from which various aspects of the landscape could be viewed; for Downing, the villa was inseparable from the requisite pleasure grounds that were its immediate surroundings. The

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<sup>153</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar, 20 August 1851, SBC.

<sup>154</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar, 10 November 1851, SBC.



dedication of space for ornamental, rather than agricultural, plantings was also the privilege of the wealthy and leisured class who inhabited villa architecture, and the grounds of Sweet Briar House featured flower gardens tended by Indiana and Elizabeth, and an arboretum of specimens cultivated by Fletcher.<sup>155</sup>

One of the chief attractions of Picturesque architecture was the freedom it allowed in the arrangement of interior spaces. The asymmetrical façade of Sweet Briar House was achieved primarily through the five-part rhythm across the façade created by the towers projecting from the block of the old house and the projecting central loggia, the free handling of the fenestration, and the asymmetrical height of the towers with varied balcony designs. As the plans for each floor show, however, the interior closely followed the axially symmetrical plan that was the legacy of the Classical design principles from Sweet Briar House I, and thus the architect's skill at interior arrangements may be seen as congruous with his draftsmanship (figures 4.14, 4.15, 4.16). Each tower contained three 20' x 20' squares, each directly over the other. The addition of six primary rooms did allow for the differentiation of space on the first floor, but only in terms of their use, not by virtue of the irregular design. The asymmetry of the plan came from the addition of secondary spaces, a series of service areas intended to facilitate the comfort and convenience of the Fletcher family. A back staircase, passages, storeroom, closet, and kitchen were added to the first floor. Each of these spaces was accessible from an L-shaped porch that was added to the East and South sides of the house. It was not visible from the front of the house, suggesting that it was intended to be used for domestic, rather than leisure, activities. On the second floor, the back staircase ascended to a central passage that ran from the front to the

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<sup>155</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar, 28 December 1850, SBC.

rear of the house. A pair of small rooms and storage closets, likely intended for use by domestic servants, were located along the rear of this passage.

### A Virtual Tour of Sweet Briar House II

In November 1852, Fletcher wrote

We are now making a completion of our new building. The marble man is putting in his hearths and Mantles [sic], Plasterer has finished, the Painters and Paper hangers are at work, and the Furniture ordered when in N. York and Philadelphia is arriving. I tell Inda and Bettie they will become lonesome when all is finished and they have no more to keep up the excitement. They say not, that they will then amuse themselves with taking care of these things which have caused so much trouble and expense and which they prize so highly.<sup>156</sup>

A visitor approaching Sweet Briar House after the renovations were completed would pass through a boxwood circle up the front steps of the house, and then under the central opening of the arcaded loggia, faced with wood worked to resemble dressed, or rusticated, stone. Such treatments, according to Downing, made the most of the play of light and shadow; they were implemented to impart “vitality to a wall or pier, and are susceptible in themselves of many shades of expression. They secure relief to adjacent pilasters, and give brilliancy, and delicacy, and value—by means of contrast—to the upper portions of edifices...”<sup>157</sup>

From the front hall, the doorways were aligned from one end of the house to the other, creating an enfilade that gave the effect of a Picturesque vista unfolding in either direction. This impression was enhanced by the unusual depth of the doorway passages into the tower rooms, legacies of the exterior walls from the Palladian house. The room immediately to the left was called the Small Tea Room, and the West tower room beyond it was the Parlor. The room

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<sup>156</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar, 7 November 1852, SBC.

<sup>157</sup> A. J. Downing, “Expression in Architecture,” *The Horticulturalist* vol. VI (December 1, 1851) 566.

directly beyond the front hall was the Library, positioned so it was not necessary to pass through it to get to any other space and disturb those within it. The room immediately to the right of the front hall was the Dining Room, and the East tower room beyond it was the Drawing Room.

The mantels installed by the “marble man” indicated the hierarchy of these rooms, all of which were designed with careful attention to using the windows as framing devices for the surrounding landscape. A highly polished mantel devoid of ornamentation on the south wall of the Parlor did not compete with the views of the front garden offered by a full-length window bay situated opposite. Standing or sitting in this bay could create the sensation of hovering above the ornamental plantings that spread down the slope of the lawn. The mantel in the adjacent Small Tea Room is situated along the west wall, originally an exterior wall, and is ornamented with a central cartouche. The windows on the north and south walls were elongated during the renovations, and a pair of gilt pier mirrors placed between them, creating virtual walls of light to reflect and enhance the views.

The Dining Room, also one of the original rooms in the house, has a similar mantel, though one of the window openings on the south wall was replaced by a doorway giving access to the kitchen and service side of the house, and the other was converted into a china closet. The most superior room in the house was the Drawing Room on the ground floor of the East tower. It was the location of the most ornate mantel, carved with naturalistic roses and flowers that recalled the gardens accessible through a pair of French doors leading onto the front porch, or down a shallow flight of stairs leading from another pair on the east wall. This ease of access helped dissolve the psychological and physical distance between the interior of the house and the pleasure grounds that surrounded it.

Returning to the front hall, a visitor ascending to the second floor of the house would move up a flight of stairs rising from left to right along the south wall. A square landing was reached, and a short flight of stairs placed at a right angle to it rose to the right. After climbing those, one arrived in an expansive stair hall, directly in front of a window framed by one of the arches of the loggia. This inviting aspect might compel the visitor to move through the double doors and onto the loggia. The original three rooms of the Palladian house were entered from this space, and the enfilade effect was repeated on this floor. Passing through to the East wing, a visitor reaching the rear passage might ascend a flight of stairs at the front of the house to reach the East tower, descend the back staircase to reach the first floor or side porch, or continue to the end of the passage and enter the smaller rooms at the rear of the house. If the visitor moved through the West wing, a staircase at the front of the house led to the West tower.

While it can be supposed that the bedrooms at Sweet Briar House were located on the second floor of the house, it is possible that the tower rooms were also used for this purpose. Elizabeth's earlier request that a balcony from which she could view the gardens be added to her bedroom suggests that she may have occupied the West tower, which has this feature. Indiana, Elizabeth and their parents were the only occupants of Sweet Briar House at the time the renovations were completed.<sup>158</sup> Although the Fletchers often received extended visits from friends and family members, there were seven primary rooms on the top two floors of the house, which allowed great flexibility in accommodating the permanent residents as well as temporary visitors.

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<sup>158</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar, 20 August 1851, SBC. The Fletchers officially transferred ownership of Tusculum to Sidney in 1849; Lucian was practicing law in California in 1851.

## Furnishing the Italianate Villa

It was natural as well as necessary that the family embarked upon a program of acquiring furnishings for their newly renovated home. According to Fletcher, these were ordered from Philadelphia and New York, cities that were centers of the fashionable furniture trade in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>159</sup> As no receipts in the archives date from that period, and no inventory was taken prior to 1900, the principles of connoisseurship must be applied to furnishings in the collection to determine which pieces were added to Sweet Briar House to ensure that the interiors were in keeping with the fashionable style promised by the Italianate villa. Several pieces in the collection are in the Rococo Revival, or “modern French,” style, which reached its zenith in popularity for high-style interiors at the time of the renovation, and may be supposed to have been acquired at that time.

The Rococo Revival, as the name suggests, was a return to the exuberant scrolling forms that characterized eighteenth-century French furniture. Produced by American furniture makers like John Henry Belter, Alexander Roux, and Joseph Meeks, the naturalistic riot of flowers and foliage carved in dark rosewood gave the clustered decorations the appearance of bouquets dipped in chocolate. Furniture in this style was intended for use in the most important social space of the house, and ideally acquired in sets, or “suits” that included side chairs, armchairs, sofas, a center table, side tables, pier mirrors, and an étagère (figure 4.17).

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<sup>159</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar, 7 November 1852, SBC. For careful scholarly analysis of household furnishings available in New York in the mid-nineteenth century, please see Amelia Peck, “The Products of Empire: Shopping for Home Decorations in New York City” and Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, “‘Gorgeous Articles of Furniture:’ Cabinetmaking in the Empire City” in *Art and the Empire City: New York, 1825-1861* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 259-325. For a comprehensive account of the domestic interior in America during the mid-nineteenth century, please see Elisabeth Donaghy Garrett, *At Home: The American Family 1750-1870* (New York: Abrams, 1990).

After the renovation program was completed, there were six additional rooms to be filled; two of these were on the first floor of the house, and thus subject to the scrutiny of visitors. As previously discussed, the Drawing Room on the first floor of the East tower could be considered the primary room in the house by virtue of the highly carved mantel with rose and floral motifs. These decorative elements would have echoed and reinforced the naturalistic effect created by the Rococo Revival furniture in the Sweet Briar collection, which includes an *étagère*, sofa, side tables, and gilt-bronze lamps by E. F. Caldwell, a premier Philadelphia manufacturer of light fixtures and decorative metalwork (figures 4.18, 4.19, 4.20).<sup>160</sup> A large gilt overmantel mirror redoubled the effect of natural and artificial light in the room.

In particular, the Sweet Briar sofa and *étagère* are tour-de-force examples of the style. The *étagère* is a piece of furniture with a series of shelves backed by a mirror; it was intended to be filled with *objets d'art* and natural curiosities. The items that were selected for display could provide an autobiography of the family who selected and arranged them, and the *étagère* was a conversation piece and focal point for the room, with its white marble surface and silk-lined doors. It was an imposing presence given its size and the active curves that were repeated in a gradually increasing pattern from the decorative crest to the legs. The Rococo Revival style also fit Downing's criteria of comfort, taste, and utility in household furnishings. Of it, he wrote "...besides the greater elegance of most French drawing-room furniture, its superior workmanship, and the luxurious ease of its admirably constructed seats, strongly commend it to popular favor."<sup>161</sup> A properly arranged Rococo Revival drawing room could imitate the Picturesque effect of a landscape, enticing a visitor to wander about admiring the artistic touches

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<sup>160</sup> The furniture at Sweet Briar does not have labels, but the lamps are stamped with "E. F. Caldwell." For more information on this firm, please see Roger Moss, *Lighting for Historic Buildings* (Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1988).

<sup>161</sup> Downing, *Architecture of Country Houses*, 432.

and decoration displayed throughout. The situation of this set of furnishings in the Drawing Room at Sweet Briar House, with multiple access points to the surrounding gardens, would have contributed to the harmonious interplay of art and nature in the most formal room of Sweet Briar House, leaving a lasting impression on visitors, and refreshing the sensibilities of the family who occupied it.

The Dining Room also received a new addition, an innovative extension dining table that Downing praised (figure 4.21). The round mahogany table was supported on a central base that split in two when leaves were to be added. The telescoping function was a design feature utilizing new technology that was as delightful as it was useful to nineteenth-century consumers. It may be supposed that other furnishings in this room included sideboards for storage and display; the Fletchers had a rich collection of silver that was passed down from the Crawford family, as well as newer pieces like a 26” tea tray, a sugar and creamer set, a castor set, and a pair of cake baskets from the Boston silversmiths Lincoln and Foss. Indiana had been responsible for the selection of these items a few years previously. She chose design motifs that anticipated the naturalism that reached its zenith in the Rococo Revival style, and also indicated the function of the object; the handles of the sugar dish replicated sugarcane and leaf, and its cover featured a child sucking a piece of sugarcane, and the cream pot featured a child drinking a cup of milk. Despite the fact that the cost of these custom items totaled \$680.19, approximately \$16,734.91 in today’s currency, Fletcher wrote approvingly that she had been “a Sample of Prudence.”<sup>162</sup> A large gilt overmantel mirror doubled the appearance of the items on display.

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<sup>162</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar, 24 October 1848, SBC; Lincoln and Foss to Indiana Fletcher, Boston, 16 August 1848 and 5 September 1848, SBC. The currency conversion was calculated using [www.westegg.com](http://www.westegg.com) on 1 February 2010. These items are no longer in the Sweet Briar collection; select items of jewelry, lace and silver belonging to Indiana were sold by the college in 1907.

