

CHEEKWOOD: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF AN AMERICAN COUNTRY
ERA ESTATE AND ITS PRESERVATION

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

Cheekwood is an opulent Georgian Revival mansion constructed during the concluding days of the Country Estate Era, just before the Great Depression. Originally a Nashville private estate, Cheekwood was built by the Cheek family and designed by Bryant Fleming. The gardens and mansion continued to function as a residence until 1959, when the property was transformed into the Tennessee Botanical Gardens and Fine Arts Center which opened to the public on May 22, 1960. This thesis traces the history of Cheekwood by studying the three entities that came together in the creation of the estate: the development of Nashville, the Cheeks moving the Tennessee, and the biography of its designer, Bryant Fleming. Through documentation and exploration into the preservation of the estate, this thesis sheds light on why Cheekwood has become known as one of the finest examples of an American Country Place Era Estate in this country.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jordan Cleek began her life in Tennessee where she was raised on her parent's horse farm abutting the foothills of Ben Lomand Mountain. Jordan would eventually attend Tennessee Technological University where she obtained her bachelors degree in civil engineering. She moved to Ithaca in the summer of 2015 with her two dogs, Fred and George. Upon graduation from Cornell University, Jordan will combined both her degrees to begin her career in preservation engineering.

To Fred and George, my constant companions.

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INTRODUCTION

Cheekwood was originally a private estate built on approximately 100 acres located eight and a half miles southwest of downtown Nashville, on the fringes of Belle Meade, the most affluent zip code in the state of Tennessee. The construction, of the property, was spearheaded by two events. The first was the sale of Maxwell House Coffee to the Postum Cereal Company, the predecessor of General Foods, in 1928. This sale left Leslie Owen Cheek with a substantial sum of money, which allowed him and his wife Mabel to realize their ambitions to build a country estate.

While the accumulation of the fiscal resources needed to build such an extravagant mansion contributed to the construction, Leslie Cheek liked to say the conception of the Cheekwood Estate grew out of Mabel's purchase of a ceiling-high Victorian pier mirror, which proved too big to fit in their West End Avenue residence. When the mirror was stored and damaged in Leslie's grocery warehouse to the exasperation of his wife, Leslie suggested that he and Mabel either sell the mirror or build a house large enough in which it could fit. Mabel called his bluff, and thus, the ideas for Cheekwood commenced.

This opulent Georgian Revival mansion was constructed during the concluding days of the Country Estate Era, just before the Great Depression. The architect and landscape architect, Bryant Fleming, was already in the Nashville area doing work on other socialites' estates. This trademark ability to harmonize the residence with the gardens was a key reason that the Cheeks commissioned him to design their beloved Cheekwood.

Because of the cohesive design, the artifacts imported by the year-long European tour of the Cheeks with Fleming and the newly constructed elements were completely unified. Fleming's man-made streams and the imported architectural features were positioned as if they had been in Belle Meade for centuries, and the circulation from the house to the gardens was effortless.

The gardens and mansion continued to function as a private estate until 1959, when Huldah Cheek, Mabel and Leslie's daughter, deeded the property to a non-profit organization for the creation of the Tennessee Botanical Gardens and Fine Arts Center. This established one of Nashville's greatest fine arts institution, which was opened to the public on May 22, 1960. In order to complete this rehabilitation from a private residence to a public museum, the estate required many alterations to the structure and grounds. A majority of these renovations were executed to create space large enough for galleries, storage, and offices and to meet modern building codes throughout the years. While the estate has experienced many changes throughout its life, it has continued to be recognized as one of Nashville's greatest architectural gems.

The information to develop this thesis was gained in the summer of 2015 through 2016 from three principal sources: the Cheekwood archives, interviews, and site visits to the estate. Once the archives were familiarized and the organization of Cheekwood data became apparent, this collection proved to be the most helpful. This conversation specifically includes information gained the many hours spent with Bryant Fleming's original blueprints, photographs taking by the Cheeks around the time of construction, blueprints created for renovations to the museum throughout the years, master plans of the museum, and letters written from the Cheeks and the designer. Particulars which could not be gained from the archives were gathered through

interviews with past and present grounds keepers, directors, and preservationists. The most in-depth of discussions include those of Sarah Lowe, Cheekwood's Botanical Garden and Horticulture Manager who has worked on the estate since 1999, and Leslie Jones, the new Curator of Decorative Arts and Historic Interpretation at Cheekwood who formerly worked as the Curator and Director of Historical Resources and Programming for the White House Historical Association in Washington, DC, and is overseeing the restoration of Cheekwood's historic interiors. Finally, numerous site visits allowed a concrete understanding of the complexity of Fleming's design as well as a better comprehension of the ramifications of the rehabilitation into a public museum.

The purpose of this thesis is to develop a comprehensive account on this grand Nashville estate. To understand of the architectural narrative of the building and the evolution the grounds, the catalyst of the construction was first investigated. The three entities that came together to create the Cheekwood Estate were the City of Nashville and its surrounding suburbs, the Cheek family and their migration to Tennessee, and the life and career of the estate's designer, Bryant Fleming. These topics are profiled in Chapter One, Two, and Three, respectively.

In the fourth and fifth chapter of this thesis, the main residential structure of the house and the estate's terraces, gardens, and support structures are examined. This in-depth documentation of both the mansion and the grounds supplies the background to conclude the thesis on its sixth and final chapter. The closing chapter of this thesis interprets the preservation of this large historic country estate and its associated gardens.

Cheekwood has greatly impacted Nashville's architectural profile since its construction. More notably, the estate personifies the lifestyle of the affluent socialites in the City of Nashville

during a time where opulence scarce. With the estate's construction ending in 1932, Cheekwood is considered one of the last great manor houses of the era built in the United States. It is with great hope that this thesis on the Cheekwood Estate will manifest the estate's importance in Nashville's history and perpetuate its preservation efforts for the enjoyment and education for Tennessee's future generations.

CHAPTER I: THE CITY AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The Nashville metropolitan area is the home of the Cheekwood Museum and Botanical Garden. The institution is located within the West Meade neighborhood of the city, which abuts Belle Meade, Tennessee. The Cheek family would move to Nashville at the turn of the twentieth century and buy the property which would house Cheekwood in 1929, after the sale of the Maxwell House Coffee brand.

Nashville, A History

Prior to any settlers or explorers setting foot in Tennessee, it was the home to three Native American tribes, the Cherokee, Shawnee, and the Chickasaw. These tribes divided Tennessee much like it is today, into the west, middle, and east portions. During the massacre of 1714, the Shawnees (who inhabited most of Middle Tennessee) were driven out by the Chickasaw, and for many years after, the interior sections of Tennessee were used as opened hunting ground for the Cherokee and Chickasaw.¹

By 1710, Nashville saw its first semi-permanent resident, a French trader from New Orleans.² This man, whose name has been lost to history, brought with him a French boy of fifteen years, named Charles Charleville, and the two established a trading post next to the

¹ Zibart, Carl F *Yesterday's Nashville*. Miami: E. A. Seemann Pub., 1976. p. 1.

² McRaven, William Henry *Nashville: "Athens of the South."* Chapel Hill: Published for the Tennessee Book Co. by Scheer & Jervis, 1949. p. 1.

proclaimed “French Lick.” This outpost permitted the Native Americans to trade furs and skins for European luxuries, and it continued for several years.

Nearly 50 years later, the outpost at French Lick would be reestablished by the gallant French officer, Captain Timote de Monte Breune (now known as Timothy Demonbreun).³ Instead of being returned to his mother country, like many French forces after French and Indian War, Timothy was sent to Kaskaskia, to act as the governor of the Ohio territory. In 1763, the young and adventurous Captain organized a small group and embarked on a journey down the Kaskaskia River. Within this entourage was Charles Charleville, the same French boy who helped develop the original trading post on the Cumberland River.

In the closing months of 1779, the first group of permanent settlers arrived in Nashville.⁴ These settlers traveled in two groups, one led by Captain James Robertson, with the men via the Cumberland Gap, and the other by Captain John Donelson, with their women and children down the Cumberland River. Unfortunately, the river would freeze half way through Donelson’s expedition, and their arrival was delayed.

It was Christmas Day when the men led by Robertson arrived, and the temperatures were frigid.⁵ Because of a treaty between the North Carolinians and the Native Americans in 1768 authorizing passage through Native American lands, it was believed the settlers were free to inhabit the land beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains, and therefore, a false sense of security led the

³ McRaven, William Henry *Nashville: "Athens of the South."* Chapel Hill: Published for the Tennessee Book Co. by Scheer & Jervis, 1949. p. 1.

⁴ Creighton, Wilbur F., Wilbur F Creighton, and Leland R Johnson. *Building of Nashville*. Rev. and enl. Nashville, 1969. p. 1.

⁵ Ibid.

group to believe their efforts would be safe and expeditious.⁶ Some even thought there was no need for a fortified settlement; however, Captain James Robertson insisted for a fort to be built.

When the women and children arrived the following spring, the Donelson party found several log cabins constructed by the men.⁷ To solidify the development of Fort Nashborough, the Cumberland Compact was signed on May 13, 1780, and immediately after its signing, the group of settlers separated into smaller settlements, or stations. Within this network of stations, the fort served as a common center, and thus, began the nucleus of the county.

It was not long after the network of permanent structures were erected before the Native Americans began to get agitated, feeling the settlers were encroaching on their hunting grounds. In beginning of 1781, a coalition of between the Cherokees and other neighboring tribes was formed with the sole intent of wiping out all Cumberland settlements.⁸ The planned Native American attack, now known as Battle of the Bluffs, commenced April 2nd that same year.⁹

In 1794 to end constant feuds with the Cherokees, Captain Robertson ordered an expedition toward East Tennessee and made a demonstration of the settlers' power by attacking-in-force all of the Cherokee Indians between Fort Nashborough and the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. This was known as the Nickajack Expedition, and its efforts ended all Cherokee attacks on the settlement of Fort Nashborough, allowing it to expand into the small city of Nashville.

⁶ McRaven, William Henry *Nashville: "Athens of the South."* Chapel Hill: Published for the Tennessee Book Co. by Scheer & Jervis, 1949. p. 7.

⁷ McRaven, William Henry *Nashville: "Athens of the South."* Chapel Hill: Published for the Tennessee Book Co. by Scheer & Jervis, 1949. p. 7.

⁸ Burt, Jesse Clifton *Nashville, Its Life and Times.* Nashville: Tennessee Book Co., 1959. p 14.

⁹ Ibid. p. 15

Around the time of the Revolutionary War, the 1783-1784 North Carolina legislature laid out a military district in the Cumberland Area to formalize Davidson County.¹⁰ This legislation instated the name change from Nashborough to Nashville, due to strong anti-British feelings brought on by the revolution, and ordered a jail and courthouse to be built. These elements were to form the foundation of Nashville's public square.

By the late 1700s, the first brick buildings and taverns had sprung up along the square.¹¹ And around this time, a young lawyer from North Carolina rode into Nashville. With him, he brought "a fine stallion with a pack-mare carrying his worldly processions, a few extra clothes, several law books, a small quantity of ammunition, tea, tobacco, liquor and salt."¹² With a rifle, three pistols and one hundred and eighty dollars in his pocket, Andrew Jackson began to build his legacy in the State of Tennessee.

The small city of Nashville already had a working government, a number of churches (including Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and shortly after, Roman Catholic), and plenty of permanent houses.¹³ Trade and commerce at this time were mostly carried out through the Cumberland River, and the barge and keel boats were used to carry the chief products produced in Nashville, including cotton, corn, flour, tobacco, and livestock.¹⁴ By 1811, the first steam powered boat made its successful voyage from Pittsburgh to New Orleans, and five years later,

¹⁰ Zibart, Carl F *Yesterday's Nashville*. Miami: E. A. Seemann Pub., 1976. p. 16.

¹¹ West, Carroll Van *Nashville Architecture: A Guide to the City*. First Edition. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2015. p. 2.

¹² McRaven, William Henry *Nashville: "Athens of the South."* Chapel Hill: Published for the Tennessee Book Co. by Scheer & Jervis, 1949. p. 30.

¹³ Burt, Jesse Clifton *Nashville, Its Life and Times*. Nashville: Tennessee Book Co., 1959. p. 25.

¹⁴ Zibart, Carl F *Yesterday's Nashville*. Miami: E. A. Seemann Pub., 1976. p. 18.

several Nashvillians formed its inaugural steamship company for the city, although would be three years before any steamship would arrive in Nashville.

When war was declared on Great Britain in 1812, the population of the small city had just hit 1,500.¹⁵ During this year, the *Nashville Whig* established (which eventually, merged with the *National Banner* in 1826), the Cumberland lodge of Masons was instituted, and the state legislature met in Nashville for the first time. It was also year Tennessee became forever known as the “Volunteer State.” On December 10, 1812, 2,500 volunteers from all over Middle Tennessee met in Nashville to go into battle to relief New Orleans. Although this original faction was disbanded by federal orders, Tennessee Governor reassembled the men after the fall of Fort Mims, Alabama. On the eve of August 30, 1813, Governor Blount of Tennessee feared the same fate as Fort Mims, Alabama, utter destruction by the hands of 1,000 Creek Indian soldiers. Without waiting for federal consent, the Governor called for 3,500 volunteers to return to service.

The volunteers assembled in Fayetteville by October 7th. Jackson led the men from Fayetteville to northern Alabama, where he won the notorious battle of Horseshoe Bend and returned home an acclaimed hero. Months later, General Jackson was appointed as a major general in the U.S. Army, and this propelled Nashville into national attention.

By the year 1828, Nashville built its first water reservoir to provide clean water to its residences, hosted its first visit from an American President, President Monroe, constructed its first bridge over the Cumberland, and celebrated the arrival of the *General Jackson* steamboat.

¹⁵ McRaven, William Henry *Nashville: "Athens of the South."* Chapel Hill: Published for the Tennessee Book Co. by Scheer & Jervis, 1949. p. 34.

Arguably, the most important of all of these events was the visitation of President Monroe, as it was the start of Nashville's political legacy.

It had been fifteen years since Jackson's victory in the War of 1812 when he ran for United States President, and Andrew Jackson won the popular election two consecutive terms in 1828 and 1832.¹⁶ By the year 1844, a second Nashvillian, James Knox Polk, had run for and won the presidency. These two men transformed Nashville into a political powerhouse, and "[f]or at least a generation, Nashville was one of the leading political centers of the developing American nation. During this exciting period of territorial expansion, generally known as the 'Manifest Destiny' era, Nashville in effect was the national capital."¹⁷ It was these two men that led in building a nation that stretched coast to coast.

The year prior to President Polk's presidential victory, legislation was passed to make Nashville the permanent capital of the state. Prior to this, the Tennessee government assembled in Knoxville, Murfreesboro, and Nashville. In fact, Knoxville was named the first seat of government by the first State Constitution, but the center of the state became a preferred location with the growth of Memphis on the Mississippi River.¹⁸ Nashville facilitated this decision when the city bought a site known as "Campbell's Hill" for \$30,000 and donated it to the state government for the site of the proposed center of government.

¹⁶ Burt, Jesse Clifton *Nashville, Its Life and Times*. Nashville: Tennessee Book Co., 1959. p. 41.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ McRaven, William Henry *Nashville: "Athens of the South."* Chapel Hill: Published for the Tennessee Book Co. by Scheer & Jervis, 1949. p. 80.

The capitol was designed by William Strickland, and the architect spent the rest of his life on this design.¹⁹ The original estimate of the entire project was \$340,00 and would take three years. He was later quoted that he underestimated the costs in fear of having to changing the design that was thought to be his masterpiece. However, this intense strain of reworking the budget and asking the State's government for more money was contributed to his untimely death at 64. In the end, the capitol cost over \$2 million and took 14 years to complete.

The style of the capitol was of Grecian design, and it was built during a time where towers were considered necessary adornment. The architect found the demanded placement of a tower on a Grecian design problematic, but he styled the tower after the tomb of Lysicrates. "Lysicrates was not a famous general, statesman, or philosopher, but had been honored by the Greeks in 325 BC for leading the winning choir in choral contests."²⁰ Although Strickland picked a tower representing what he thought as the frivolity of music, little did he know that Nashville would become a center for the music industry in the twentieth century, earning it the nickname "Music City."

At the time of the Civil War, Nashville was a fairly large city of 17,000 people, and the city was actively expanding with better transportation.²¹ "The decade before the Civil War was one of widespread development in civic, social, and cultural improvement of Nashville."²² By 1853, the city had established a regular service train from Nashville to Chattanooga, and this was

¹⁹ Creighton, Wilbur F., Wilbur F Creighton, and Leland R Johnson. *Building of Nashville*. Rev. and enl. Nashville, 1969. p. 100.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ McRaven, William Henry *Nashville: "Athens of the South."* Chapel Hill: Published for the Tennessee Book Co. by Scheer & Jervis, 1949. p. 93.

²² McRaven, William Henry *Nashville: "Athens of the South."* Chapel Hill: Published for the Tennessee Book Co. by Scheer & Jervis, 1949. p. 87.

completed in time for the Union Army to make use of them when they occupied both cities.²³ By controlling the railroad, the Union could efficiently mobilize and transport needed resources of war.

Nashville was officially turned over to the Yankees at the fall of Fort Donelson and Fort Henry in February 1862.²⁴ By this date, hundreds of families had fled the city, well before Mayor R. B. Cheatham officially surrendered. When the Union Army entered into Nashville, the city was physically intact. There were twenty wholesale grocery stores, two large drug firms, three liquor and wine distributors, boot companies, and other retail stores.²⁵ The remaining Nashville citizens were defenseless from the Union, and with enemy soldiers bivouacked throughout the city, looting and vandalism ran rampant.²⁶

Because the Union troops seized houses to fortify the city, many prominent citizens were who supported Confederate States of America were imprisoned. Many of these people were held in the Maxwell House hotel.²⁷ This hotel was intended to be one of the grandest hotels in all of Nashville but was halted by the war. As soon as the Federals invaded the city, the half complete hotel was used as prison cells for the Confederates and war barracks for the Union soldiers.

²³ Zibart, Carl F *Yesterday's Nashville*. Miami: E. A. Seemann Pub., 1976. p 25.

²⁴ Creighton, Wilbur F., Wilbur F Creighton, and Leland R Johnson. *Building of Nashville*. Rev. and enl. Nashville, 1969. p. 79.

²⁵ McRaven, William Henry *Nashville: "Athens of the South."* Chapel Hill: Published for the Tennessee Book Co. by Scheer & Jervis, 1949. p. 93.

²⁶ Zibart, Carl F *Yesterday's Nashville*. Miami: E. A. Seemann Pub., 1976. p 26.

²⁷ McRaven, William Henry *Nashville: "Athens of the South."* Chapel Hill: Published for the Tennessee Book Co. by Scheer & Jervis, 1949. p. 106.

Although the city was already taken, the Confederate Forces did attempt to regain Nashville on December 15th and 16th, 1864.²⁸ The Battle of Nashville pitted a well-fortified Union Army located in a system of forts in the outskirts of the city. It has been told that fifty thousand men took an active part in the battle, and it was the Union's superior numbers at won the battle.

Although the Civil War seemed everlasting, Nashville's reconstruction happened expeditious, comparatively. At least thirteen high-ranking Yankee officers married Nashville high-society women, and therefore, some of the Northern wealth stayed in Nashville, helping with the reconstruction efforts.²⁹ The city's collapsed bridges were back in service within a few months with the efforts of the U.S. Corps of Engineers.³⁰ Public schooling began again, and the universities and colleges reopened. By 1873, nearly 8,730 children were in school, and that same year, Vanderbilt University was established.³¹ The Maxwell House hotel was also completed at this time.

During its lifetime, the Maxwell House Hotel hosted five presidents, including Andrew Johnson, Rutherford B. Hayes, Grover Cleveland, Theodore Roosevelt, William McKinley, and a number of other prominent guests.³² It was President Theodore Roosevelt that gave the Maxwell House Hotel coffee the infamous slogan of "Good to the last drop."³³ It would also

²⁸ McRaven, William Henry *Nashville: "Athens of the South,"* Chapel Hill: Published for the Tennessee Book Co. by Scheer & Jervis, 1949. p. 97.

²⁹ Burt, Jesse Clifton *Nashville, Its Life and Times*. Nashville: Tennessee Book Co., 1959. p. 60.

³⁰ Creighton, Wilbur F., Wilbur F Creighton, and Leland R Johnson. *Building of Nashville*. Rev. and enl. Nashville, 1969. p. 79.

³¹ Burt, Jesse Clifton *Nashville, Its Life and Times*. Nashville: Tennessee Book Co., 1959. p. 76.

³² Burt, Jesse Clifton *Nashville, Its Life and Times*. Nashville: Tennessee Book Co., 1959. p 36.

³³ Ibid, p. 109.

make the Cheek-Neal Company, the distributor of the Maxwell House Coffee, very wealthy. On August 1, 1928, Postum Cereal Company, the predecessor of General Foods Corporation, announced the acquisition of Maxwell House Coffee for \$16,600,000 in cash and 414,789 shares of Postum stocks.³⁴

Overall Reconstruction was a time of overwhelming development and propensity. By the late 1880s, Nashville had introduced electric streetcars, spurring suburban developments north, west, and to a limited degree south. The center of the city gained buildings thanks to the Baptists Convention's decision to increase its Sunday School Board headquarters and publishing house. Commercial prosperity seemed assured with the new railroad station.³⁵

The prosperity did not last, and when the United States had entered into an economic downturn in 1893, Tennessee's state economy suffered in a similar fashion. Prior to the recession, proposals to celebrate Tennessee's 100th Anniversary was a state were discussed, and it was decided to proceed even if it were just an effort to divert the public's attention away from the economic downturn.³⁶ To plan the event, a stock company, known as the Nashville Tennessee Exposition Company, was organized and was to operate using the \$500,000 raised through selling shares for the event at \$25 each.

The event was to showcase everything Tennessee had to offer, and in doing so, exhibition halls dedicated to main themes were planned. These exhibition halls portrayed Tennessean agriculture, machinery, mineral and forestry, transportation, women's outreach, commerce,

³⁴ Creighton, Wilbur F., Wilbur F Creighton, and Leland R Johnson. *Building of Nashville*. Rev. and enl. Nashville, 1969. p. 121.

³⁵ Zibart, Carl F *Yesterday's Nashville*. Miami: E. A. Seemann Pub., 1976. p. 27.