The Small Tea Room still retains the pair of gilded pier mirrors that give light and vitality to that interior, and similar items were illustrated by Downing, who wrote of them “Nothing so much adds to the splendor and gayety of an apartment as *mirrors*. Although we would introduce them nowhere else in a country house, we think one or two large ones are indispensable in the drawing-room of a first-rate villa (figure 4.22).”<sup>163</sup> Just beyond this brilliantly lit space was the Parlor, and it is here that the family may have spent its most intimate and quiet hours. The room was designed to take equal advantage of the proximity to the outdoors, and the view through the bay window was reflected in a large gilt overmantel mirror hung directly across from it. The decorative elements were more restrained, suggesting that it was a semi-public space at best. Elizabeth Fletcher owned a piano, and Indiana played the harp, and it is likely that these instruments were housed in this room.

The last furnishings that can be attributed to the purchases made after the completion of the renovations belong to a bedroom set of the sort espoused by Downing for their artistic simplicity, lightness, and strength (figure 4.23).<sup>164</sup> This set, which has no labels or makers’ marks, is painted dark green with gold painted decoration, and includes a bed, set of four chairs, armoire, wash stand, side table, and bureau (figure 4.24). It is located on the third floor of the West tower, in the room that Elizabeth seems to have claimed for her own, and the expansive views from that aerie-like space extend to the north, west and south. Certainly Indiana and Elizabeth derived great comfort, pleasure and satisfaction from the Picturesque home that they created between 1851 and 1852; Fletcher wrote soon after the renovation and furnishing program were completed that

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<sup>163</sup> Downing, *Architecture of Country Houses*, 436. There were multiple sets of pier mirrors in Sweet Briar House, but only the pair in the Small Tea Room, now known as the Middle Parlor, remains in place.

<sup>164</sup> Downing, *Architecture of Country Houses*, 416.



Inda & Bettie spend most of their time here with me during the hot weather and rarely go to town except for the purpose of attending church...[They] never complain that the days are too long, always finding something to interest them in their domestic management and projects. They read much and spend much time with their music. Inda is a great enthusiast with her Harp. She took lessons again while in New York last winter from a very distinguished Welch teacher, and practiced six or seven hours each day. It gratifies me that they are contented and pass their days usefully and pleasantly.<sup>165</sup>

### Conclusion

This chapter traced the metamorphosis of Sweet Briar House from a Palladian plantation to an Italianate villa inspired by Richard Upjohn's King House, published by the influential tastemaker A. J. Downing in *The Architecture of Country Houses*. The selection of this Picturesque style for their home conveyed the Fletcher family's cultured taste and material success, fulfilling Downing's ideal of the villa as a country house in which the location, design, and furnishings were allied so that artistic inspiration and spiritual refreshment could be gathered inside and out. By the end of the renovations in 1852, guided by the plans of an unknown architect, the measured application of taste from Indiana and Elizabeth, and a constant infusion of funds from Fletcher, the family had created "one of the most picturesque and imposing villas in the state, the graceful style of which harmonizes with the surrounding country scenery."<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Letter from Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher written from Sweet Briar on July 28, 1854.

<sup>166</sup> Livingston 17.

## Chapter 5

### The Will, the War, and the Williams Family: 1858-1876

#### Introduction

This chapter refutes the long-accepted notion that Indiana Fletcher inherited Sweet Briar from her father at the time of his death in 1858. Examination of Elijah Fletcher's will in conjunction with family papers and letters, and deeds in the Amherst County Courthouse, demonstrates that the process by which Sweet Briar became his daughter's property was more complex. It also offers new information regarding Indiana's experiences during the Civil War, her marriage to James Henry Williams in 1865, their immediate relocation to New York City, and the importance they placed on Sweet Briar as a country retreat throughout the late nineteenth century, when they divided their time between New York and Virginia. The primary sources for this chapter include the deed and will books held at the Amherst County Courthouse, the diaries and correspondence of Calvin Fletcher published by the Indiana Historical Society between 1972 and 1983, and documents in the Sweet Briar College archives.

#### The Will of Elijah Fletcher

Elijah Fletcher drafted his will on July 30, 1852, a date that coincided almost exactly with the completion of the program of renovations at Sweet Briar House. It has been established that Fletcher could be liberal with praise and pecuniary support for his children so long as they repaid him with affection and used the funds in a manner that upheld his expectations for comfort and gentility. His pleasure in the success of his daughters' stewardship of the work carried out

between 1851 and 1852, and his desire that they should continue to enjoy what he clearly regarded as their creation, is demonstrated by the fact Sweet Briar House, its contents, lands, and all associated holdings—including sixty-eight slaves and an undetermined number of their children—were left to Indiana and Elizabeth, along with the Lynchburg townhouse. Fletcher died on February 13, 1858, and his will was probated on April 19, 1858. His son Sidney was named as executor with the stipulation that no security or inventory of the estate was required.<sup>167</sup>

Two items in Fletcher's will caused difficulty for his children. His intentions were clear regarding the disinheritance of Lucian, his second son, as Fletcher's will clearly stated "All my property of every kind, nature and description I give to my son Sidney and my daughters Indiana and Elizabeth desiring that the same be kept together and managed by them jointly. The intention of the above instrument is to convey my entire estate to my son Sidney and my daughters Indiana and Elizabeth." The second item was more ambiguous in its interpretation; after specifying that Sweet Briar was to become the shared property of Indiana and Elizabeth, Fletcher made the recommendation that the stock—understood to include the slaves—and "Plantation utensils" be sold the fall after his death. It is remarkable that Fletcher, engaged as he was with his children's welfare and activities, failed to discuss such momentous decisions with his three favored children, but this seems to be the case. Indiana, Elizabeth and Sidney quickly devised a settlement for Lucian from their portions of the estate, and Sidney assumed the responsibility of running Sweet Briar plantation for his sisters, finishing out the crop of 1858 and planting another in 1859. This unity among the three siblings was short-lived, disrupted by Elizabeth's marriage to William Hamilton Mosby on September 30, 1859. At that time Sweet Briar became the Mosbys' home as well, a situation that Indiana found untenable (figure 5.1).

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<sup>167</sup> Amherst County Will Book 14, pages 527-529; probated 19 April 1858.

It is possible that Indiana's prejudice against her sister's marriage was another legacy from Elijah Fletcher, who received constant requests for money from his wife's relatives, even after her death in 1853. A year later he wrote to his brother Calvin "...they are all asking favors, loans of money &c. one for \$100, last week another application for \$2000. These things annoy me, as they are highly improper and unreasonable...they are from the lazy and unworthy, asking me to provide for their imprudence."<sup>168</sup> That the topic of supporting relatives by marriage was discussed in detail between the brothers, and Fletcher's view of it, is made clear from one of Calvin's diary entries made shortly after Elizabeth's marriage, in which he wrote of Indiana that

She as well as my brothers [sic] other childrin [sic] are unhappy. They were not permitted to marry or thought the policy [of her father] who was a worldlywise [sic] man was preferable. He had accumulated a large fortune Taught his childrin to revere & respect him. On his father's side moderate fortunes carrying the occupants just above starvation. He therefore having accumulated his fortune (ample indeed) by his own industry, impressed his childrin except the youngest son [Lucian] a great profligate, with views of his magic of acquiring & retaining a fortune. He had suffered for want of patrimonial estates & his wives [sic] relations had suffered for squandering them. He intended to be wise—as 5 or 6 sisters of his wife had married poor men, fortune hunters who ran thro' with the ample fortunes they got by their marraeges [sic]. While he kept all he received by his wife & never used it himself & gave her habits of parsimony that she increased instead of diminishing her fortune & it has been transmitted to her childrin (Both father & mother now dead). His childrin to avoid the difficulty that new matrimonial alliances might make have all attained middle age but not married except 1 girl (Betty) [Elizabeth's nickname] married recently & since the decease of father & mother. This marreage caused a division of property which was rather held in common by the 3 childrin (Lucian being an outcast). Betty's husband who caused the division has been unfortunate in trade I presume a bankrupt. The division of their property (negroes as well as land) was a sad disruption of family matters. It seems to have rended the foundation of worldly wisdom. The history of my esteem brothers [sic] affairs would be well to be studied by those who wish & desire to acquire family fortunes.<sup>169</sup>

It is common knowledge that an advertisement for Sweet Briar plantation appeared in the *Virginian* on 6 January 1860 (figure 5.2), but it has been assumed the reason for the sale is that Indiana, an unmarried woman in a country in which armed conflict between the Northern and

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<sup>168</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar, 28 July 1854, SBC.

<sup>169</sup> Gail Thornbrough, ed., *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher*, (16 June 1860), p. 566, vol. VI.

Southern states seemed inevitable in the near future, understood the difficulty of continuing its agricultural operations, which depended entirely on slave labor. However, a letter from her maternal uncle, William S. Crawford, shows that the reason for the sale arose from a matter of domestic, rather than national, concern.

Written shortly after Elizabeth's marriage, the letter's content indicates that Indiana was unwilling either to share Sweet Briar House with the Mosbys, or leave them to live there while she occupied the Lynchburg townhouse, another property co-owned by the sisters. While expressing sympathy with Indiana's viewpoint, noting that "strangers have intervened so as to preclude the hope that such joint occupancy [of Sweet Briar House] can harmoniously exist," Crawford advised that to prevent any confusion over the property's ownership in the future "a public sale would be necessary so as to afford either party an opportunity of becoming entire owner."<sup>170</sup> The notice was not intended to attract buyers from among the general public but rather to establish the irrefutable legitimacy of the sale; on the same day the advertisement appeared, a deed was recorded establishing Indiana Fletcher as the owner of the advertised 1300 acres, including Sweet Briar House, and the Mosbys as the owners of one thousand and thirty three acres of adjacent property.<sup>171</sup> These domestic struggles, while tumultuous for the family, were insignificant in light of the challenges they faced, along with the rest of the country, in the years between 1860-1865.

### The War

In a country that became progressively fragmented from midcentury onwards, Indiana Fletcher could be considered a dual citizen of the North and the South. Her father once wrote

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<sup>170</sup> William S. Crawford to Indiana Fletcher, Washington, D. C., 1 November 1859, SBC.

<sup>171</sup> Amherst County Deed Book EE, p. 339.

proudly to his family of his children “They are all Fletcher. They are charmed with the Old Farm in Vermont, as well as with all our Family, and they possess not a particle of the foolish southern prejudice against Northern people and Northern habits.”<sup>172</sup> Indiana’s custom of wintering in either Philadelphia or New York throughout the 1850s demonstrates that she was at home in Northern cities, and her correspondence shows that she maintained fond relationships with friends and Fletcher family members living throughout the Northern states.

On April 12, 1861, the same day that shots were fired at Fort Sumter, Keyes and Lucy Fletcher, two of Calvin’s children from Indianapolis, arrived in Lynchburg anticipating an extended stay at Sweet Briar.<sup>173</sup> The visitors felt no peril, but Calvin wrote immediately to William Crawford, brother of Maria Fletcher and a powerful force in Virginia politics, asking that his children be escorted to Washington, D.C., so that they might travel safely home through northern states. Although Crawford readily complied, the comfortable familial relations between the Fletcher branches in the Northern state of Indiana and the Southern state of Virginia were tested in the years to come.

After her father’s death in 1858, Indiana relied equally upon advice from her uncles William Crawford and Calvin Fletcher. As has been shown by their frequent correspondence, carried on without interruption for almost thirty years, Calvin was the family member with whom her father was closest. Though Indiana initially believed Calvin could be relied on as an advocate, this was a role he was increasingly reluctant to play as the war progressed.<sup>174</sup> None of

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<sup>172</sup> Elijah Fletcher to Calvin Fletcher, Sweet Briar, 10 April 1848, SBC.