³⁶ Creighton, Wilbur F., Wilbur F Creighton, and Leland R Johnson. *Building of Nashville*. Rev. and enl. Nashville, 1969. p. 138.

government, educational, and history with immense focus on the prosperity in Tennessee. Of the most well-known of these buildings was the Parthenon. The parthenon was constructed as an art museum for the exposition. Although it was constructed of wood and stone veneer, it was an icon of the event that lasted for years to come.

Following the ideas first offered at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, the Midway housed the entertainment. Within the Midway included a designed landscapes of exotic scenes. In the Egyptian streets of Cairo, camels could be ridden and patrons could visit Egyptian barbers and snake charmers.³⁷ In the Cuban Village, beautiful, short-skirted women performed exotic dances, considered lewd in 1897 and a favored exhibit by the men. The Chinese Village was possibly the least favorite area, as many Nashvillians believed it was a ruse to smuggle Asian workers into the country.

Other attractions on the Midway included a plethora of rides. Some were giant slides, height defying mechanisms, and gondola rides. During the day, mock battles were performed, and during the night, there were spectacular firework displays.

Although the exhibition did not open as planned in 1896, it ran from May to October of 1897, and over 1.5 million guest attended.³⁸ Among the most prominent guests were President and Mrs. William McKinley, along with a majority of the Presidential cabinet and their families. By the end of the Exhibition, the receipts totaled \$1,101,285.84 and the disbursements were \$1,101,246.40.³⁹ This left a grand total of \$39.44 in the coffers. The event was considered a

³⁷ Creighton, Wilbur F., Wilbur F Creighton, and Leland R Johnson. *Building of Nashville*. Rev. and enl. Nashville, 1969. p. 141.

³⁸ Burt, Jesse Clifton *Nashville, Its Life and Times*. Nashville: Tennessee Book Co., 1959. p. 84.

³⁹ Creighton, Wilbur F., Wilbur F Creighton, and Leland R Johnson. *Building of Nashville*. Rev. and enl. Nashville, 1969. p. 144.

major success, however, because it diverted public attention away from the recession. The Centennial contributed to the revival of the town that lasted until the next recession in 1907.

Development of Suburbs and Belle Meade

Nashville saw several decades of suburban expansion after the 1880s, especially towards the west.⁴⁰ This event was perpetuated by the development of the streetcar and the Belle Meade Planation selling nearly half of the estate's 5000 acres to developers intending to subdivide the property for exclusive suburban residences. Although this west neighborhood was not Nashville's only area to be developed for the upper echelon of Nashville's society, it was the first successful attempt at romantic planning in a neighborhood.⁴¹

Originally, Belle Meade was a plantation built in 1852 that produced America's first entry to win the English Derby, and soon, Belle Meade's thoroughbreds became world renowned.⁴² Surviving the Civil War, it became an emblem of the plantation South at its best and was celebrated as the "Queen of the Southern Plantation." The active planation, however, was disassembled by the family in 1904 after a member embezzled operational funds to pay off their resplendent living costs. This act had devastating consequences for both the plantation and the family, which suffered suicides, shootings, and hostile fighting. Although the planation house has remained intact, the acreage to the home was divided for many of Nashville's grand country estates. Cheekwood would become one of these estates nearly three decades later.

⁴⁰ John Joseph Ellis, "Belle Meade: Development of an Upper-Class Suburb. 1905-1938" Nashville; M. A. thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1983. p. 2.

⁴¹ Ibid, p 17.

⁴² Ibid, p 1.

The generation prior to the Belle Meade development, Nashville's businessmen and professionals lived in Rutledge Hill toward the south of town.⁴³ This area was of prime location as it was bounded by institutions such as University of Nashville, Montgomery Bell Academy, and the city's medical schools. This was an area that was also booming with commercial industry. Consequently, professors and businessmen alike could leave their place of work and make it to their respective homes for a midday break without fear of returning late.

As the suburbs spread, they were restricted from southern expansion as the area lacked proper drainage. This area was known as "Black Bottom" and was the residence of many of Nashville's poor African-American families. The elite, therefore, continued their move westward. During this time, the West End neighborhood flourished. Places such as Edgewood and Capitol Hill were also popular; although, they were on the decline for the Nashville socialites.

After the 1916 Edgewood fire, the elite would only to move more west. During this tumultuous time, the Nashville reservoir had just collapsed, dumping 25 million gallons of water into South Nashville and leaving many homeless. This not only put a press on Nashville's housing needs, but the economy became more stressed as World War I was at its peak.⁴⁴

Belle Meade was a logical outcome of this growth west. Although, it was proper planning that caused the suburb to retain its prosperity while avoiding the decay experience by Nashville's earlier neighborhoods. This neighborhood was the first successful attempt of

⁴³ John Joseph Ellis, "Belle Meade: Development of an Upper-Class Suburb. 1905-1938" Nashville; M. A. thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1983. p. 2.

⁴⁴ McRaven, William Henry *Nashville: "Athens of the South."* Chapel Hill: Published for the Tennessee Book Co. by Scheer & Jervis, 1949. p. 195.

romantic planning in Tennessee seen in many nineteenth-century suburban cemetery plans.⁴⁵

The Belle Meade Land Company commissioned Cole Simonds to lay out the first roadways and lots for the community. Simonds was known as the co-founder of the American Society of Landscape Architects with Frederick Law Olmstead in 1886 and as America's premier cemetery landscape architect. It was the romanticism of the Simonds design that allowed Belle Meade to continue with its popularity for generations to come.

Simonds curvilinear street patterns was a stark contrast from the urban grid iron plan seen throughout Nashville. This cut down on through traffic, and streets could not be easily transformed into main thoroughfares, thus giving an feeling of inaccessibility from the growing city. It was from cemetery planning, too, that Belle Meade inherited restrictive covenants and limited the owners ability to subdivide lots. Thus, the neighborhood lots remained expansive and exclusive.

Belle Meade was a southern take on America's Country Place Era. This period perpetuated from the 1890s through the Great Depression.⁴⁶ During this time, most large cities had at least one suburb resembling Belle Meade. These neighborhoods were of romantic design inspired by planners such as Olmstead and Simonds. The country place dominated these suburbs, and, "[i]n spite of an imitative tendency, both locally and nationally, domestic architecture showed its greatest strength during this period. Great attention was paid to detail and proportion, particularly between the house and its grounds, a feature termed 'architectonic.'"⁴⁷

⁴⁵ John Joseph Ellis, "Belle Meade: Development of an Upper-Class Suburb. 1905-1938" Nashville; M. A. thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1983. p. 10.

⁴⁶ Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land*. (Cambridge, MA: Press, 1971), p. 427 - 46.

⁴⁷ John Joseph Ellis, "Belle Meade: Development of an Upper-Class Suburb. 1905-1938" Nashville; M. A. thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1983. p. 140.

This period coincided with the École des Beaux Arts movement which greatly influenced domestic architecture, including that of Belle Meade. During the Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893, America was presented with a new classicism as a reprieve from the imaginative chaos of the Reconstruction era and the beginning of a reformed architecture based on traditional norms.⁴⁸ This architectural taste was heightened by the available large-scale lots in Belle Meade, and although the community's success was gradual, its growth did not gain full speed until after the First World War.

During the Construction of Cheekwood

By the end of WWI, residents of rural neighboring parts were pouring into the city. These migrants came first and foremost for the economic opportunities and education, and it was estimated that nearly 30,000 rural migrants moved into the city during the 1920s.⁴⁹ This raised Nashville's population to nearly 150,000 by the 1930s.⁵⁰

As job became increasingly hard to find, more and more people sought opportunity in Nashville's seedy underbelly, and "Nashville's most prominent vice district was on Capitol Hill, surrounding Tennessee's citadel of law."⁵¹ Other vice districts also sprung up at this time. These areas included clusters of illegal saloons, gambling rings, and prostitution. Where these districts

⁴⁸ James Patrick (1981). *Architecture in Tennessee, 1768-1897*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press. p. 206.

⁴⁹ Doyle, Don Harrison *Nashville Since the 1920s*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985. p. 35.

⁵⁰ Burt, Jesse Clifton *Nashville, Its Life and Times*. Nashville: Tennessee Book Co., 1959. p. 110.

⁵¹ McRaven, William Henry *Nashville: "Athens of the South."* Chapel Hill: Published for the Tennessee Book Co. by Scheer & Jervis, 1949. p. 195.

overlapped with neighborhoods, crime and health conditions were dismal and contradicted the prosperity seen by the other side of Nashville.

The wealthy side of Nashville was experiencing the development of the Grand Ole Opry, the selling of Maxwell House Coffee to General Foods, and rebuilding the relic left behind from the Tennessee Centennial Exposition, the Parthenon. The Parthenon had been closed for many years, as it had never been intended to be a permanent structure, and in 1922, Foster and Creighton Company of Nashville were given the bid to replace the first replica with a permanent structure.⁵² The first attempt was razed excluding the brick walls around the Cella and the stone foundation. Artists were commissioned to create the vast detailing on the building's pediment and the Athena structure housed within the building. It has been said that the replica was intended to house works of art for all of the Nashville residents to see, but once the Parthenon was completed, it was "so perfectly proportioned" that hanging artwork would only distraction from its beauty.

Because of this dichotomy, Nashville faced a major obstacle in its city planning. Nashville's wealthy were rapidly moving beyond city limits, and the tax base was beginning to falter.⁵³ To fix the trend, Nashville began a large campaign of annexation, absorbing the neighborhoods of Hillsboro, Belmont, and Sylvan Park on the fast-growing western side of town. During this period of city expansion, Nashville from 18.2 square miles in 1926 to 26.4 square miles in 1930. This allowed Nashville to increase its tax base over \$30 million, and the city was

⁵² Creighton, Wilbur F., Wilbur F Creighton, and Leland R Johnson. *Building of Nashville*. Rev. and enl. Nashville, 1969. p. 146.

⁵³ Doyle, Don Harrison *Nashville Since the 1920s*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985. p. 78.

able reallocate nearly \$5 million to its much needed infrastructure improvements and educational facilities.

Belle Meade, on the other hand, resisted the annexation. While the neighborhood experienced serious problems with its water supply, sewage, and police and fire protection, the suburb preferred its autonomy. By doing this, Belle Meade was able to maintain its restrictive zoning and preserve its exclusivity. Belle Meade was experiencing a large population movement into the area as suburbanites fled the city center, and with them, brought their wealth into the community. These families were developing their estates, and the large lots of Belle Meade allowed little restrictions on the size of the mansion. This was at the peak of the Country Estate design in Belle Meade, and it was at this time that the Cheek family bought approximately 100 acres just outside the community's borders and began to construction their estate, Cheekwood.

The following chapter will discuss the Cheek family. It will not only explore the origins of the family, but it will examine how the Cheeks came to Nashville. This family, soon after translocating to the city from Kentucky, became a pivotal player in Nashville's societal life.

Chapter II:

THE FAMILY

The Cheek family first arrived in Nashville in 1877 but quickly became an integral part in the City's society. They are most well known for the development of Maxwell House Coffee, the successful regional wholesale grocery industry, C. T. Cheek and Sons. The Cheeks were also remembered for being avid patrons of the Nashville arts and building many Nashville mansions, including the Governor's mansion on West End Avenue, Crieve Hall, and Cheekwood. It was Leslie and Mabel Cheek, of C. T. Cheek and Sons, that constructed Cheekwood, and their heirs, Leslie Jr. and Huldah established the legacy of the estate.