<sup>173</sup> *Diary*, vol. VII, fn 166, 93.

<sup>174</sup> For the situation in the Lynchburg area during and immediately following the Civil War, please see Karen L. Kilcup, *A Cherokee Woman’s America: Memoirs of Narcissa Owen* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005); Elizabeth Baer, ed., *Shadows on My Heart: The Civil War Diary of Lucy Rebecca Buck of Virginia* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1997); Steven Elliott Tripp, *Yankee Town, Southern City: Race and Class Relations in Civil War*

Indiana's correspondence from this period survives, but her fervent desire to leave Virginia for the North can be constructed from the entries Calvin made in his diaries during the Civil War years.

As early as August 14, 1861, Calvin recorded that he received a letter from Indiana mentioning "great destruction of property in some parts of the state & [she] thinks she may suffer."<sup>175</sup> Without waiting to receive a reply, Indiana sent another letter to Calvin by express mail specifically requesting his assistance in leaving Virginia, and next appealed to his son, Dr. William B. Fletcher, because Calvin was reluctant to act on her behalf. He was firmly committed to the Union cause, and wrote with indignation that Sidney, though not enlisted in the Confederate army, had contributed \$15,000 to arm his "poor relations in Rebellom," which became his preferred term for Virginia. Calvin believed this funding of arms to be grounds for the forfeiture of any interest in the Vermont farm held by his brother's children, and pursued this course of action through government petition in 1862.<sup>176</sup>

In April 1863, Calvin noted "I have received a letter from India. Fletcher notifying me of her having written 2 weeks before to get a pass to come into the Federal lines north. I consulted uncle [his brother Stoughton Fletcher] As to what I should do & postponed it for further

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*Lynchburg* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); George Morris and Susan L. Foutz, *Lynchburg in the Civil War: The People, the City, the Battle* (Lynchburg: H. E. Howell, 1984). For the experiences of women in the Civil War, please see Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Catherine Clinton, *Tara Revisited: Women, War & The Plantation Legend* (New York: Abbeville, 1995); Clinton and Nina Silber, eds., *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Experiences of single women in particular are addressed by Michael O'Brien, ed., *An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827-1867* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia) 1993 and Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller in *Liberty, A Better Husband: Single Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

<sup>175</sup> *Diary*, vol. VII, 171.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, fn 423, 566.

consideration. I hope & rather think she is loyal.”<sup>177</sup> Her letter reiterated how strongly she wished to leave Virginia, and after a few days of reflection, Calvin wrote to Bishop Ames, a Methodist church leader who was on his way to Washington, D. C., instructing him to request a passport in the capital for Indiana. Calvin soon received a letter from a clerk in Washington few weeks later stating that all applications were at a standstill.<sup>178</sup> Though the clerk’s letter indicated that arrangements were underway to allow all Southerners with applications on file to go North, and all Northerners in the same situation to go South, this authorization did not take place. Indiana renewed her plea after an appropriate interval, and enlisted a friend from New York, Elizabeth Kirkland, who was living in Indiana, to follow up with Calvin. His conscience pricking him, he discussed the matter with his son Elijah, and showed Kirkland’s letter to his brother Stoughton. Together they determined that Indiana’s commitment to the North’s cause was questionable, and thus Calvin took no action, writing in his diary “I could not vouch for her loyalty & felt it a delicate matter to act in the affair and let it drop.”<sup>179</sup>

After enduring for another year, Indiana renewed her plea for assistance. According to Calvin’s diary entry of April 27, 1864, “She expresses a desire to get away from the South, Says fortunes are vanishing like the glories of the setting sun.”<sup>180</sup> In the same letter, Indiana unwisely mentioned, perhaps to demonstrate her family’s unwillingness to join the armed conflict, that Sidney avoided military service by donating the crops and livestock from his Tusculum plantation to the Confederate government. Calvin sent no reply, and Indiana tried to communicate with him once more in November 1864 through indirect means. She wrote to her friend Elizabeth Kirkland and enclosed a letter to be forwarded to Calvin. In this letter, Indiana

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<sup>177</sup> *Diary*, vol. VIII, 113.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>179</sup> *Diary*, vol. VIII, 188.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.



again requested a pass to allow her to travel north to visit friends. The forwarded packet reached Calvin in January 1865, at which point he put a definitive end to the matter, recording of the letters that “I read both and wrote a pert reply.”<sup>181</sup> In reply sent to Kirkland, he stated his intention to suspend all correspondence with his “rebel relations” and was unmoved on the matter, even after she vouched for Indiana’s loyalty via another letter that arrived by return mail.<sup>182</sup> Calvin sent no answer to his niece, and faced with silence from her uncle, Indiana was still at Sweet Briar on April 9, 1865, when the hostilities of the Civil War were concluded at Appomattox Court House, less than twenty miles from her plantation.

From 1861 to 1865, Sweet Briar provided a refuge from the confusion of Lynchburg, which was nearly lawless and practically unprovisioned in the months before the war’s end and those that followed. Narcissa Owen, a near-contemporary of Indiana’s in age and status, occupied Point of Honor during the 1860s and noted that the elite citizens of the city banded together to provide for poor and widowed during and after the war years, volunteering at hospitals and donating money for their medical care and necessities. Indiana’s name is not among those mentioned in Owen’s detailed memoirs, which suggests she stayed away from the city during and after the war.

### Marriage to James Henry Williams

A literal union between North and South was achieved through the marriage of Indiana to James Henry Williams of New York on August 23, 1865 at St. Paul’s Church in

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<sup>181</sup> *Diary*, vol. IX, 13.

<sup>182</sup> *Diary*, vol. IX, 16.

Lynchburg.<sup>183</sup> A morning wedding allowed the newlyweds to catch the northbound train that left at noon, and a congratulatory letter from Henry's sister written on the same date indicates that the wedding was a long-anticipated and joyous event.<sup>184</sup> At the time of their marriage, Williams was the rector at Zion Episcopal Church in his hometown of Dobbs Ferry, New York (figure 5.3). Williams graduated from Trinity College in Hartford in 1854 where his diligent attention to his studies was rewarded with a Phi Beta Kappa key. The following year he enrolled in New York City's General Theological Seminary from which he graduated in 1858.<sup>185</sup>

The origin of their relationship dated to a period almost twenty years earlier, when Indiana's classmates at St. Mary's Hall in New Jersey included Henry's sisters Harriet and Emma Williams. The acquaintance between Henry and Indiana apparently developed into an independent relationship in the 1850s, as Indiana received an invitation to his graduation from Trinity College.<sup>186</sup> A few years later, Henry spent the holidays at Sweet Briar, perhaps as much to comfort Indiana during the first Christmas without her father as to celebrate the season.<sup>187</sup> Indiana's desire for singular ownership of Sweet Briar, achieved in 1860, may have owed as much to her desire to establish it as her married residence as to avoid sharing the house with the Mosbys. It is clear that her relationship with Henry was disrupted by the Civil War, but was resumed as soon as circumstances allowed, and the connection between them explains Indiana's

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<sup>183</sup> Indiana's husband was always known as "Henry." For evidence supporting the extent to which the Williams family differed from traditional patterns of Southern marriage and childrearing, please see Carol Bleser, ed., *In Joy and Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>184</sup> Emma Williams McCall to Henry Williams, Poughkeepsie, 23 August 1865, SBC.

<sup>185</sup> Undated letter from Episcopal Diocese of New York, SBC; email correspondence with Peter J. Knapp, Special Collections and Library Archivist at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, 25 January 2010.

<sup>186</sup> This invitation, addressed to Indiana, is in the Sweet Briar College archives.

<sup>187</sup> James McCall to Indiana Fletcher, New York, New York, 31 December 1858, SBC. McCall was married to Henry's sister Emma.

repeated attempts to relocate to the North during this period, something she finally achieved through her marriage.

The newlyweds went directly to the Fletcher farm in Vermont, and spent several weeks visiting with Indiana's family members. Calvin arrived on September 18 and found that they had departed a few days previously to avoid meeting him. The formerly cordial and affectionate Fletcher family bonds were broken permanently by Calvin's refusal to act in Indiana's interests during the long years of war, and further correspondence between uncle and niece was restricted to settling a sale of stock in the amount of \$3665 that she held in Calvin's bank in Indianapolis. These letters, however devoid of personal content, do provide the Williams' address in New York. They were living at 254 Fourth Avenue, in one of a series of townhouses that were run as apartment-hotels by Henry's family, headed by his mother Harriet Williams.<sup>188</sup>

Their proprietorship of these properties in the 1860s placed the Williams family at the leading edge of the housing transformation from townhouses occupied by one or two families to apartments, units that were viewed by the middle class as uncomfortably close to the tenement layouts occupied by the poorer segments of society. By contrast, the term "apartment-hotels" conveyed the level of service offered to occupants, who could expect to be attended to by servants without the trouble of hiring, training, and supervising them. Public rooms that served as common areas, such as parlors and dining rooms, were comfortably and elegantly appointed. Perhaps most appealingly, these residences featured the newest utilities such as gaslight and central heating, allowing occupants to enjoy the conveniences of "modern housekeeping"

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<sup>188</sup> *Diary*, vol. IX, p. 141; the Williams family owned a block of townhouses at 254, 256, 258, 260, 262, and 262 Fourth Avenue, which was renamed Park Avenue in 1867.

without the attendant responsibilities of maintenance and upkeep.<sup>189</sup> These circumstances were perfectly suited to the couple as they established themselves in New York, and Williams did not resume his duties at the Zion Episcopal Church in Dobbs Ferry, but turned his attention to assisting with the management of his family's real estate holdings.

### The Postbellum Years at Sweet Briar

The relocation to New York had pragmatic roots. The apartment-hotel was convenient for a couple newly embarking upon married life, and it would have been difficult to make Sweet Briar profitable in the period immediately following the Civil War. Williams' training as a clergyman had little application in agricultural pursuits, and as a Northerner, he would not have been welcomed by the local population in the tension-filled months following the end of the war. It is an oft-quoted story about the decline of southern fortunes that when James Bruce, the magnificently prosperous builder of Berry Hill in Halifax County, died in March 1865, he "felt grim satisfaction in leaving the world at that time, as he knew that nothing but ruin was in store for his class."<sup>190</sup> The postbellum era in Virginia was indeed grim. In 1871, William Pope

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<sup>189</sup> For the development and operation of apartment-hotels of the sort owned by the Williams family, please see Dell Upton, "Inventing the Metropolis: Civilization and Urbanity in Antebellum New York," in *Art and the Empire City*, edited by Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howatt (New York: Yale University Press, 2001), 3-45; Elizabeth Hawes, *New York, New York: How the Apartment House Transformed the Life of the City, 1869-1930* (New York: Knopf, 1993); Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). The quality of life in the apartment-hotels owned by the Williams family is evident by looking at receipts from the establishments that furnished it with food and furnishings: fine imported wines and teas were provided by Park & Tilford, seafood came from C. A. Lewis, vegetables from Seaman Lichtenstein & Co., and gilded mirrors and other household items from Sypher & Company, regarded in the nineteenth century as one of the leading furniture establishments on Broadway.

<sup>190</sup> For the situation in Virginia in the postbellum period, please see Peter S. Carmichael, *The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War and Reunion* (Chapel Hill: University of

Dabney, for whose brother Alexander J. Davis had designed a house, wrote to apprise the architect of the situation in the state:

I would not advise you to revisit Virginia at this time. The old hereditary mansions are in the hands, not of owners—for no one is able to buy—but of the old overseer class, who rent them from the assignees in bankruptcy, and work a small patch themselves, and with their sons. The old planter is gone. The slaves are living in huts on the pines, eking out a miserable half-starving condition by petty thefts and depredations. We did have a hope that Northern thrift and capital would come along and buy up these deserted farms, but, misrepresented by the carpet-baggers who hold all our offices, and lie upon us in Congress, unfriendly legislation is driving capital and labor from all our borders. Our people would recognize the logic of events and would welcome the rule of the old flag, but the refusal of amnesty has converted every man of any position before the war into an enemy of the government, and you can imagine what this will do.<sup>191</sup>

Despite these trying conditions, it is a testament to Indiana's enduring attachment to Sweet Briar that she returned there for the first time since her marriage for the birth of her only child, a daughter named Maria Georgiana, in September 1867 (figure 5.4). Symbolically, it may have been important to her that Sweet Briar was the baby's birthplace; emotionally, it was undoubtedly the place where Indiana felt most at home and could be made comfortable and cared for by her former slaves, now servants, with whom she had a longstanding connection. The child was always known as "Daisy," and her birth heralded a new era in her parents' lives, one in which they began dividing their time between Sweet Briar and New York City, thus bestowing equal doses of country and city life upon her. The Williams family spent the months of May through September at Sweet Briar, where Daisy was in the charge of Martha Penn Taylor, a former Fletcher slave who established her own household at the nearby settlement of Coolwell in

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North Carolina Press, 2005); Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); James L. Roark, *Masters Without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977).<sup>191</sup> William Pope Dabney to Alexander J. Davis, Elmington, 10 May 1871, Metropolitan Museum of Art, A. J. Davis Collection, Vol. XVIII, 24.66.1417, Leaf 148 recto.

the years after the war. At Sweet Briar, Daisy maintained a flock of chickens, fished, gardened, and visited with her uncle, Sidney, and her aunt, Elizabeth.

### The Williams Family in New York

Beginning in Daisy's infancy, the Williams family spent the months of October through April in residence at the apartment-hotels in New York City. Harriet Williams died in 1872, and at that time, Henry and Indiana assumed proprietorship of the properties. Daisy attended academies for young ladies starting at the age of seven, and school reports and correspondence over the next decade show that, like Indiana, she became proficient in languages, mastering French, German and Italian. Following her mother's example, Daisy also became an accomplished harpist, and her letters contain accounts of the refined leisure pursuits the family enjoyed, including attendance at the opera, music recitals and lectures. An event in 1876, when the family traveled to Philadelphia for the Centennial Exhibition, provided all of these attractions in one locale, as well as an introduction to the exotic and appealing world of Japanese arts and crafts that contributed to the Aesthetic Movement. The family's reaction to this experience, including the inspiration for transforming their home into an Aesthetic retreat, is the subject of the next chapter.

### Conclusion

This chapter has presented new knowledge about Sweet Briar and the Fletcher family. It has detailed the intense feelings of ownership Indiana Fletcher felt towards Sweet Briar, and the steps she took to legitimize her claim to it. It has also traced events leading up to Indiana's marriage to Henry Williams in 1865, and explored their life in New York. It has established the

rupture of relations between members of the Fletcher family as a result of the Civil War, and the pattern of visitation at Sweet Briar adopted by the Williams family after the birth of their daughter Daisy.

## Chapter 6

### Sweet Briar House III: Aesthetic Retreat (1876-1900)

#### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the final decades the Williams family spent at Sweet Briar House and details their transformation of the property into an Aesthetic Retreat. Their inspiration came from the artistic possibilities offered by the Aesthetic Movement, which will be introduced through the Peacock Room, a premier example of the Aesthetic Movement interior in Britain. A major catalyst for the movement—and for the Williams family—was the Centennial Exhibition held in Philadelphia in 1876. One of a series of world's fairs initiated in 1851 by London's Great Exhibition, it presented the first opportunity for significant numbers of Americans to encounter art from a wide range of nations and periods. The novelty and artistry of the exhibitions displayed by Japan garnered widespread attention; the critical reactions and consumer responses that resulted will be analyzed, as will their effect on the domestic interior, in particular that of Sweet Briar House.

#### The Aesthetic Movement in Britain

The origins of the Aesthetic Movement in Britain can be traced to the design reform that grew in vigor in the wake of the Great Exhibition of 1851, where critics were horrified by the exaggerated naturalism and shoddy manufacture of some of the objects on display. The reform movement had been anticipated by the architect A. W. N. Pugin in 1836, whose strident Catholicism, which found an outlet in his relentless promotion of the Gothic style, did not detract



from the validity of his argument regarding the poor design of some modern architecture. Pugin used the Medieval Court he designed for the Great Exhibition as a didactic showcase for his theory of good design, which gained strength from an idea introduced contemporaneously by the philosopher and critic John Ruskin in *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53): that the medieval era represented the height of artistic production, when each object came from the hand of an individual artisan who worked until he achieved his vision, rather than stamping out identical items by the schedule of the factory whistle. A desire to recapture the workshop tradition of handicraft in an era defined by assembly line production in factories attracted many followers, most notably William Morris, whose advice to “Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful” became the guiding principle of the Arts and Crafts Movement.<sup>192</sup>

From a common starting point, the Aesthetic Movement outpaced the Arts and Crafts Movement and reached its full influence by the 1870s. Its primary concern could be expressed as “art for art’s sake;” adherents to the movement liberated beauty from any further obligation, and celebrated its infusion into all aspects of the domestic interior. On those criteria, the Peacock Room, James McNeill Whistler’s *Harmony in Blue and Gold*, completed in 1877, can be used as a case study for the Aesthetic Movement (figure 6.1). The Peacock Room represents the pinnacle of the movement in Britain, and though it is widely regarded as Whistler’s creation, the credit for the interior he so notably transformed belongs to Thomas Jeckyll, the designer

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<sup>192</sup> Morris found the relevant chapter, “On the Nature of the Gothic,” so important that he reprinted it through his Kelmscott Press in 1892. For an account of the significance of this far-reaching idea, see Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris, and the Craftsman Ideal in America* (Philadelphia: American Civilization Series/Temple University Press, 1986). This quotation comes from a lecture Morris gave at the Birmingham Society of Arts and School of Design on February 19, 1880 and published in *The Beauty of Life* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1908), 108.

commissioned by Frederick Leyland to remodel his London home into a “Palace of Art.”<sup>193</sup> The dining room design was to incorporate items from Leyland’s collection, including panels of antique embossed gilt leather with painted floral decoration, Chinese porcelain, and Whistler’s portrait *Princesse du pays de la porcelaine* (1864-65). The harmonious composition of artistic elements, varied in material, period, and country of origin, was a central tenet of the Aesthetic Movement; to realize this objective, Jeckyll gathered additional decorative elements and inspiration from other sources and periods.

Jeckyll envisioned Leyland’s dining room as a modern interpretation of a seventeenth-century porcelain room; gilt leather was traditionally used as a background to enhance the appearance of blue and white china, but the framework of walnut shelves he designed to display the collection were carved with Persian and Chinese patterns from Owen Jones’ *Grammar of Ornament* (1856), a compendium of stylized designs based on disparate, often non-Western, sources. The ceiling followed geometric Tudor designs, and suspended from the fan vaulting were gas lamps, the brass fittings of which were decorated with pierced Japanese motifs of butterflies, dragonflies, and flowers. Whistler’s *Princesse* was installed over the mantel, above a turquoise-tiled fireplace that was the primary source of color in the room. This feature, set off by a pair of Jeckyll’s gilt-bronze sunflower andirons, their design a compromise between geometry and nature, paired with a fender featuring ornament derived from Japanese design, would have drawn attention to the painting as the focal point of the room; it was balanced by a sideboard at

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<sup>193</sup> The sensation surrounding the reception of the Peacock Room has sometimes overshadowed a nuanced understanding of its importance as a work of art, which is detailed in Linda Merrill’s *The Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); for the artist, see David Park Curry, *James McNeill Whistler: Uneasy Pieces* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2006). For a full account of the original design of the Peacock Room see Susan Weber Soros, *Thomas Jeckyll: Architect and Designer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 190-197.

the opposite end. An Indian rug whose colors complemented the decoration of the gilt leather panels was placed under the neoclassical dining table, and Jeckyll updated the upholstery of its matching chairs with leather embossed with sunflowers, which became a standard motif of Aesthetic design.

The penultimate Peacock Room demonstrates that the Aesthetic Movement drew freely from all cultures and periods. The overriding criterion for each element selected was that it makes an artistic contribution to composition of the interior. After Whistler was asked to make some minor contributions in the final phase of the project, he appropriated it completely, explaining “Well, you know, I just painted as I went on, without design or sketch—it grew as I painted...And the harmony in blue and gold developing, you know, I forgot everything in my joy of it!”<sup>194</sup> Whether or not Whistler’s description of the almost manic state he reached in the pursuit of beauty is exaggerated, through his energies the dining room became a five-sided oil painting in subtle tones of blue which he unified through the repetition of a golden pattern from a peacock feather on the sideboard, the dado, the ceiling, and by gilding the shelves. Some of these were removed to make room for the boldly depicted, life-sized peacocks Whistler painted on the leather, which he gilded to resemble Japanese screens. He selected a turquoise rug to cover the floor, and had a matching cover made for the dining table so that two vast areas blended into the overall color scheme and provided no distraction from the appreciation of the lively golden painted elements.

In conjunction with the richly patterned surface treatment of the walls, and placed opposite the pair of fighting peacocks, the *Princesse* portrait became part of the design of the dining room, rather than its focal point; in the aesthetic interior, paintings and the decorative arts

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<sup>194</sup> Elizabeth Robins Pennell and Joseph Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler*, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1908), 204.

were placed on equal footing as objects of artistic merit. Whistler's creation was remarkable for its level of artistic synthesis, and also for its focus on the peacock motif. Popularly depicted on Japanese screens and scrolls of the Edo period, its beauty and exotic origins made the use of peacock perfectly representative of the Aesthetic Movement.<sup>195</sup>

### The Centennial Exhibition

The Centennial Exhibition provided the venue in which the ideals of the Aesthetic Movement were introduced and fostered in America. Since their origin in London in 1851, world's fairs had been held in other countries with some degree of regularity, and they provided a context in which nations could display the best examples of their industry and art and demonstrate their potential to participate in international trade. The Centennial of 1876 held particular importance for Americans. As the name suggests, it was planned to coincide with the celebration of one hundred years of independence and to prove to the world America had established considerable power and influence in the century since its founding; the Centennial also offered the chance to publicly demonstrate that the rift of the Civil War had healed. The official opening took place at the Main Building on 10 May 1876; the structure of wood, glass and iron was the largest in the world, measuring 464' wide and a symbolic 1876' long (figure 6.2). By the time it closed six months later, it was estimated that ten million visitors had streamed through the gates of the Fairmount Park fairgrounds (figure 6.3). While there, they

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<sup>195</sup> Although Whistler's use of the peacock as a decorative motif in the interior was the most widely known, it was slightly anticipated by an 1873 design by George Aitchison for Frederick Lehmann at 15 Berkeley Square in which the peacocks are restricted to the frieze (Royal Institute of British Architects Library Drawings Collection, RIBA21159). In addition to its beauty, the peacock was a delicacy once served at feasts and royal banquets, and Charles Brownell has suggested that its use in the dining room may also provide a link to the Neoclassical concept of decor, in which ornament is suited to the purpose of a room.

might encounter anything from France's torchbearing hand of the Statue of Liberty to America's colossal Corliss steam engine to Mexico's two-ton block of silver.<sup>196</sup>

The fairgrounds could not possibly be covered in a day, and even over an extended period it would have been difficult to comprehend everything offered at the Centennial, where thirty thousand displays were parceled out among two hundred and forty buildings; a schema produced in the *Centennial Review* shows that the total square footage available in Philadelphia exceeded that of all previous exhibitions (figure 6.4). Many visitors relied on guidebooks to navigate the choices, and the Main Building was a logical starting point. As the most important of the fairground's facilities, it also contained the contributions of countries deemed to be the most important among the fifty that participated: the Americas (including Mexico and Brazil), England, France, and Germany—and China and Japan, whose central location reflected the efforts of strong lobbying on the part of their governments. The Main Building was organized to dramatize the effect of its scale, with the displays arranged to facilitate extended vistas in either