The Cheek Family

Although the Cheeks have made a lasting contribution to the business and civic life of the City of Nashville, by some standards, they are considered a newer family in Nashville. The earliest record of the Cheek's in the Nashville City Directory is 1877.¹ This is true, however, only for the localized area. The name Cheek dates back as early as 1273 and was wide-spread throughout England.² Although there are discrepancies in the exact lineage, some argue the name Cheek evolved from the words Chugo, Chich, and Cheke. Helen Louise Picksley Cheek ignited a more complete study, *Cheek and Allied Families*, and traced the genealogy of the Cheeks to Charlemagne, Stephen, King of England, and other members of the peerage.

¹ Mary Glenn Hearne, et al. *Nashville: A Family Town*. Nashville: Nashville Public Library, 1978. p. 146. Gathered from the Media Research Bureau, Washington, DC.

² Ibid, p. 149.

The uncontested line of the Nashville Cheek's begins with William Cheek, born in London on December 22, 1728 (See Figure 2.1).³ He was most remembered for his exceptional skills in mathematics and wrote the book "Universal Accountant, Part I, the Elements of Arithmetic." It is not known when he immigrated to America, but William died in Virginia. Prior to his death, William Cheek married twice. His two marriages brought him four children, three from his first wife Lindal and one from his second. The Nashville Cheeks descended from the wife Lindal, who bore three sons, Henry, Thomas, and John.

Henry Cheek, the eldest of William, was born on May 22, 1769, in Bedford County, Virginia, and married Jean Hancock in 1797. Jean, known as Jenny, was a member of a prominent colonial family who were descendants from Jean Flournoy, a French Huguenot who fled persecution in France and Switzerland and settled in America along the James River in 1699.⁴ By 1800, Henry and Jenny moved to Kentucky where they raised 13 children: Thomas, William, Henry, Jr., Elizabeth, Pamela, James Hill, Nancy, George Hancock, Silas, Aaron, Levi, John Lindal, and Mary Jane.⁵ Although Levi died in infancy and Pamela, Nancy, and George Hancock never married, the other nine married and had children. While their descendants can be found in every state of the union, the Tennessee Cheeks are direct descendants of William and James Hill.

James Hill Cheek eventually moved to Burkesville, Kentucky, where he practiced medicine and married Mary Agnes Bledsoe. This couple would raise four children, one of which was Joel Owsley Cheek, developer and distributor of the Maxwell House Coffee blend. William

³ Cheek, Meniffee R. *Cheek Family: First Cheeks to America and Kentucky*. Nashville, 1965. p. 1.

⁴ Mary Glenn Hearne, et al. *Nashville: A Family Town*. Nashville: Nashville Public Library, 1978. p. 151.

⁵ Cheek, Meniffee R. *Cheek Family: First Cheeks to America and Kentucky*. Nashville, 1965. p. 3.

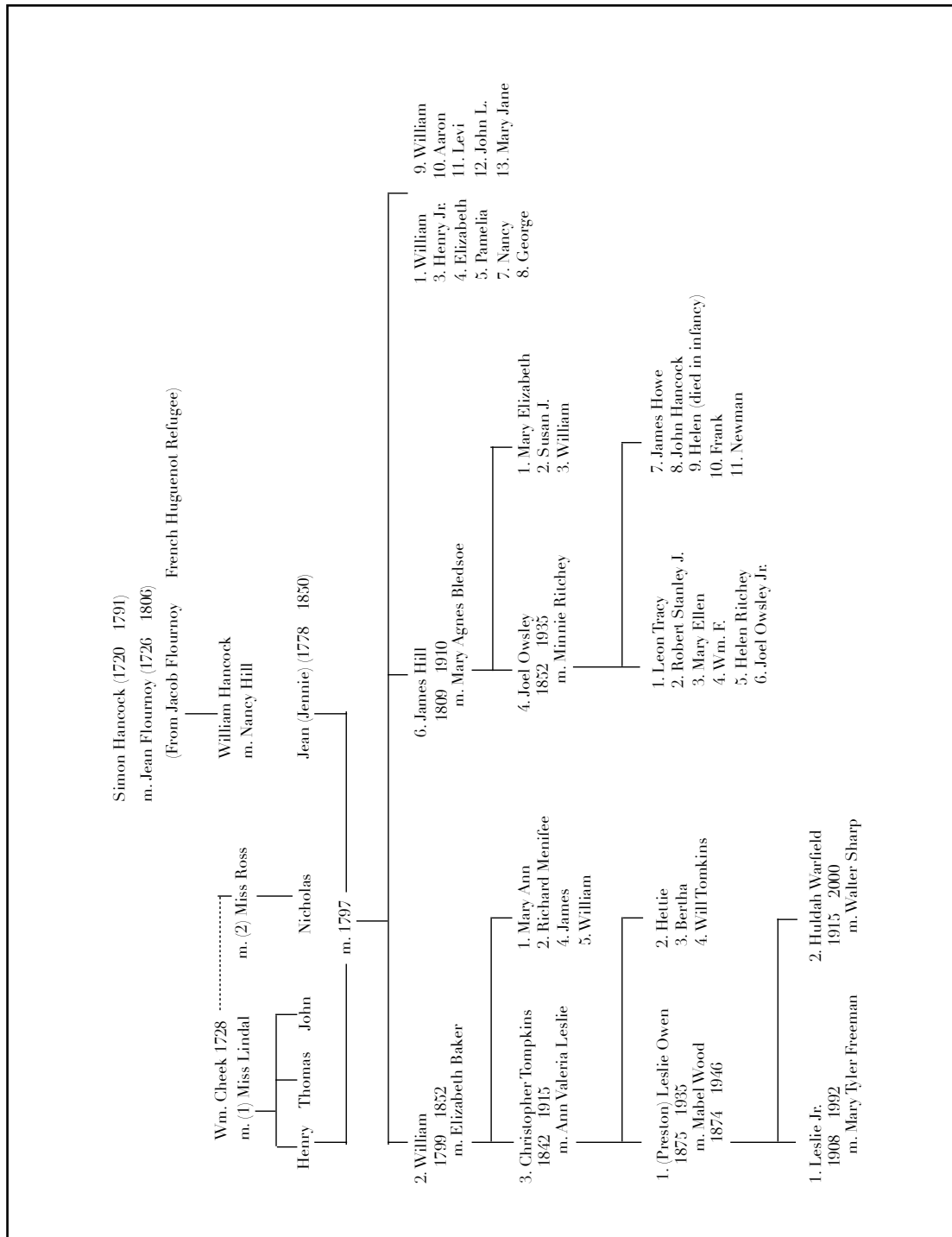


Figure 1.1: Cheek Family Tree with Emphasis on Tennessee Cheeks

Source: Compiled by Author using information gained in Cheek, Meniffee R. *Cheek Family:*

First Cheeks to America and Kentucky. Nashville, 1965. p. 1.

Cheek would father Christopher Tompkins Cheek. C. T. Cheek married Ann Valeria Leslie, daughter of Preston Leslie, the governor of both Kentucky and Montana, and operated a successful business in Glasgow, Kentucky. After being persuaded to move to Nashville by his first cousin Joel, Christopher and Joel started the wholesale grocery firm of Cheek, Webb, and Company of Nashville. While Joel Owsley Cheek concentrated on the coffee side of the industry, Christopher was active in wholesaling groceries throughout the city and distributed Maxwell House Coffee.

It was the lineage of these two grocery and coffee moguls that would leave an everlasting mark on Nashville's history, and:

[t]heir life styles have contributed much to gracious living of this city and the eclectic architecture of their homes has added so very much to the beauty of the city. The family of Joel Owsley Cheek lived on Woodland Avenue and later moved to the Louise Avenue mansion which is still standing. The Christopher Tompkins Cheeks lived at 2118 West End Avenue. This home later became the governor's mansion and is intact. The Robert Stanley Cheek home on Woodmont Avenue is now used as St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. It was at this residence that much of the planning went on that led up to the successful sale of Cheek-Neal to Postum and General Foods.⁶

Of all these mansions, however, the one that is most remember was constructed by Christopher Thompkin's eldest son, Leslie Cheek. Leslie Cheek and Mabel Wood would eventually marry and build their county estate, Cheekwood (See Figure 2.2 and 2.3).

Leslie and Mabel Cheek

The owners' of Cheekwood initial meeting was one that could have easily been the start to a modern fairytale. Mabel was on a train traveling to Kentucky when a Leslie Cheek, having bribed the conductor with a box of cigars to obtain the girl's name,

⁶ Mary Glenn Hearne, et al. *Nashville: A Family Town*. Nashville: Nashville Public Library, 1978. p. 157.



Figure 2.2: Portrait of Mabel Cheek

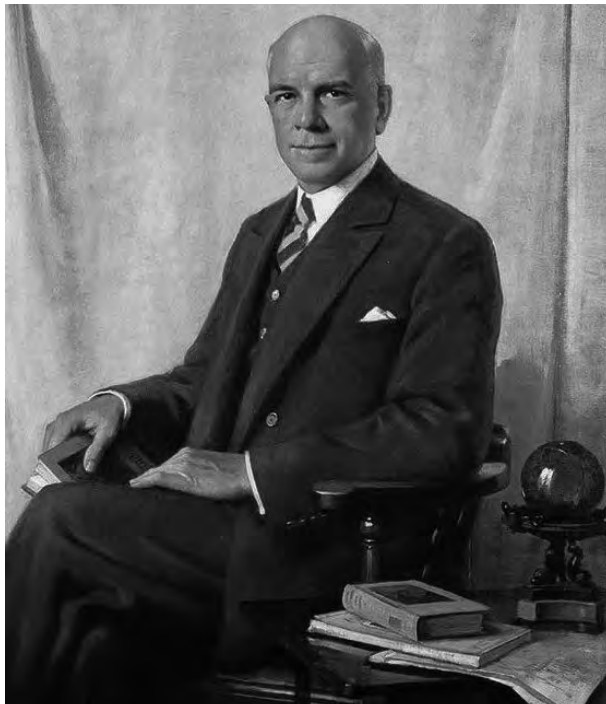


Figure 2.3: Portrait of Leslie Cheek, Sr.

Source: Author, March 28, 2016

introduced himself.⁷ Although Mabel was engaged to another suitor, this was a rare occurrence of what their son described as, “smitten at first sight,” and the two were married eighteen months later (See Figure 2.4).

When the two met, Leslie Cheek was a partner in his family’s grocery firm. After a few prosperous years of the father-son company, the Nashville grocery business was expanded to cover the southern region and was renamed C. T. Cheek and Son.⁸ This company would continue until 1932. Mabel Wood of Clarksville, Tennessee, had been “brought up in small town Tennessee luxury, but she preferred the urban life.” Therefore, the move to Nashville was not a hard transition for her.

The two were married on October 3, 1896, Mabel being twenty-two and Leslie Cheek being twenty-four. By 1900, they built their first home on Nashville’s West End Avenue, across from Vanderbilt’s Campus (See Figure 2.5).⁹ While Leslie worked outside the home, Mabel played a commanding role in the luxurious Italianate residence, a design in which she chose, and maintained the house with the accompaniment of Ed Drake, the family chauffeur; Mary Lou, the cook; Emilio, the gardener and butler; and a number of housemaids, laundresses, and serving men that came in as needed.