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<sup>196</sup> For the Centennial Exhibition and a timeline of previous exhibitions, see Jonathan Meyer, *Great Exhibitions: London, New York, Paris, Philadelphia, 1851-1900* (London: Antique Collectors Club, 2006); Bruno Giberti, *Designing the Centennial: A History of the 1876 International Exhibition at Philadelphia* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002); Robert Rydell, "The Centennial Exhibition, 1876: The Exposition as 'Moral Influence' in *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 9-37. A primary source by J. S. Ingram, *The Centennial Exposition Described and Illustrated: Being a Concise and Graphic Description of This Grand Enterprise Commemorative of the First Centennary [sic] of American Independence* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Bros., 1876) is comprehensive book that offers a history of world's exhibitions, beginning in Imperial Rome as well as a history of the preparations of the Philadelphia Centennial, its opening ceremonies, a description of the main buildings, of the American exhibitions, those of individual countries of note the author considered notable. James Dabney McCabe's *The Illustrated History of the Centennial Exhibition, Held in Commemoration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of American Independence, With a Full Description of the Great Buildings and All the Objects of Interest Exhibited in Them and Embellished with over 300 Fine Engravings of Building and Scenes in the Great Exhibition* (Cincinnati: Jones Brothers & Co., 1876) lives up to its title; this a useful primary source published shortly after the Centennial provides an excellent overview of the fair and includes facts, figures, and lists of award winners.

direction. Many visitors to the Centennial had never even visited a department store, and so the reaction of Samantha, an “everywoman” character from a popular series of novels, describes what must have been a fairly common response to the overwhelming variety offered under its roof:

Oh good land! Why a hull Dictionary of jest such words couldn't begin to tell my feelins as I stood there a lookin' round on each side of me, down that broad, majestic, glitterin' street full of folks and fountains and glitterin' stands, and statues, and ornaments, with gorgeous shops on each side contain' the most beautiful beauty, the sublimest sublimity, and the very grandest grandeur the hull world affords.<sup>197</sup>

Venturing past the Main Building required another major commitment of time and fortitude; there were four more primary buildings to explore, including the Machinery Hall, the Agricultural Hall, the Horticultural Hall, and Memorial Hall, which served as the art gallery. On display there were more than three thousand paintings, over six hundred sculptures and close to five hundred works of decorative art. It housed contributions ranging from a bas relief of Iolanthe sculpted in butter to Gustave Moreau's *Salome*, described as possessing a “strange and weird charm;” given the latitude with which art was interpreted, there were so many contributions that an annex was added to accommodate them.<sup>198</sup> Furniture and furnishings were deliberately included in this category under the heading “Industrial Art;” a memorandum written by a member of the committee explained their decision as follows

The development of our Art industries is a matter especially important, for the commercial value of a great number of manufactured products which we use depends upon the Art character of the work more than upon either the raw material or the cost of production. . . In very many instances, the taste displayed in the design really forms almost the whole value.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Marietta Holley, *Josiah Allen's Wife...Samantha at the Centennial* (Hartford: American Publishing, 1878), 411.

<sup>198</sup> Rydell 11; “Paintings from the Centennial,” *The Art Journal* vol. 2 (1876), 283.

<sup>199</sup> *Report of the Provisional Committee*, Appendix C, 1-2.

Contributors to this section included Barnard, Bishop and Barnards; the company that produced Jeckyll's sunflower andirons for the Peacock Room replicated the design as wrought iron railings for the Centennial (figure 6.5). The American firm Kimbel and Cabus designed an entire model room in the Modern Gothic style that was lauded as "rich and tasteful enough to rank it among the very best of the American exhibits in household art (figure 6.6)."<sup>200</sup>

Countries and companies also could erect additional structures as showcases for their contributions at their own expense. While strolling the three hundred and eighty four acres of Fairmont Park, fairgoers might step into the New England Log House, the Turkish Coffee Building, the Singer Sewing Machine Building, or St. George's House, a sixteenth-century house England shipped across the Atlantic.<sup>201</sup> There were no parameters for what could be included in these buildings, and so the contents of the international buildings were those selected by the country to provide the best examples of what it had produced, no matter what the period. In this way, in conjunction with the modern items on display in the main buildings, visitors were presented with an unimaginable array of artistic possibilities from countless eras and nations, exactly the conditions that the Aesthetic Movement needed to flourish in America.

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<sup>200</sup> Several Centennial publications were devoted solely to reproductions of the art on display. For the sunflower railings, see Walter Smith, *The Masterpieces of the Centennial International Exhibition: Illustrated* vol. II, Industrial Art (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Barrie, 1876-78), 403. for the Kimbel and Cabus room see George T. Ferris, *Gems of the Centennial Exhibition: Consisting of Illustrated Descriptions of Objects of an Artistic Character, in the Exhibits of the United States, Great Britain, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Hungary, Russia, Japan, China, Egypt, Turkey, India, etc., etc., at the Philadelphia International Exhibition of 1876* (New York: D. Appleton, 1877), 140.

<sup>201</sup> Rydell 11.

## Japan at the Centennial

Although the Centennial marked its American debut, Japan was first included at a world's fair at the London International Exhibition of Art and Industry in 1862, when Sir Rutherford Alcock, a British diplomat, set up a small Japanese Court (figure 6.7). He exercised scant critical taste in the selection of the objects, but they were received with delight by the general public and with rapt attention from the design-literate including William Burges, architect of the Exhibition's Medieval Court. Burges discerned that the traditional practices of the artisan were still carried out in contemporary Japan and declared "If however the visitor wishes to see the real Middle Ages, he must visit the Japanese Court, for, at the present day, the arts of the Middle Ages have deserted Europe and are only to be found in the East." In a subsequent article he admired the level of skill demonstrated by the Japanese, as "[they] appear not only to know all that the Middle Ages knew, but, in some respects, are beyond them and us as well."<sup>202</sup> These qualities gave both the aesthetes and the reformers something to appreciate, and Japanese artifacts found a ready market in Britain.<sup>203</sup>

In the period between the London exhibition and the Centennial, Japanese society underwent a significant change. Imperial rule was restored in 1868, and the interest with which the artistic nature of its objects had been received in England and Europe in the previous decade suggested to its leaders the lucrative potential of the new American market. Under the Meiji Dynasty, Kiriu Kosho Kuwaisha, the first Japanese manufacturing and trading company, was

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<sup>202</sup> William Burges, "The International Exhibition," *Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Review* vol. 212 (June 1862), 665; Burges, "The Japanese Court in the International Exhibition," *Gentleman's Magazine* vol. 213 (September 1862), 243.

<sup>203</sup> After the exhibition closed, the items from the Japanese Court were sold through a department store called Farmer and Rogers, where Arthur Lazenby Liberty became the first manager of the Oriental department; he founded Liberty's of London, known as an Aesthetic department store, in the following decade. (Gere and Hoskins, 47.)



established to promote Japan's traditional crafts, serve as its official representative at international exhibitions, and capitalize upon the Western fascination with the objects they could produce (figure 6.8). Its activities were closely guided by the Japanese Commission formed for the Centennial, and together they put forth a colossal marketing effort, calculated to raise the status of Japan in the eyes of the world, and also to foster a receptive audience for the products it had to offer. Thirteen tons of goods valued at more than \$200,000 were shipped to Philadelphia, and those of the highest quality were displayed prominently in the 17,000 feet it had allotted in the Main Building (figure 6.9). It was also determined that three additional buildings would be erected using traditional construction techniques; the structures included a house for the commissioners, a teahouse where customers could experience Japanese customs, and a bazaar where an extensive selection of mid-range pieces could be purchased. The buildings themselves acted as advertisements for Japan, and a garden adjacent to the bazaar encouraged visitors to linger (figure 6.10).<sup>204</sup>

The most effective marketing by the Japanese Commission was done through the *Official Catalogue of the Japanese Section and Descriptive Notes on the Industry and Agriculture of Japan*. This publication was widely distributed, and contained extensive descriptions of individual objects from the Japanese displays, along with detailed explanations of the craft techniques used to create them. Many of the published descriptions were reprinted verbatim

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<sup>204</sup> On the Japanese presence at the Centennial, please see Doi Komiko and others, *Japan Goes to the World's Fairs: Japanese Art at the Great Expositions in Europe and the United States, 1867-1904* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2005); Steven Conn, "Where is the East? Asian Objects in American Museums, from Nathan Dunn to Charles Freer" *Winterthur Portfolio* vol. 35 (Summer-Autumn 2000), 157-173; David Finn, "Japan at the Centennial," *Nineteenth Century* vol. 2 (Autumn 1976), 33-40. Primary sources of particular interest in regards to the Japanese displays include Phillip T. Sandhurst, *The Great Centennial Exhibition Critically Described and Illustrated* (Philadelphia: P.W. Ziegler & Co., 1876) and Frank Norton, *Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exhibition, Philadelphia, 1876 and of the Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1878* (New York: American News Company, 1879).

from this source, which provided an avenue to justify the high costs of certain pieces (figure 6.11). Of the elaborate type of bronze pictured in the center it was claimed,

to make a copy of one of the smallest of the objects in this collection would be beyond the skill of the best French artisans. The bronze-ware is of two kinds, the cheaper being cast, while the other is worked out by hand, with cutting and polishing instruments, with marvelous patience and skill. It is estimated that the work on one of the bases is equivalent to 2,250 days' steady labor of one man. When the fact is appreciated, the price asked, \$2,000, does not seem extravagant.<sup>205</sup>

The *Official Catalogue* also shaped, to a significant degree, the ways in which Japanese objects were perceived, reassuring Western audiences who might be baffled by a screen featuring marching grasshoppers that it did have artistic and monetary value (figure 6.12).

The larger-sized screens cost from \$100-\$400, and the best pictorial art in Japan is devoted to their decoration; the wealthy and cultured Japanese enjoys the collection and exhibition of these articles in the same manner as does a merchant-prince in this country his gallery of paintings.<sup>206</sup>

Through the catalogue, the unfamiliar was decoded. It also provided a handy shortcut for writers assigned to cover the fair, and it was the source of much of the praise for the Japanese contributions reprinted wholesale in a number of the Centennial publications. The authoritative language regarding the painstaking nature of Japanese craftsmanship read well, and provided a direct conduit for the Commission's carefully crafted messages about the purity of technique and high level of artistic skill that characterized its offerings. Omitted was the fact that some of the items, such as a toilette mirror, had no Japanese counterpart; even if it had, most Japanese would have recoiled from the motley assortment of fauna that surrounded the miniature house meant to hold items used at the dressing table (figure 6.13). But Japan was not at the Centennial to sell to the Japanese; it was there to create a desire for its goods among new audiences, and succeeded in

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<sup>205</sup> Norton 249.

<sup>206</sup> Norton 250.

doing so by creating multiple opportunities for American consumers to encounter its offerings. They could marvel at the unique displays in the Main Building, where the least expensive item cost \$200; they could purchase a vase from the bazaar for about a tenth of that price (figure 6.14); or they could take home a souvenir fan for only a few cents (figure 6.15).<sup>207</sup> The teahouse was available for meals, and a visit to the Japanese garden was included with admission to the fairgrounds.

The success of Japan's reception in Philadelphia was immortalized in the most lavish and expensive of the publications documenting world's fairs, which featured a display from the Centennial on the frontispiece, illustrated in full color, and containing far more information about pieces from Japan than from any other country (figure 6.16).<sup>208</sup> It has been determined that Japan did everything possible to break down any barriers to the reception of its goods, but the popularity of these items also owes much to their inherent beauty and the fascination with which they were regarded by American consumers. An account in the *Atlantic Monthly* reported that throughout the duration of the Centennial, the only areas that were consistently crowded were the painting exhibitions in Memorial Hall, and the Japanese department. The author recommended starting a visit at the latter to ensure ample time to absorb all of the displays, and the evocative description of them encapsulates the collective allure they held for the American public:

The Japanese collection is the first stage for those who are moved chiefly by the love of beauty or novelty in their sight-seeing. The gorgeousness of the specimens is equaled only by their exquisite delicacy. Here is the handicraft of those extremest Orientals, five, eight, eleven hundred years old if we can believe it, with a grace and elegance of design and workmanship which rival or excel the

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<sup>207</sup> Sandhurst 133.

<sup>208</sup> This was Frank Norton's *Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exhibition, Philadelphia, 1876 and of the Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1878* (New York: American News Company, 1879).

marvels of Italian ornamental art at its zenith. There may be a monotony of theme, a sameness of idea, but endless variety of representation. It is all reproduction of natural objects with nothing conventional in the treatment...the fancy and sentiment shown in the mode of depicting and arranging them seems inexhaustible. There are other paintings—drawings, sketchings, what shall they be called?—on screens, a few houses and trees beside water which vanishes amid outlines as ethereal as visions; you hardly see them as you are examining the picture; they steal out as you are turning away; the whole landscape has hardly any color, yet it is not in black and white, it might be veiled moonlight without shadows. Wherever you look the eye is delighted and contented; after the Japanese collection everything looks in a measure more commonplace, almost vulgar.<sup>209</sup>

Everything that was appealing about the Japanese displays at the Centennial can be found in the passage above. They offered beauty, novelty, and a model of artistic excellence from a source other than Europe rendered to mesmerizing effect that afforded immense aesthetic satisfaction. The Japanese objects presented provided a fresh way of looking at the natural world, introduced asymmetry as a viable design feature, and repaid close and repeated attention. Their extraordinary artistic qualities mirrored the principles of the Aesthetic Movement and mandated their inclusion in any home where the occupants aspired to elevate, enrich, and enliven the interior.

### The Williams Family's Acquisitions

The Williams family visited the Centennial Exhibition on their way to New York in the fall of 1876.<sup>210</sup> Accustomed as they were to patronizing the leading stores in New York, they were better equipped to navigate the offerings of the Centennial than many visitors. Although the details of their time at the fair are not documented, the range of the collections still extant at Sweet Briar House attests that they explored and appreciated the Japanese displays; there is also

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<sup>209</sup> Anonymous, "Characteristics of the International Fair," *Atlantic Monthly* vol. 38 (July 1876), 89.

<sup>210</sup> James Henry Williams to Emma McCall, New York, 15 September 1876, SBC.

a Centennial publication in the Rare Books Collection that belonged to them. *The Century: Its Fruits and its Festival* (1877) is a large and lavishly illustrated book that includes very detailed descriptions of Japanese displays. The text includes many observations that suggest the ways in which the artistic merit of these works demonstrate the craftsman's mastery and delicacy, and may have helped the family better appreciate the objects they purchased.<sup>211</sup> Whether the family acquired items directly from the fair or later from specialty stores in New York, their selections indicate that they sought to acquire a variety of objects in a variety of materials.

Christine Guth, author of *Longfellow's Tattoos*, observes that the vast array of objects produced by Japan found ready consumers across the entire economic spectrum, and proposes the following association between class and object: paper goods, such as parasols, fans, and lanterns were for those of modest means; a more durable material such as porcelain or lacquer, even if only a single item was displayed, signified the middle class; and larger, more expensive pieces such as folding screens, large bronzes, and carved lacquer were for the homes of the most affluent consumers.<sup>212</sup> All of the items in this latter category were purchased for Sweet Briar House, but the finest may be a Japanesque display cabinet inlaid with a geometric design of exotic woods and mother-of-pearl discs (figure 6.17). Suspended above the asymmetrical shelves and drawers is a cricket box constructed of miniature sliding screens of the sort used in Japanese houses. Like the Rococo Revival étagère dating from the mid-nineteenth century, this object was meant to be filled with items that reflected the owners' interests and refinement, though it can also stand alone as a work of art. The size of this piece is rare, as most marquetry

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<sup>211</sup> Edward C. Bruce, *The Century: Its Fruits and Its Festival: Being a History and Description of the Centennial Exhibition, with a Preliminary Outline of Modern Progress* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1877).

<sup>212</sup> Christine Guth, *Longfellow's Tattoos: Tourism, Collecting and Japan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 173.

exported to the West came in the form of boxes, and the technique may represent an attempt by Japan to satisfy Western tastes, marrying their mastery of pattern with the European technique used on eighteenth-century furniture. Published accounts of the Centennial do not show any illustrations of similar objects, though the records of the Kiriu Kosho Kuwaisha indicate that a craftsman well known for his marquetry work sent three pieces, including a bookcase, to the Centennial; however, the dimensions of it do not match the piece at Sweet Briar House, and the quality of the Sweet Briar piece seems higher by comparison (figure 6.18).<sup>213</sup>

Another large-scale piece in the collection is a folding lacquer screen painted with asymmetrical designs of birds and flowering trees; incised brass corners are decorative as well as functional (figure 6.19). There is also a small lacquer cabinet; these seem to have been produced in an inexhaustible array of types, but the molding on the top and bottom edges, as well as the ball feet, suggest the piece was produced specifically for the Western market. The variety of drawers makes it useful for storage of small items like jewelry, and the level of decoration transforms it into an art object (figure 6.20). Lacquer seemed a miraculous material to many who encountered it. The high gloss made it beautiful, but it was also lightweight, incredibly strong, and could withstand boiling water or acidic liquid; these seemingly contradictory qualities added to its appeal. The Sweet Briar collection contains an extensive group of lacquerware of the type used for dining, as well as more unique pieces like card boxes and floating soap dishes. The finest piece of lacquer is a traditional box of the type hung from a

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<sup>213</sup> Yumiko Yamamori, “Japanese Export Furniture with Particular Emphasis on the Meiji Era, 1868-1912,” (dissertation in progress, Bard Graduate Center, New York). This work focuses on the influence of the conventions of American and European artistic traditions on Japanese art; I am grateful to Yumiko for sharing her research with me, including photographs and dimensions of marquetry cabinets.

kimono and used as a pocket; bronze lamps and porcelain cups round out the collection as it exists today (figure 6.21).

A Kimbel & Cabus desk purchased for Daisy was a piece of art furniture of the type included in the firm's display at the Centennial and praised as "rich and tasteful enough to rank it among the very best of the American exhibits in household art" (figure 6.22).<sup>214</sup> Later reproduced on their trade card, the desk features the mortise-and-tenon construction, chamfered linen-fold paneling, shallow incising, and the medieval-style strapwork hardware of the Modern Gothic style; the architectonic quality is extended to a small compartment topped with a pitched roof that opens for storage (figure 6.23). Before considering how these furnishings might have been combined at Sweet Briar House, it is useful to look at the ways in which Americans implemented the principles of the Aesthetic Movement, in which each object must represent an artistic addition to an interior composition, in the period following the Centennial Exhibition.<sup>215</sup>

### Creating the Artistic Home: The Popularization of the Aesthetic Movement in America

In 1878 Clarence Cook, a journalist and art critic, published *The House Beautiful* (figure 6.24). Based on a compendium of articles written for *Scribner's Monthly* starting in 1875,

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<sup>214</sup> Daisy Williams to Indiana Fletcher Williams, New York, September 1876 (no day given), SBC; Ferris 140.

<sup>215</sup> Sylvia L. Yount, "Give the People What They Want: The American Aesthetic Movement, Art Worlds, and Consumer Culture, 1876-1890," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1995); Cynthia Brandimarte, "Japanese Novelty Stores," *Winterthur Portfolio* vol. 26 (Spring 1991), 1-25; William Hosley, *The Japan Idea: Art and Life in Victorian America* (Hartford: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1990); Jane Converse Brown, "'Fine Arts and Fine People: The Japanese Taste in the American Home'" in Marilyn F. Motz and Pat Browne, eds., *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Material Culture, 1840-1940* (Madison: Popular Press, 1988) (Hosley noted that the dissertation on which this article was based should have found ready publication with little adaption of the original text, but a book has not materialized); Martha Crabill McLaugherty, "Household Art: Creating the Artistic Home, 1868-1893," *Winterthur Portfolio* vol. 18 (Spring 1983) 1-26.

Cook's publication was distinguished by *My Lady's Chamber*, the iconic frontispiece by Walter Crane representing the essential qualities of the Aesthetic Movement (figure 6.25). Crane was second only to William Morris in his influence on the collective artistic consciousness of the nineteenth century, and demonstrated his versatility in many of the same fields including art, decorative arts, design and publications. A keen observer could glean the essential content of the book through this alone: each of the objects depicted among a harmonious mixture of historic styles and origins adds delight and variety to the bright interior. An upholstered armchair, once part of a large set for a drawing room, coexists happily across an eighteenth-century gateleg table from a sturdy vernacular chair; these could be rearranged in the room as needed. A neoclassical silver tea added graceful form and delicate ornament to the elements of traditional classicism conveyed in the pedimented clock centered on the mantel under a convex mirror, and the mismatched brass candlesticks refresh the strict symmetry once associated the style. The room is filled with non-Western elements, including blue and white porcelain in varied shapes and the display of inexpensive and colorful Japanese fans. The surface ornament adds a great deal to the artistic appearance of the room, anchored by the patterned Oriental rug and rising through the blue and white tiles of the fireplace surround to wallpaper patterned in the stylized naturalism of William Morris' designs.

Two representative illustrations from *The House Beautiful* demonstrate how an artful combination of objects can have a collective appeal that a single object lacks (figure 6.26). In "We Met By Chance" a Jacobean chair with "old needlework tapestry" is placed at an angle to a carved Chinese teak table with a marble top, the white square of which would have provided a bright spot along the dark wall. A porcelain cup rests on top of the table, just below a hanging Japanese scroll. A textile gathered in the corner features birds and animals, and the floor is



covered with an Oriental rug. A wall sconce, devoid of candles, provides ornament rather than light, and the effective juxtaposition of objects from various times and places demonstrates the means by which an aesthetic interior might take shape in a reader's home. The facing illustration, "A Surprise Party," depicts the harmony that can be achieved when disparate elements are thoughtfully and inventively combined to make use of objects and spaces that would otherwise be neglected. A Sheraton-style card table from the early nineteenth century is used as the base of a multi-layered assemblage. It supports a lacquered Japanese cabinet, upon which is placed a Japanese tray stand topped with a blue and white jar of flowers. A mirror hung high on the wall reflects the gleam of the jar back into the room, adding extra light to the interior, and a few ornamental vases stand ready to be used as needed, or admired in the meantime. Cook's examples showed the middle class the potential of what might be achieved in their homes, the range that the Aesthetic Movement traveled up and down the economic scale, and the extent to which it offered Americans "art for all."