Eight years later, the Cheek’s would bare their first child, Preston Leslie Cheek, informally known as Leslie, Jr. During this time, Florence Drake, Ed Drake’s mother, became

⁷ Rouse, Parke. *Living by Design: Leslie Cheek and the Arts: a Photobiography*. Williamsburg, Va: Society of the Alumni of the College of William and Mary, 1985. p. 31.

⁸ Ibid, p. 30.

⁹ Ibid, p. 31-33.



Figure 2.4: Mabel and Leslie's Wedding Day

Source: Rouse, Parke. *Living by Design: Leslie Cheek and the Arts: a Photobiography*.

Williamsburg, Va: Society of the Alumni of the College of William and Mary, 1985. p. 31.



Figure 2.5: Cheek Family Scrapbook Page Highlighting Newspaper Coverage on Mabel and

Leslie's First Resident

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

the family's nurse. Their next child, a daughter, would arrive in 1915, and the baby was named Huldah.

The family lived in their Italianate estate with Mabel's mother until 1928 before they considered changing residences. On August 1, 1928, Postum announced the acquisition of the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company for \$16,600,000 in cash and 414,789 shares of General Foods stocks. Although already considerably wealthy, Leslie Cheek, Sr. was further enriched by the sale, as he was a major stock holder. It was this event that the Cheek's were able to realize their ambitions to build a country estate in Nashville's outskirts.¹⁰ While both Mabel and Leslie, Sr. thoroughly enjoyed the prospects of building a new residence, they now had the financial means to do so. Anecdotally,

[Leslie, Sr.] liked to say it had grown out of Mabel's purchase of a ceiling-high Victorian pier mirror, which proved too big to fit the walls of the West End Avenue residence. When the mirror was stored and damaged, her husband suggested that they either sell it or build a house big enough to fit it. Mabel called his bluff, and the idea for Cheekwood was born.¹¹

By 1929, the Cheek's had purchased 100 acres eight miles southwest of the City of Nashville, and the designer, Bryant Fleming was hired to manage the development. With that, the design for the Cheek mansion and its extensive gardens commenced.

Leslie Cheek, Sr. retired after the sale of the Maxwell House Coffee was able to spent the rest of his days traveling, fishing, and gardening.¹² Due to his interests in gardening, many of the boxwoods around the mansions can be traced back to Mr. Cheek's endeavors of collecting

¹⁰ Rouse, Parke. *Living by Design: Leslie Cheek and the Arts: a Photobiography*. Williamsburg, Va: Society of the Alumni of the College of William and Mary, 1985. p. 39.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Rouse, Parke. *Living by Design: Leslie Cheek and the Arts: a Photobiography*. Williamsburg, Va: Society of the Alumni of the College of William and Mary, 1985. p. 42.

specimens from all over the south. During his drives with his chauffeur — as Leslie never learned to drive, he would ask Ed Drake to pull over when they would spot small boxwood specimens growing near the road. Mr. Cheek would knock on the door of the property owner and offer large sums for the shrubbery. Because this was during the years of the Great Depression, the offer was rarely refused.

The Cheeks finally got to move into their finished house on Thanksgiving Day of 1932, and the only complaint from the family was from Huldah, who wished her room were overlooking the stables instead of her brother's.¹³ Mabel thoroughly enjoyed the network of brooks and springs created by Bryant Fleming as they could be heard from the panel library and created an amiable reading environment. Although Leslie, Jr. was off in college, he enjoyed his art studio and bedroom over his holidays.

Leslie Sr. would only live in the house for two years before passing away in 1935.¹⁴ Mabel would continue to live in the mansion for another eleven years before her death in 1946. The estate would then be passed down to Huldah and her husband Walter Sharp.

Leslie Jr. and Huldah

According to Leslie Jr., he and Huldah were raised with a mother “that represented the gentler, intellectual character of her family” and a father that “represented the hard-won drive of his family.”¹⁵ It was a harmonious relationship, and their parenting styles reflected such. Mabel

¹³ Mary Glenn Hearne, et al. *Nashville: A Family Town*. Nashville: Nashville Public Library, 1978. p. 155.

¹⁴ *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History & Culture*. Nashville, Tenn.: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998. p. 237.

¹⁵ Rouse, Parke. *Living by Design: Leslie Cheek and the Arts: a Photobiography*. Williamsburg, Va: Society of the Alumni of the College of William and Mary, 1985. p. 33.

would take the children each spring to Nashville's Metropolitan Opera performances and instilled the appreciation of literature and travel in her children. Leslie Sr. imprinted the importance of sociability, fastidious neatness, and family pride.

Together, the Cheeks traveled worldwide (See Figure 2.6). Mabel would coax Leslie, Sr. to take time off of work to escort his family to places few Americans had encountered in the early twentieth century. On one particularly long excursion, the family journeyed to China, Cambodia, India, Egypt, Turkey, Austria, and France over the course of a year.¹⁶ These trips were well-documented through the use of travel logs, photos, and a movie camera given to Leslie Jr. (a novelty of the time). His movies captured scenes of Mabel shepherding her family through exotic bazaars and crowded streets, Leslie Sr. puffing amiably on his cigar, and Huldah lurking on the periphery, obviously embarrassed by her mother's gusto and antiquated attire.

While Leslie, Jr., thought Huldah to be ashamed of her family, Huldah had a different recollection of the events:

In Shanghai, Daddy bought a movie camera. Movie cameras for individuals were new that year. My brother was appointed photographer and he assumed his duties with meticulous method. There was some difference of opinion as to what was film-worthy. Mother wanted teeming street scenes; Leslie was obsessed with ships. The point was argues around the world. Here I might insert that my brother was as unsatisfactory to travel with as I was. At eighteen, he was hyperconscious of what others might think and since he was ashamed of his family, contrived to be associated with us as little as possible. He walked either some distance behind or in front of us and insisted that we keep public contact with him to a minimum.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 35-36.

¹⁷ Mary Glenn Hearne, et al. *Nashville: A Family Town*. Nashville: Nashville Public Library, 1978. p. 156.



Figure 2.6: Leslie, Sr., Huldah, and Mabel on European Trip made prior to
Cheekwood Construction

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

Although Leslie, Sr. and Mabel's children may not have been so keen on their family travels, it was this sort of lifestyle that would greatly impact their children's future, as both children were to go on to become patrons of the arts.

Leslie, Jr. studied art at Harvard University and architecture at Yale (See Figure 2.7).¹⁸ He was head of the Fine Arts Department at the College of William and Mary, and eventually he became the director of the state-sponsored museum in Richmond from 1948 until his retirement in 1968. He was remembered at the museum for introducing many innovative programs, such as Artmobile I which took the museum's collections to the public, and transforming the small local gallery into a nationally known cultural center.

Huldah became involved in the musical arts (See Figure 2.8). Only being married four years when Huldah gained control of the Cheekwood Estate, she and her husband immediately put it to use in advocating for the Nashville Symphony Orchestra, which was still in its infancy.¹⁹ Although the performances took place at the downtown War Memorial Building, the planning and fundraising meetings were held at the Sharp's home, Cheekwood. With the size of the estate, Huldah was able to host grand receptions for the symphony's awareness and fundraising. She was also able to accommodate William Strickland, the symphony's conductor, with living quarters on the grounds for five years. Her husband was also well invested in the arts. Walter Sharp chaired the Department of Fine Arts and Music at Vanderbilt, sat as first president of the Nashville Arts Council, trustee at Fisk University, and co-founded the Tennessee Commission on the Performing Arts, which would later become the Tennessee Arts Commission.

¹⁸ "Leslie Cheek Jr., 84; Led Virginia Museum." *The New York Times*. [New York]. December 8, 1992.

¹⁹ *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History & Culture*. Nashville, Tenn. Tennessee Historical Society, p. 237.



Figure 2.7: Leslie Jr. and His Automobile

Source: Mary Tyler Freeman McClenahan. *Southern Civility: Recollections of My Early Life*.
Donnan Publishing, 2003. p 96.



Figure 2.8: Leslie Jr. and His Automobile

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

The Cheek Legacy

“Nashville remembers [the Cheek family] as a remarkable one. They lived in style, enjoying world travel and the arts at a time when most Americans had neither the time nor taste for trans-oceanic crossings.”²⁰ During Leslie, Sr. and Mabel’s time, the house was remembered most for the lavish parties thrown at Cheekwood (See Figure 2.9 and 10). The most anticipated of these parties were the Cheek’s themed events, and costumes were a must as guests tried to out do one another on historical accuracies.²¹ In 1933, they Cheek’s planned a Victorian Stable Party, and the stables and garage were turned into a fragment of 19th century England, where guests in costumes from Queen Victoria’s day danced to period music. The following year, nearly 200 guested donned Greek and Roman costumes for the “BC Party.”

Once the estate was passed down to Huldah, it was her and her husband’s endeavors that propelled Cheekwood into the institution that it is today. In 1957, the Sharps agreed to deed fifty-acres of the estate, including the mansion, to Nashville’s Exchange Club to create the Tennessee Botanical Gardens and Fine Arts Center.²² This was contingent on the Exchange Club raising the start up and operational cost for the museum and botanical gardens. With the agreement from the Sharps, the Exchange Club of Nashville went forward with their fundraising efforts. It was no small task as it took large gifts from the Exchange Club, the Davidson County Horticultural Society as well as large gifts from the twenty-seven museum founders, and members of the 109 garden clubs in the general area to raise only three-fourths of the intended

²⁰ Rouse, Parke. *Living by Design: Leslie Cheek and the Arts: a Photobiography*. Williamsburg, Va: Society of the Alumni of the College of William and Mary, 1985. p. 30.

²¹ Ibid, p. 43.

²² *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History & Culture*. Nashville, Tenn.: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998. p. 237.