By contrast W. H. Vanderbilt's Japanese Room was attainable only by those who could afford the finest examples of Japanese art, hire a decorating firm to coordinate the interior elements to highlight them, and dedicate a room to the single purpose of display (figure 6.27). The Vanderbilt House (1879-1882) was the premier project of Christian Herter, the millionaires' decorator of choice, and represented the zenith of the Aesthetic Movement in America. There was such interest in the house that it was featured on eleven pages, more than any other, in an expensive and expansive publication documenting the most admired rooms in America, *Artistic Houses* (1883-1884). The contents of the house, which featured furniture designed by Herter's firm as well as Vanderbilt's art collection, were also considered so worthy of celebration that

they were published in a two-volume work, *Mr. Vanderbilt's House and Collection*, of the same period.<sup>216</sup>

Wherever it fell on the scale between Vanderbilt's Japanese Room and Cook's "The Surprise Party," the artistic interior provided a snug refuge from an outside world that might be harsh or troublesome; it offered sanctuary from events that were outside of one's control, and the chance to luxuriate in surroundings arranged just to one's liking. The contents of these interiors provided diverse opportunities for enjoyment through rearrangement or contemplation, and were invaluable in reaffirming the taste and discernment of the occupants. The vision of such an interior, one that inspired alternate states of aesthetic repose and stimulation, guided the Williams family as they integrated their new acquisitions into their home.<sup>217</sup>

### Sweet Briar House III: Aesthetic Retreat

An Aesthetic Retreat promised an environment where the cares of everyday life were shed upon entering a home where every aspect had been carefully chosen for its beauty, and arranged to enhance and reflect the artistic qualities of the other objects in the interior; it could

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<sup>216</sup> George Sheldon's *Artistic Houses: Being a Series of Interior Views of a Number of the Most Beautiful and Celebrated Homes in the United States with a Description of the Art Treasures Contained Therein* (2 vols. in four parts, New York, 1883-1884) featured several other interiors by Herter; at the Vanderbilt House, he worked with the architects John B. Snook and Charles B. Atwood, but was responsible for the design of the artistic features of the Vanderbilt House. Earl Shinn, under the pseudonym Edward Strahan, published *Mr. Vanderbilt's House and Collection* (Boston: G. Barrie, 1883-1884). For information on Herter's firm, see Katherine Howe, Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen and Catherine Hoover Voorsanger, *Herter Brothers: Furniture and Interiors for a Gilded Age* (New York: Abrams, 1994).

<sup>217</sup> Please see Appendix III for a list of Japanese objects at Sweet Briar House in 1900. The most expensive item on the inventory is a tortoiseshell bowl; it does not appear in any of the pre-1900 photographs, but can be seen on the table in the Middle Parlor, c. 1900 (figure 6.32).

also provide a retreat from mass-produced commercial goods.<sup>218</sup> The Aesthetic Retreat created at Sweet Briar House lasted from 1877, when the Williams family returned from New York following their visit to the Centennial, to 1884, when the house was closed following the death of Daisy Williams. Three photographs, a bamboo grove, and a rich collection of material culture are the remnants of the Aesthetic Retreat that Williams family created and enjoyed, but they provide a glimpse of it during the period in which the Aesthetic Movement in America was fully integrated into the American consciousness.

Decoration and the domestic sphere are often seen as woman's domain; art historian Roger Stein commented that "in many respects the Aesthetic Movement was a women's movement...insofar as the movement was primarily directed toward the domestic realm, they were also its chief consumers."<sup>219</sup> In the case of the Williams family, both Indiana and Henry selected furnishings for Sweet Briar House; Indiana's purchases have been documented in previous chapters, and she once told a friend "Mr. Williams bought everything he saw and wanted."<sup>220</sup> Another unusual manifestation of the Aesthetic Movement at Sweet Briar is that, while it was almost exclusively focused on the interior, the Williams family, moved by the possibilities of creating a living artistic composition in the landscape, planted a bamboo grove outside the cultivated grounds of the house, and ordered sets of peacocks to populate it (figure 6.28). These unmistakable signifiers of exotic culture, meant to stop visitors in their tracks, also

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<sup>218</sup> On the concept of the domestic interior as an Aesthetic Retreat, see Mary Warner Blanchard, "The Aesthetic Parlor, the Objet d' Art, and the Sedated Self" in *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 85-136.

<sup>219</sup> Roger Stein, "Artifact as Ideology" in *In Pursuit of Beauty*, 24. For a well-crafted study of the psychological relationship between women and the objects they collected please see Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Enchanted Lives, Enchanted Objects: American Women Collectors and the Making of Culture, 1800-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>220</sup> Testimony from the court hearing brought by the children of Lucian Fletcher against the estate of Indiana Fletcher Williams, 1900, SBC.

primed them to appreciate the artistic vistas that were carefully arranged inside Sweet Briar House.

In the Entrance Hall, a combination of elements from different periods and places established an Aesthetic pattern that the rest of the house followed, in which materials and styles were harmoniously blended, and contrasts artfully introduced (figure 6.29). A heavily carved lacquer jar was placed by an Empire card table, and a tall clock was flanked by mirrored candleholders used primarily to reflect light. A classical bronze plaque was mounted above the door, an Oriental rug was placed on the floor, and a straight chair arranged conveniently inside the door. The wallpaper was a lively naturalistic pattern that contributes a sense of movement to the interior. The walls of the adjacent Middle Parlor were papered with a foliate pattern and hung with framed prints. The floor was carpeted with a stylized geometric design that runs to the edge of the room, and the flexibility of the space was indicated by the presence of side chairs and a wicker chair, the back resembling a Japanese fan, that could be moved as needed.

The Rococo Revival *étagère* was moved out of the pride of place it once held in the East Parlor, the most elegant room in the house, and a series of porcelain vases, all of them different, flanked an ice water pitcher positioned on its white marble top (figure 6.30). The lightness it provided was carried throughout the room by the exotic alabaster pitchers on the mantel and the alabaster urn flanked by a pair of girandoles placed in front of the pier mirror. The substantial low armchairs, while resistant to the Aesthetic prohibition on sets, were low and inviting, and the rocker provided another comfortable seat.

The West Parlor was equally comfortable, though the carpet and wallpaper belonged to an earlier era (figure 6.31). The Japanesque display cabinet was tucked next to the mantel, and the small porcelain cups were ranged around the top shelf. A carved, vaguely Chinese table

stood in the center of the room, supporting a great cloisonné mounted vase. Elements of neoclassical style were introduced by the hand-painted fire screen and the set of glass-topped Sèvres ornaments on the mantel. Art was installed in unexpected places in the West Parlor, above the doorway, and on a wall-length textile hanging next to it. This trio of photographs provides the evidence for Sweet Briar House as an Aesthetic Retreat, an era in which each room contained multiple objects representing different cultures and eras but which, especially when considered as part of a whole, afforded pleasure and delight.

On his North American tour in 1882, Oscar Wilde, the greatest of the aesthetes, proclaimed “Into the secure and sacred house of Beauty, the true artist will admit nothing that is harsh or disturbing, nothing that gives pain...”<sup>221</sup> However artistically it was constructed, the Aesthetic Retreat the Williams family created at Sweet Briar House was not able to withstand the death of Daisy Williams in 1884. Her parents closed the house and moved to New York, where they remained until Henry died in 1889. Only then did Indiana return to Virginia, and her Aesthetic Retreat became a memory palace. Elizabeth Payne, who was a frequent visitor to Sweet Briar House, and a long-time friend of Indiana’s, recalled

She often said in going through the house, “you think it very foolish having all these things here, but they are the accumulation of years; some from my city home and some from the country home; my New York residence and Mr. Williams’ mother’s things, which I feel attached to, and my own foolish fancy in buying what I fancied.”<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Essays of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corporation, 1916), 459. This is from his lecture on the English Renaissance, by which he meant the Arts and Crafts Movement.

<sup>222</sup> Testimony from the court hearing brought by the children of Lucian Fletcher against the estate of Indiana Fletcher Williams.

## Conclusion

This chapter introduced the Aesthetic Movement in Britain and America. The role of the Centennial Exhibition in introducing the arts of Japan to America, and creating the conditions in which the Aesthetic Movement was translated to the American interior was discussed. The transformation of Sweet Briar House into an Aesthetic Retreat was presented. The next section, the conclusion, will include a discussion of the last major change to take place at Sweet Briar House as it became the centerpiece of Sweet Briar College, founded in 1901 in memory of Daisy Williams.

## Conclusion

### Introduction

Sweet Briar House is one of the best-documented sites in Virginia, with sources ranging from architectural drawings and extensive archives to original furnishings. It is worthy of national recognition, but the significance of this major nineteenth-century house has only now been fully considered. Sweet Briar House was purchased by Elijah Fletcher, a prominent figure in Lynchburg, Virginia, in 1830 and remodeled between 1851-1852. His daughter Indiana Fletcher assumed ownership of the property in 1860, and it remained her home after her marriage to James Henry Williams in 1865 and until her death in 1899. In her will, Williams left instructions for the founding of Sweet Briar Institute, an educational institution for women that accepted its first class of students in 1906, and exists today as Sweet Briar College.

### The Founding of Sweet Briar College

In her will, Indiana Fletcher Williams directed that all of the assets from her estate be used as a memorial to Daisy, directing her executors to

Procure the incorporation of ‘Sweet Briar Institute’...for the education of white girls and young women. It shall be the general scope and object of the school to impart to its students such education in sound learning and such physical, moral and religious training as shall, in the judgment of the directors, best fit them to be useful members of society.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Will of Indiana Fletcher Williams, Amherst County Willbook. This provision, which excluded any of Lucian Fletcher’s legitimate children from an inheritance, led to a prolonged court case in which the Williams estate and the board of trustees appointed to carry out their wishes eventually prevailed.

The college's first president, Mary K. Benedict, lived Sweet Briar House, which for several years functioned as an all-purpose building for the nascent college, including residence, board room, and meeting hall, before the college opened its doors in 1906. She viewed the residence as

a storehouse from which we all drew materially and spiritually. The house and the grounds were just right for the social life...and the beauty and harmony of all our surroundings seemed to emanate from the home...in coming into this home I think we all felt...that we had been graciously invited to come by the persons to whom it belonged. We had been asked to take it over in trust for the realization of the high purposes of the Founders. They had left expectations which we were to live up to. [The other academic buildings] seemed to have grown out of the Sweet Briar domain and were a part of it, nurtured by it...From the soil came the bricks...from the farm the supplies for our table...from the springs and the wells on and under the earth came our water.<sup>224</sup>

This legacy, which sprang from the continuous cultivation of Sweet Briar House by its occupants during the nineteenth century, exerts a similar pull over those who enter the house today. It is the centerpiece of the college's admirable examples of historic architecture, used for entertainment, education, and edification of students, alumnae, faculty, staff and visitors, all of whom take away a unique piece of Indiana Fletcher Williams' vision.

#### Conclusion: Sweet Briar House as Palladian Plantation House, Italianate Villa, Aesthetic Retreat

The nineteenth century was a time of extraordinary change in American architecture and decorative arts, and the major themes of this shift can be seen in the three phases of Sweet Briar House that have been the subject of this dissertation, which has advanced a thesis tied to each phase. The first thesis proposed that the double portico motif introduced by Palladio at the Villa Cornaro in the sixteenth century became the fundamental motif of Palladianism in Virginia architecture, generating a line of offspring that proliferated in the eighteenth century and beyond. The Palladian Plantation (Sweet Briar House I, c. 1800) featured this double portico, which

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<sup>224</sup> Martha Lou Lemmon Stohlman, *The Story of Sweet Briar College*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 94.



descended from the first building of this type in Virginia, the second Williamsburg Capitol (1751-53).

In 1851, following the return of the Fletcher children from an extended Grand Tour of Europe, the house was remodeled as an Italianate villa (Sweet Briar House II, 1851-52). The second thesis advanced the contention that by renovating their Palladian house into an Italianate villa, the Fletcher family deftly bridged the chasm between the balanced façade that characterized Sweet Briar House I and the fashion for the Picturesque that dominated American building in the second half of the nineteenth century. Experienced firsthand by the Fletcher family in Europe, and also through their knowledge of the first Italianate villa built in America, the Italianate villa style was popularized through publication and praise by tastemaker A. J. Downing in *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850).

In 1876, the Williams family traveled to the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, which hosted the first displays of significant amounts of Japanese decorative arts in America. The Centennial was a seminal influence in the widespread adoption of the Aesthetic Movement principles, characterized by the artful and self-conscious arrangement of objects old and new, familiar and foreign, in the domestic interior. This event was instrumental in the dissemination of reform design throughout the country as designers and artists took inspiration from these new materials and decorative motifs from Japan. The third thesis maintained that the Williams family's decision to transform Sweet Briar House into an Aesthetic Movement retreat, which reflected their sophistication, education, and cultural aspirations, was inspired by their experiences at the Centennial Exhibition.