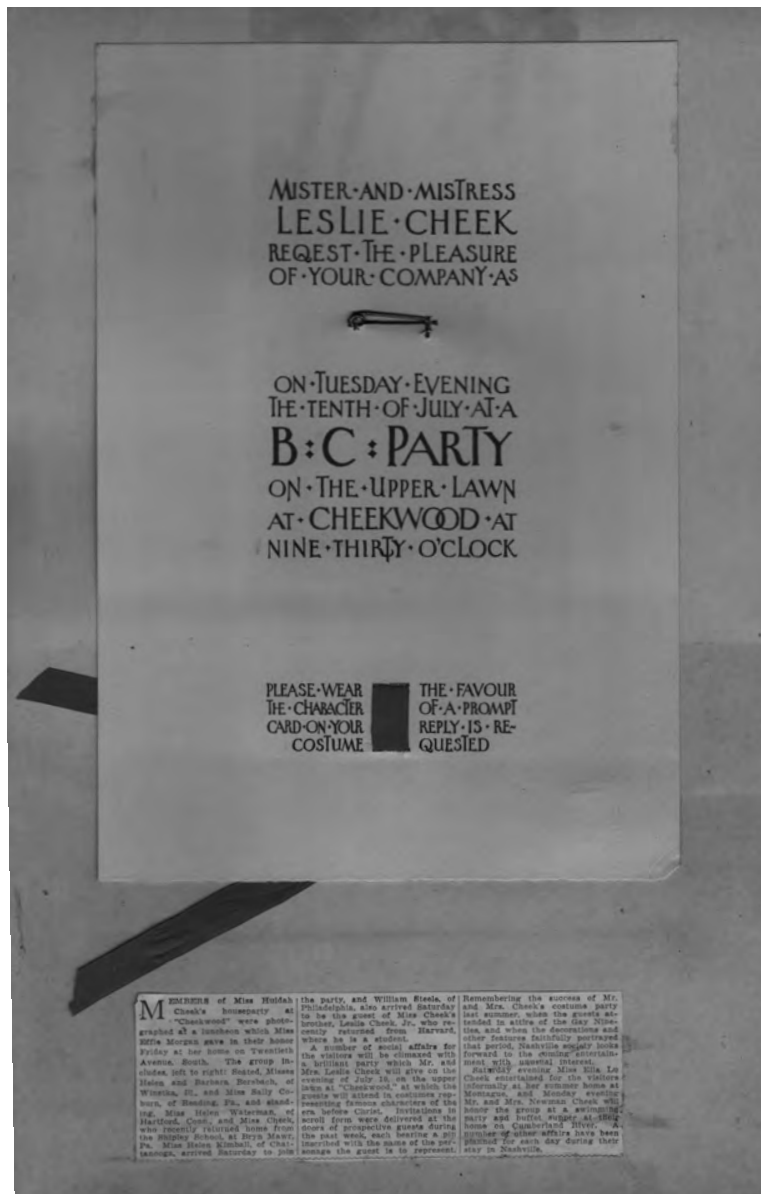


Figure 2.9: Cheek Family Scrapbook Page Highlighting BC Party Invitation and Newspaper

Coverage on Event

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 2.10: Cheek Family Scrapbook Page Highlighting BC Party Event.

Top photo portrays Huldah, Leslie Sr., and Mabel as second, third, and forth from the right, respectively. Mabel's mother can be seen at the far left of the photo.

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

value to meet the Sharps agreement.²³ To reach the adequate endowment needed to purchase the Sharp's estate, the Nashville Museum of Art's sold its former building, and the profits from its sale were relocated toward buying Cheekwood. On May 31, 1959, the Sharps deeded the property over to a non-profit organization set up as the Tennessee Botanical Gardens and Fine Arts Center.

The museum and gardens were opened to the public on May 22, 1960, and it soon established itself as one of Nashville's greatest fine arts institution (See Figure 2.11).²⁴ Over the next forty years, the museum expanded through added gardens, structures, and additions to the main house; however, much of Bryant Fleming's original Georgian Revival design remained intact. Today, Cheekwood is known as the "one of the last great manor houses built in the United States."²⁵ The following chapter will look at the residential and landscape architect, Bryant Fleming, and it will describe how he came to Nashville and perfected the country estate design.

²³ Louise Davis and Ginger Burrell. *Cheekwood, The First 50 Years*. Cheekwood Fine Arts Center, 1979. p. 11.

²⁴ *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History & Culture*. Nashville, Tenn.: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998. p. 237.

²⁵ Rouse, Parke. *Living by Design: Leslie Cheek and the Arts: a Photobiography*. Williamsburg, Va: Society of the Alumni of the College of William and Mary, 1985. p. 41.

CHAPTER III:

THE DESIGNER

Bryant Fleming is the architect and landscape architect of Cheekwood Museum and Botanical Garden in Nashville, Tennessee. This twentieth century architect's career flourished after World War I with the rise of the suburb. During this time, wealthy families were moving out of the city to create their country estates, a design Fleming perfected in his career. Fleming had commissions and designs scattered all over the Midwest and Northeast, however, those in Nashville were at his zenith, and Cheekwood was his most famous design. Although the Depression left Fleming and his team with little compensation, what they left behind in Tennessee was a legacy.

Biographical Sketch

Bryant Fleming was born on July 19, 1877 in Buffalo, New York.¹ At the age of two, his mother, Mary Harris Fleming, passed away and left Bryant and his younger sister to be brought up by their father, Emmet Fleming. This placed Emmet in financial and temporal constraints. Without the support of a spouse to rear the children while Emmet was at work, and without the financial stability to leave his job with Buffalo's lumber industry, the two Fleming children were sent to spend a majority of their childhood with their grandparents in Lewistown, New York. By moving to his grandparent's farm in rural northern Niagara County, young Bryant was able to

¹ Gayle Sanders Knight. *Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect: Residential Designs, 1905 to 1935*. Cornell University, August 1987. p. 9. Information gained through interview with Alan McCarthy, February 2, 1987, Buffalo, New York.

experience nature alongside his grandfather, an expert appraiser of art objects for the U.S. Customs Division at the Canadian border.² It is presumed that this is where Bryant Fleming's artistic development began. "This early familiarity with fine and rare things developed into an appreciation of artistic values and a keen sense of discrimination, which were later reflected in his work."³

Bryant Fleming moved back with his father when he was no longer in need of constant surveillance, as all young children require to live, and he graduated from Buffalo Central High School in 1896.⁴ Upon graduating, Fleming studied at the Buffalo Botanical Gardens, and under the direction of Professor Cowell, the director of the gardens, Fleming compiled the Herbarium there and made a general study of perennial borders. When the time arose to seek more formal training, Fleming sent a lengthy letter describing his interests and ambitions to the infamous Frederick Olmsted, designer of Central Park and the Columbian Exposition at Chicago.⁵ Olmsted, in his reply, suggested that Bryant Fleming place himself under the direction of Professor Liberty Hyde Bailey at Cornell. Although Cornell did not have a certified degree in Landscape Architecture, it was known that Bailey was a great authority in all aspects of horticulture and gardening.

² Walter A. J. Ewald, "Bryant Fleming: A Biographical Minute," *Landscape Architecture*, vol. 37, no. 2 (January 1947). p. 57.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Rhonda Warren, "Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect," *Historical Wyoming*, vol. 31, no. 2 (October, 1984). p. 30.

⁵ Harry S. Famous Douglass, "Sons and Daughters of Wyoming County, New York." [Warsaw, N.Y.]: Wyoming County Newspapers, 1935.

Following the instructions of Olmsted's letter, at the beginning of Cornell's winter term, in 1898, Fleming entered into the Ivy League institution to specialize in landscape architecture.⁶

Because this field was still in its infancy,

[t]his unusual situation of a student in landscape architecture aroused the interest of Dr. Bailey who in consequence gave him his quite undivided attention, and together they outlined what has since become the course in Landscape Design at Cornell University, and from which has sprung most of the recognized courses for such study in many other universities.⁷

Therefore, Bryant Fleming's coursework was a tailored degree engineered by both Fleming and Bailey, and Fleming's courses included those of horticulture, architecture, and art.⁸ Following graduation from Cornell in 1901 with a degree of B.S.A., Fleming remained at Cornell for a subsequent year taking classes exclusively in the College of Architecture.

Fleming retired from his student life at Cornell (although, his professional relationship with the school would continue throughout Fleming's career), his first work experience took him to Boston. There he spent three years under the guidance of Warren H. Manning, an associate of Frederick Law Olmsted which started as an expert in horticulture and later evolved into an assistant in Olmsted's designs.⁹ Manning was very interested in adopting and advising young "landscape designers," a term he always preferred, and his studio "was a training ground remembered affectionately in later years by young men of whom many would become prominent

⁶ Walter A. J. Ewald, "Bryant Fleming: A Biographical Minute," *Landscape Architecture*, vol. 37, no. 2. January 1947. p. 57.

⁷ Harry S. Famous Douglass, "Sons and Daughters of Wyoming County, New York." [Warsaw, N.Y.]: Wyoming County Newspapers, 1935.

⁸ Walter A. J. Ewald, "Bryant Fleming: A Biographical Minute," *Landscape Architecture*, vol. 37, no. 2. January 1947. p. 57.

⁹ Gayle Sanders Knight. *Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect: Residential Designs, 1905 to 1935*. Cornell University, August 1987. p. 16.

in the profession.”¹⁰ It was during his time associated with Manning that Fleming made his first documented trip abroad to study landscapes, an effort that Fleming would employ throughout his professional life.

After completing his three year tenure with Manning, Fleming and Professor Bailey began the gradual development of Cornell University’s Department of Landscape Architecture in the College of Agriculture.¹¹ Cornell was not the first to establish the field, this had happened at Harvard University some four years earlier, but, Fleming was the first at Cornell to lecture and instruct on landscape art. By 1906, Fleming served as the head of the department, all while starting up a personal practice of his own.

Fleming’s private firm was almost immediately merged with Frederic dePeyster Townsend’s company, and the practice became known as Townsend and Fleming.¹² This practice was very well respected and highly active in the world of landscape design. By 1905, both partners were elected to junior membership in the American Society of Landscape Architecture. While a vast majority of their work was focused on residential designs, their work was highly diverse. The firm’s projects ran the gambit of comprehensive site plans of institutions, including Denison University in Granville, and restoration work on public parks, including Watkins Glen and Cascadilla Glen. Townsend and Fleming’s more prestigious projects included the landscaping design for a home owned by Avery Coonley of the Chicago suburb, Riverside, Illinois, and designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. This Townsend and Fleming design firm worked

¹⁰ Norman T. Newton. *Design on the Land*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971. p. 389.

¹¹ Gayle Sanders Knight. *Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect: Residential Designs, 1905 to 1935*. Cornell University, August 1987. p. 19.

¹² Ibid.

together, and prosperously, until 1915. That same year, Fleming stepped down as head of the landscape program at Cornell and moved Wyoming, New York, with his father and their housekeeper to start an autonomous practice.

Good relationships with a client from his previous firm allowed Bryant Fleming to not only move into office, but also, his residence. Both these buildings were owned by Mrs. Coonley Ward, one of Fleming's greatest admirers and patrons. Due to close relations with Mrs. Ward, Fleming acquired many contracts in Wyoming, New York, and his private practice was stemming with business well up until World War I. By then, Fleming was finishing up the final details to the landscape design for "Shadowbrook," the enormous estate owned by Andrew Carnegie in Lenox, Massachusetts.

During the war, Fleming, like many architects and engineers of the time, joined in the war effort and lent his designing skills to the Department of the Defense.¹³ Soon after, however, his services were no longer needed and Bryant Fleming's private practice began to thrive once more. This created an incredibly energized environment within the small firm. Although the remoteness of the town of Wyoming did not dampened the firm's prominence, it called for the Fleming and his workers to be highly mobile and extremely efficient.¹⁴ When a prospective project was acquired, the procession went as follows:

Fleming would be contacted about a job, would arrange to meet with the potential client, and would make a visit to the site. The jobs varied greatly in their scope, from preparing only preliminary drawings, to landscape work, the design of a complete "country estate" to be executed by the office. Whatever the client demanded, Fleming would make notes and drawings in a pocketbook that he carried, clip two or three sheets together, index

¹³ Rhonda Warren. "Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect." *Historical Wyoming*, vol. 31, no. 2. October, 1984. p. 36.

¹⁴ Gayle Sanders Knight. *Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect: Residential Designs, 1905 to 1935*. Cornell University, August 1987. p. 54.

them so that they could be put together correctly, and send them back to Wyoming. From these little sheets, the project began!