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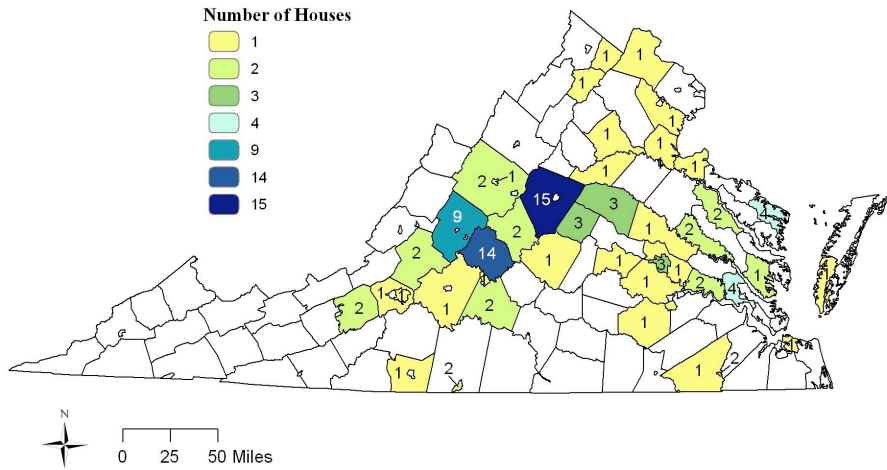
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## Appendix I Double-Portico Houses by County



Albemarle	15	King George	1
Amherst	14	King William	2
Augusta	2	Loudoun	1
Bedford	1	Louisa	3
Botetourt	2	Lynchburg (city)	1
Buckingham	1	Montgomery	2
Campbell	2	Nelson	2
Charles City	2	Norfolk (city)	1
Chesterfield	1	Northampton	1
Clarke	1	Northumberland	4
Culpeper	1	Orange	1
Danville (city)	2	Petersburg (city)	1
Dinwiddie	1	Powhatan	1
Essex	2	Prince William	1
Fluvanna	3	Richmond (city)	3
Franklin	2	Roanoke (city)	1
Fredericksburg (city)	1	Roanoke	1
Gloucester	2	Rockbridge	9
Hanover	1	Southampton	1
Henrico	1	Stafford	1
Henry	1	Staunton (city)	1
James City	4	Warren	1

## APPENDIX II

### A Listing of Double Portico Houses built in Virginia after Williamsburg II

<u>Name</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Date of Construction</u>	<u>Source</u>
Annefield	Clarke	c. 1790	<i>VLR</i>
Arlington	Northampton	burnt prior to 1832	DHR
Bassett Hall	James City	1753-56	Smith
Battersea	Petersburg (city)	c. 1770; portico lowered	White
Beaumont	Powhatan	1811	<i>VLR</i>
Belle Aire	Roanoke (city)	1849	<i>VLR</i>
Belle Grove	King George	1790-96; porticos post-1839	DHR
Belleview	Henry	c. 1800	White
Bellevue	Roanoke	c. 1850	<i>Old Virginia</i>
Belmont	Albemarle	(rebuilt after 1883 fire)	Byrne
Belmont	Fredericksburg (city)	1825	<i>VLR</i>
Belvidere	Richmond (city)	17 <sup>th</sup> c.; porticos added c. 1798	White
Blandfield	Essex	1769-71; top portico removed	DHR
Bleak	Albemarle	c. 1810	Byrne
Boush-Tazewell Hse.	Norfolk (city)	1779-83; porticos 1791	<i>VLR</i>
Robert Carter House	James City	c. 1746; porticos c. 1776	Smith
The Cedars	Albemarle	1850s	<i>VLR</i>
Chatham	Stafford	1768-71	DHR
Chatsworth	Henrico	pre-1751; portico later	<i>Lost Virginia</i>



Chellowe	Buckingham	c. 1840	DHR
Chelsea	King William	c. 1709; porticos mid-19 <sup>th</sup> c.	White
Chericoke	King William	1828	<i>VLR</i>
Clifton	Rockbridge	c. 1815	<i>VLR</i>
Cloverdale	Northumberland	c. 1820	DHR
Clover Hill	Albemarle	c. 1830	Byrne
Cuckoo	Louisa	c. 1819; porticos 20 <sup>th</sup> c.	<i>VLR</i>
Dodd House	Amherst	n.d.	DHR
Duck Bill	Amherst	c. 1825	ACHM
Dudley Tavern	Danville	c. 1810	Byrne
East Belmont	Albemarle	c. 1834-35	<i>VLR</i>
Edge Hill	Amherst	c. 1814	ACHM
Edgewood	Amherst	1818	ACHM
Edgeworth	Albemarle	n.d.	DHR
Exeter	Loudoun	c. 1790	DHR
Fairview Farm	Warren	n.d.	White
Fancy Hill	Rockbridge	n.d.	DHR
Farley	Culpeper	c. 1800-24	DHR
The Farm	Franklin	1856	<i>VLR</i>
Federal Hill	Campbell	1782	DHR
Fotheringay	Montgomery	c. 1800	<i>VLR</i>
Frederick Hall	Louisa	c. 1800-1810	DHR
Freeland House	Richmond (city)	1790	White

Gentry House	Albemarle	c. 1825	DHR
Gibson House	Augusta	1817	DHR
Glendower	Albemarle	c. 1810	Byrne
Glen Maury	Rockbridge	n.d.	White
Grayson	Montgomery	c. 1850	<i>VLR</i>
Greenwood Farm	Amherst	n.d.	DHR
The Grove	Bedford	pre-1828	DHR
Hickory Hill	Hanover	1827	<i>VLR</i>
Hickory Level	Fluvanna	1842	DHR
Hook-Powell-Moorman Farm	Franklin	c. 1855; top portico added 1895	<i>VLR</i>
Hopkins House	Rockbridge	c. 1845	HLF
House-Grace & Franklin	Lynchburg (city)	n.d.	DHR
House-near Danville	Danville	c. 1800	Byrne
House-Rt. 653/659	Louisa	n.d.	Byrne
Kenmore Farm	Amherst	1857-59	ACHM
Lee-Parr House	Amherst	pre-1850	DHR
Level Green	Nelson	c. 1800	Byrne
Limestone	Albemarle	n.d.	DHR
Linden	Albemarle	c. 1785	Byrne
Lithia Springs	Amherst	n.d.	DHR
Locust Grove	Amherst	c. 1810-1818	DHR
Magnolia Grange	Chesterfield	1823	<i>VLR</i>
Maxwelton	Rockbridge	c. 1815-1818	DHR

McElwee House	Rockbridge	c. 1858	Byrne
Moldavia	Richmond (city)	c. 1800; porticos slightly later	<i>Lost Virginia</i>
Monticello I	Albemarle	1769	<i>Lost Virginia</i>
Newstead	Gloucester	n.d.	Byrne
The Oaks	Amherst	c. 1811	DHR
Old Blue Hotel	Rockbridge	c. 1818	Byrne
Orange Springs	Orange	1790; porticos 1850	White
Prospect Hill	Botetourt	c. 1837-38	<i>VLR</i>
Riverview	Albemarle	c. 1790	Byrne
Ruffner House	Rockbridge	1821-1824	HLF
Tazewell Hall	James City	c. 1762	Smith
Shirley	Charles City	c. 1740; porticos c. 1831	<i>VLR</i>
Solitude	Fluvanna	c. 1790	Byrne
Springfield	Northumberland	1828	<i>VLR</i>
Staunton View Farm	Campbell	c. 1835	DHR
Stuart House	Staunton (city)	1791	<i>VLR</i>
Sugar Loaf Farm	Augusta	1820; porticos 20 <sup>th</sup> c.	White
Sunny Bank	Albemarle	c. 1797	<i>VLR</i>
Sunnyside	Southampton	1810-11	White
Sweet Briar House	Amherst	pre-1825; remodeled c. 1850	DHR
Taliaferro House	Amherst	n.d.	DHR
Tallwood	Albemarle	c. 1803	Byrne
Tedington	Charles City	c. 1750; porticos late 18 <sup>th</sup> c.	<i>Lost Virginia</i>

Thornton House	Amherst	n.d.	DHR
Tuctoe Hall	Prince William	n.d.	DHR
Versailles	Northumberland	1857	<i>VLR</i>
Warner Hall	Gloucester	n.d.	DHR
Wayside	Fluvanna	c. 1820	Byrne
Westbury	Albemarle	n.d.	DHR
Wheatland	Essex	1840	<i>VLR</i>
Wheatland	Northumberland	1848-49	<i>VLR</i>
Whippernock	Dinwiddie	c. 1725; porticos added pre-1825	DHR
White Hall	Amherst	n.d.	DHR
Wiloma	Botetourt	1848	<i>VLR</i>
Windy Glen	Rockbridge	c. 1800	DHR
Wintergreen	Nelson	pre-1828	DHR
Wythe House	James City	1752-54	Smith

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KEY TO SOURCES  
(see bibliography for full citations)

ACHM: Amherst County Historical Museum, Amherst, Virginia  
 Byrne: unpublished dissertation by Virginia Ann DeRosa Byrne, Georgia Institute of Technology  
 DHR: Department of Historic Resources Archives, Richmond, Virginia  
 HLF: Historic Lexington Foundation  
 Lost Virginia: 2001 publication by Green, Loth and Rasmussen  
*Old Virginia*: 2003 exhibition catalogue by Rasmussen and Tilton  
 Smith: seminar paper for Dr. Charles E. Brownell, Virginia Commonwealth University  
*VLR*: 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Virginia Landmarks Register*, published in 1999  
 White: unpublished thesis by Joseph Senter White III under the direction of  
 Dr. Charles Brownell, Virginia Commonwealth University

### APPENDIX III

#### A Listing of Japanese Objects in Inventory of the Williams Estate, 1900

##### Parlor

Japanese chess table	3.00
Small Japanese cabinet on stand	25.00
Japanese cabinet	10.00
Japanese pitcher	1.00
Toy stand, Japan	.50
Japan teapot	.25
Japan nest boxes	.50
Teapot, Japanese	.50
Japanese plates, 17 round	1.50
Japanese trays, 10	2.00
Japanese box, small	.10
Japanese mugs, 3	.25
Japanese boxes, 3 round	.75
Japanese card plate	.50
Japanese umbrella	1.00
World's Fair Art Series-16 prints	.25
Oil painting-scene in Japan	2.00
Japanese bowls, pair	
Japanese box	
Japanese fans	

Japanese tray on marble top

Japanese boxes and candles on marble top

Japanese napkins

Japanese fans, 2

Japanese tray .10

Library

Japanese saucer .10

Japanese tray .50

Japanese trays .75

Stand and Japanese cabinet 10.00

Japanese bowl, tortoiseshell 100.00

Dining Room

Japanese cups .50

Japanese waiter 2.00

Japanese waiter

Mrs. Williams' Room

Japanese work box 1.00

Japanese vase .10

Japanese cabinet 1.50

Japanese pin tray .05

Japanese cup and saucer .50

Japanese vase .50

Japanese bowl .25

Japanese tray .05

Middle Room, West Tower, Over Parlor

Bowls, Japanese

Japanese tray

Japanese vase 6.00

Japanese boxes .50

Middle Room, East Tower, Over Drawing Room

Japanese wooden vases

On Stairway, Front Hall

Japanese portfolio .50

Room Over Dining Room

Japanese cabinet

## Vita

H. Christian Carr was born on 10 July 1972 in Loudoun County, Virginia. She is an American citizen and holds the titles of Director, Arts Management Program and Director, Sweet Briar Museum at Sweet Briar College in Virginia, where she has worked since 2001. In addition to her degree from Virginia Commonwealth University, she holds an M.A. from Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design and Culture in New York and a B.A. in Art History and English from Hollins College, Roanoke, VA, 1994. In 2010 she also earned a certificate in Arts Administration from New York University.