Fleming usually had at least three superintendents, each knowledgeable in a different field, that oversaw the projects once they were underway. Some moved from city to city with him as projects were completed. Holt traveled frequently to consult with Fleming, riding the train to meet him about one job, then taking the sleeper overnight arrive at another site in the morning. Often, drafting boards would be stored in cities with several commissions, and one or two men would be sent out occasionally to work in a hotel for a few days or a week as needed.¹⁵

This determination was one of the key factors that allowed his popularity to spread over the United States and Canada. There was another component to his success. As an architect and a landscape architect, Fleming was able to secure a sense of complete mergence between the interior and the exterior, and this was done through his painstaking attention to detail refinement.¹⁶ The ability to unify spaces was ubiquitous in his design. Even in his interiors, Fleming was able to create a sense of authenticity and old-world charm by adhering to to an architectural style and incorporating genuine antiques, authentic to the project's period style. This created a harmonization between new and old, and this was a sought after talent from prospective clients as they were wanting their residences to feel as established as the country estates in Europe.

Fleming's aptness to command large scale properties also bode with the affluent seeking to build their homes. These families had ample land and even more money. Consequently, this sort of commission allowed Fleming to execute extravagant environments without the hindrance

¹⁵ Gayle Sanders Knight. *Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect: Residential Designs, 1905 to 1935*. Cornell University, August 1987. p. 55.

¹⁶ Walter A. J. Ewald, "Bryant Fleming: A Biographical Minute," *Landscape Architecture*, vol. 37, no. 2. January 1947. p. 57.

of financial or spacial constraints. The only thing left to restrict him was his very own imagination.

Fleming's designs were highly sought after, and thus, Fleming's professional life flourished. This kept Fleming in a state of perpetual motion going from one site to the next. Most sites that called for a country estate were in the wealthy suburbs of large cities. Places such as Grosse Point, a suburb of Detroit, and Belle Meade located right outside Nashville, Tennessee, were where Fleming spent a majority of his time. This change in cliental gave pause to Fleming on the remoteness of his primary office.¹⁷ As his work spread west, Fleming decided to move his studio to New York City, as many of his clients had said the little town of Wyoming was much too difficult to reach. As a precursory move, Fleming established his office in Ithaca, acting as a interim studio, until a city space could be procured.

At this point, Fleming was again called by his alma mater for guidance, and "Fleming's appointment as University Landscape Advisor cast him in the thick of a new campus planning campaign."¹⁸ After these plans were finalized, however, Fleming's practice moved to where a majority of where his commissions were, Nashville, Tennessee.

Fleming in Nashville

"The career of Bryant Fleming as a designer of 'country estates,' from the broadest conception of the idea to the infinite detailing of interior and exterior spaces, reached its zenith in

¹⁷ Gayle Sanders Knight. *Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect: Residential Designs, 1905 to 1935*. Cornell University, August 1987. p. 61.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Nashville.”¹⁹ Projects included a number of families from the upper echelon of Nashville. “Brookhill,” a country estate and garden they termed the “country French” was styled for Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Warner (See Figure 3.1).²⁰ Mr. and Mrs. C. Runcie Clements commissioned a meticulously manicured garden (See Figure 3.2).²¹ Mr. and Mrs. W. F. Allen employed Fleming to construct a residence to suit their or their West Meade estate, and this structure became lovingly known to the family as “Joclyn Hollow” (See Figure 3.3). Banker George Shwab and Luke Lea also retained Fleming for improvements on the grounds of existing homes (See Figure 3.4). Fleming was not only working diligently with private estates, he also designed the steps to the Warner Parks of Belle Meade (Figure 3.5).

While many of the commissioned projects were execute as planned, the United State’s economy was straining even the most affluent of Flemings patrons’ reserves. Therefore, “some clients were forced to modify the grandiose schemes they had originally envisioned as an economy measure.”²² This trend manifested as the Depression worsened, and the financial arrangements between the designer and client often became a point of contention, and this unforeseen stress caused his office to come up on the short end of several commissions. By the early 1930s, the time had come for Fleming and his cohort to head back to Ithaca, New York, taking back little compensation. What they left in Tennessee, however, was an architectural legacy.

¹⁹ Gayle Sanders Knight. *Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect: Residential Designs, 1905 to 1935*. Cornell University, August 1987. p. 63.

²⁰ Oscar Cromwell Tidwell, Jr. *Belle Meade Park*. Nashville Tennessee: Privately published, 1983. p. 66.

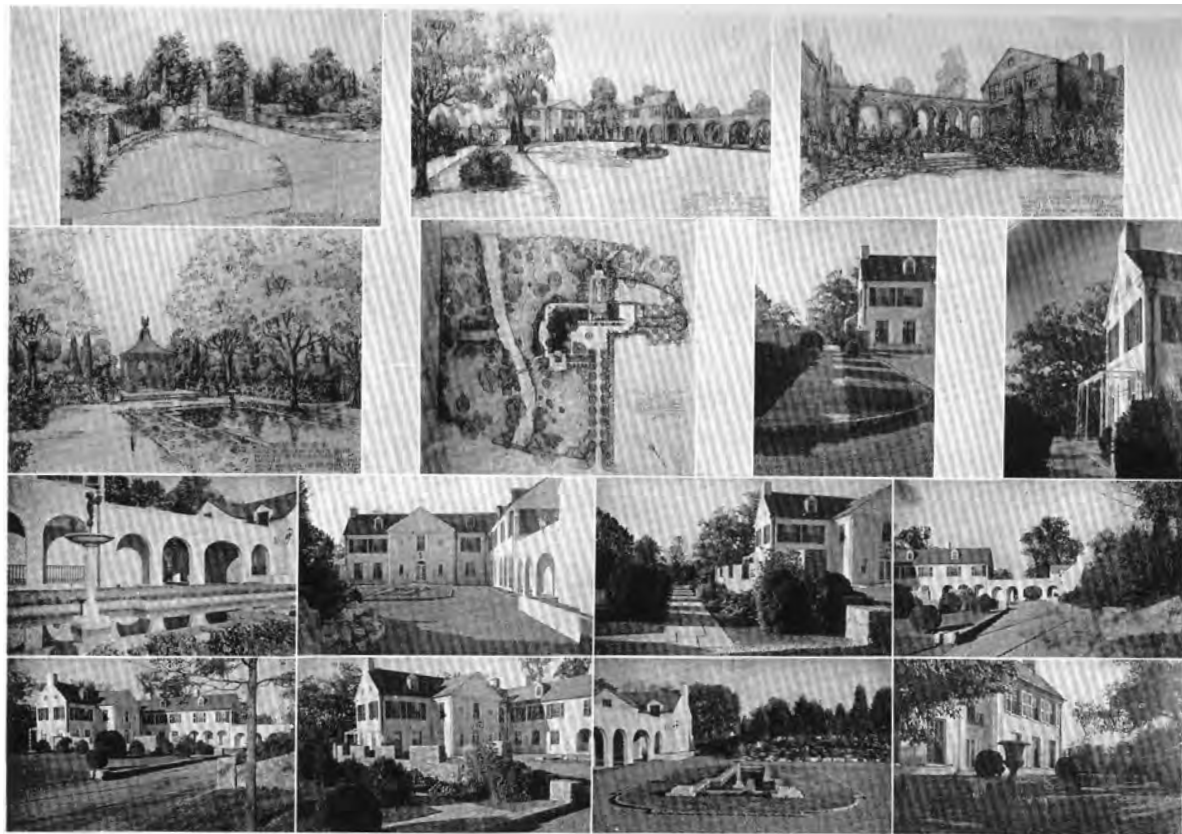
²¹ Bryant Fleming, *Illustrations From the Work of Bryant Fleming, Architect, Landscape Architect*. Wyoming, N.Y.: The Academy. p. 20-25.

²² Gayle Sanders Knight. *Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect: Residential Designs, 1905 to 1935*. Cornell University, August 1987. p. 65.



Figure 3.1: Fleming's Work at Brookhill

Source: Bryant Fleming. *Illustrations From the Work of Bryant Fleming, Architect, Landscape Architect*. Wyoming, N.Y.: The Academy.



*Sketches and Photographs of
Gardens Under Construction for
MR. AND MRS. C. RUNCIE CLEMENTS
Nashville, Tennessee*

BRYANT FLEMING, A. I. A., F. A. S. L. A.
Landscape Architect

Figure 3.2: Fleming's Work at the Clement's Estate

Source: Bryant Fleming. *Illustrations From the Work of Bryant Fleming, Architect, Landscape Architect*. Wyoming, N.Y.: The Academy.

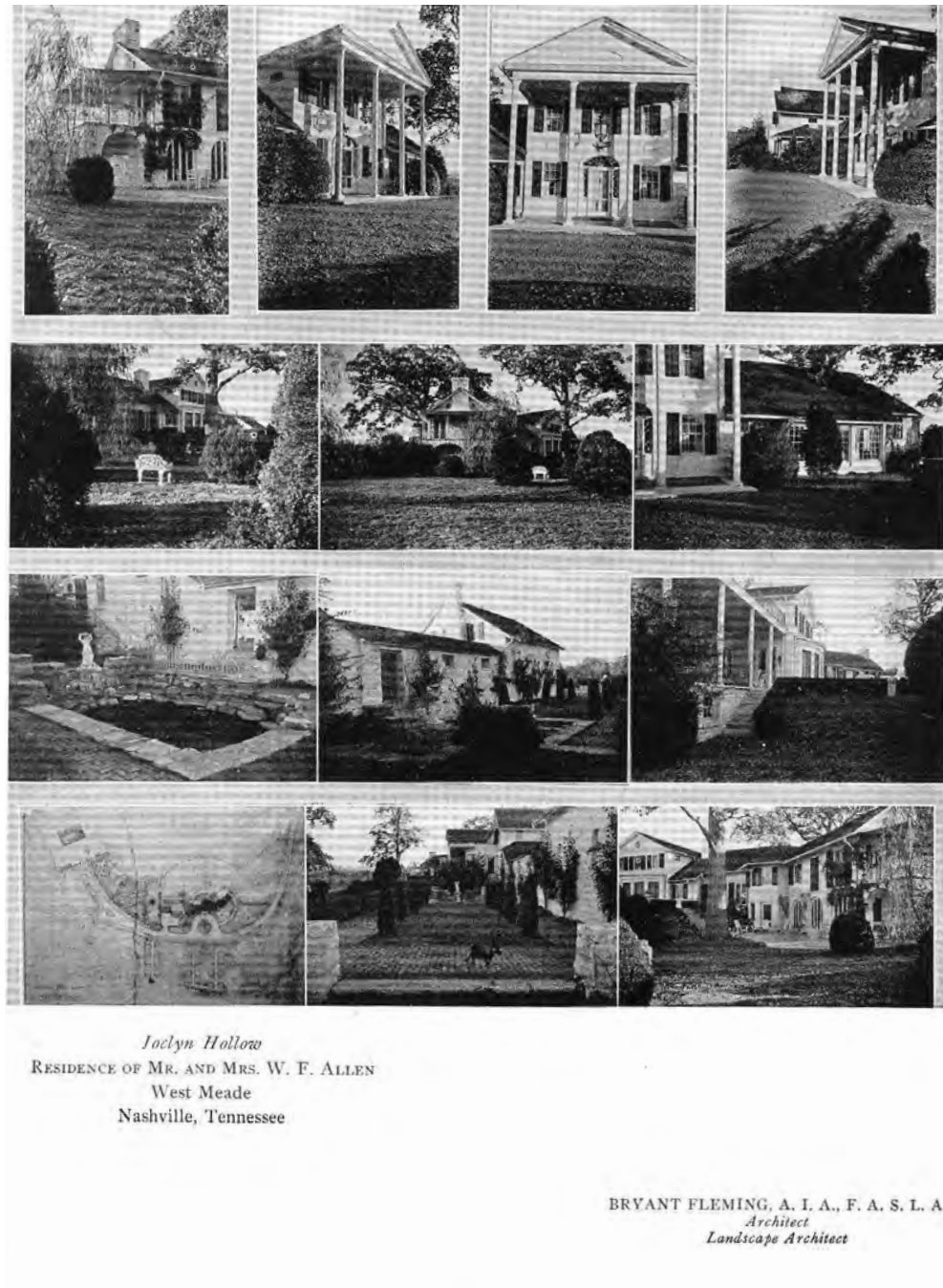


Figure 3.3: Fleming's Work at Joclyn Hollow

Source: Bryant Fleming. *Illustrations From the Work of Bryant Fleming, Architect, Landscape Architect*. Wyoming, N.Y.: The Academy.

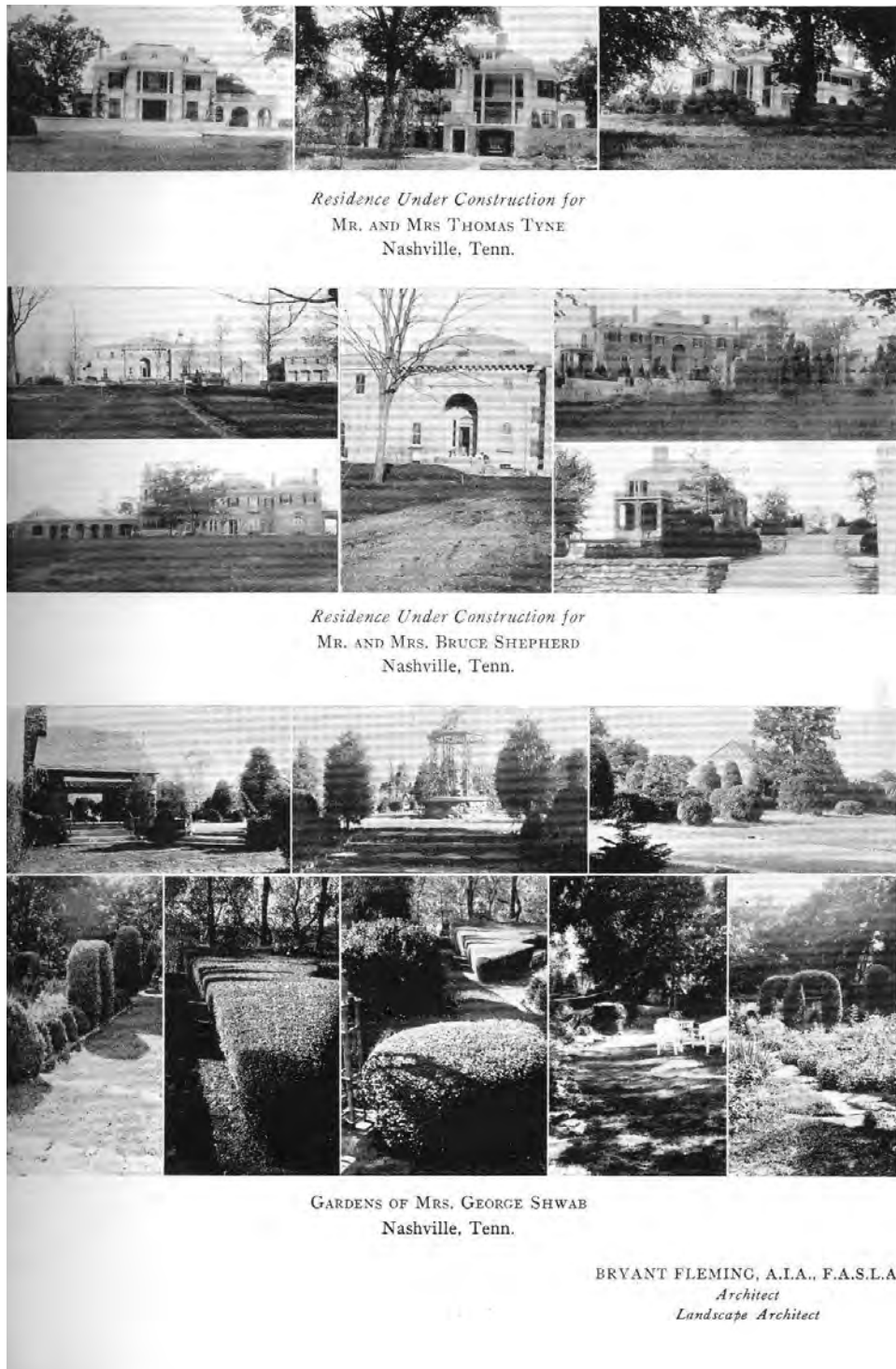


Figure 3.4: Fleming's at Multiple Residences of Nashville

Source: Bryant Fleming. *Illustrations From the Work of Bryant Fleming, Architect, Landscape Architect*. Wyoming, N.Y.: The Academy.



Figure 3.5: Photograph of Fleming's Design at the Warner Parks in Nashville.

Source: The Author, March 27, 2016

Fleming and the Cheeks

Although Fleming was already working in Nashville when he contracted with the Cheeks. Cheekwood, the Cheek's estate, contributed mightily to Fleming's local reputation and number of other commissions obtained in the area (Figure 3.6).²³ Cheekwood's design set an unprecedented degree of grandeur in terms of a housing structure and landscape design, even in the wealthy Belle Meade subdivision.

The search for an appropriate designer took some time while the Cheeks finally settled on approximately 100 acres of undeveloped land, south of what later became Percy Warner Park.²⁴ After his contract was signed, Fleming asked the Cheeks to decide on an overall architectural style that was to be an ubiquitous theme throughout the design.

Although the Cheeks initially favored a Spanish-style design, they soon realized they needed to do more research on the matter when Bryant Fleming showed them sketches of a "French Colonial" residence that he designed. After examining many other architectural styles and even considering an imitation of Andrew Jackson's house, the Hermitage, the family settled on a Georgian design. This was a noticeable and rare choice at the time. Many of the Cheek's neighbors and Nashville socialites were selecting more modern styles homes to accommodate contemporary lifestyles. These modern houses would not be confined to the traditional halls and parlors found in Georgian design. Instead, the structures could almost be described as modular and personalized to each family. Because the Cheek's chose this innately formal design, it would suggest the Cheek's prominence and attuned sense of cultural adeptness within Nashville.

²³ Gayle Sanders Knight. *Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect: Residential Designs, 1905 to 1935*. Cornell University, August 1987. p. 132.

²⁴ Ibid.



Figure 3.6: Fleming on the Cheekwood Estate

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 3.7: Fleming's Perspective Sketch of Cheekwood

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

The next step in Fleming's design process was to take the family to Europe to not only redefine their vision by studying the finest examples of English architecture, but also to collect architectural fragments and authentic period antiques to be used at Cheekwood. Upon returning, the construction commenced. Leslie Cheek Jr., a fellow architect, seemed to admire Fleming's sumptuous tactics.

Bryant Fleming was a unique designer in a unique time. His training at Cornell had given him a proper professional background but his own tendencies to expand his learning led him into many travels... At the end of his life he was known more as a 'landscape architect' than as an architect-though, in fact, he was exterior, interior, and outdoor designer wrapped into one. He was what ones might be described as an 'estate designer' for this particularly luxurious period in American history, since he had a rare feeling for design of all periods... ²⁵

Overall, the Cheekwood residence and gardens would not disappoint. Fleming's ability to interlace his design with the existing land was nothing short of splendid, and within the cohesive design, the artifacts and the artificial were hard to discern. The man-made streams and imported architectural features felt as if they had been in Belle Meade for centuries. The estate was exemplary of Fleming's ability secure a sense of complete mergence between all facets of his design through detail refinement. Although Bryant Flemming would not complete the construction of the Cheek estate by decision of the family, Cheekwood was still considered his masterpiece in Nashville.

The following chapter will address the main residential structure of Fleming's design, the Cheek mansion. Through the use of the Bryant Fleming blueprints, photos, and historical accounts, the interior and exterior of the estate will be recounted. To conclude the chapter, the alterations to transform the private residences into a public museum will be discussed.

²⁵ Leslie Cheek, Jr. *Unpublished Manuscript*. Cheekwood Fine Arts Center Archives, 1979. p. 4.

CHAPTER IV:

THE MANSION

The Cheekwood Mansion is the main residential structure of the Cheekwood Estates designed by Bryant Fleming and commissioned by the Cheek family. Its construction spanned three years from 1929-1932, and the final design of the residence is a Georgian Revival with an adjacent garden. The structure acted as a private residence from its creation until 1959 when it was rehabilitated to serve as the museum for the Tennessee Botanical Gardens and Fine Arts Center. The estate continues to function as a public museum and garden to this day. The discussion that follows locates the property, describes its features, and itemizes the changes which have taken place. This is accomplished through the use of Bryant Fleming's original blueprints, photographs taken by the Cheeks around the time of construction, blueprints created for renovations to the museum throughout the years, and site visits to the estate.

Location

Located at 1200 Forrest Park Drive in Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee, Cheekwood is approximately eight and a half miles southwest to the downtown area and on the fringes of Belle Meade (Figure 4.1). While the original estate consisted of approximately 100 acres of rugged land which was refined and terraced by Bryant Fleming when he designed the landscape. Today, the estate is comprised of the 55 acres of which Huldah and Walter Sharp deeded over in the creation of the public botanical gardens and museum. Since Cheekwood's transformation from a private residence to a Nashville art institution, its neighborhood has also



Figure 4.1: Cheekwood Location

Source: Google Maps

changed, and now, the estate is circumscribed by Percy Warner Park and Golf Course, Highway 100, the Belle Park neighborhood, and Belle Meade Boulevard.¹

Form and Appearance

The Cheekwood mansion is a Georgian Revival residence modeled on English Country Estates. This structure was a culmination of Bryant Fleming's originality and architectural features procured by the Cheeks on their year long European excursion with the architect's guidance. The final design results in a construction with a central main block flanked by two supporting wings.² The structure was comprised of raised basement, two primary floors, and a spacious attic. This gives the main entrance on the east facade the illusion of three-stories, while the west facade basement was below grade and not accessible or seen from the exterior (Figure 4.2 and 4.3).

The east facade is a symmetric nine bay design divided into three bays (Figure 4.4). The central bay projects slightly and is emphasized by four pilasters and a rusticated first story. The main entrance is located on the lowest level of the residence and flanked by two niches which would eventually hold statuary.

The left-flanking wing projects out from the main block and consists of a single, three-story bay. On the upper-story and basement, the east facade has two uniform windows. On the first floor, the projection has a large, central Palladian window. The right-flanking wing is

¹ Rand McNally and Company. (2000). *Nashville, Tennessee, City Map: including Belle Meade, Brentwood, Forest Hills*. Skokie, Ill: Rand McNally.

² Bryant Fleming. (1929). *Residence for Mr & Mrs Cheek*. 3188-148. [Technical Drawing].

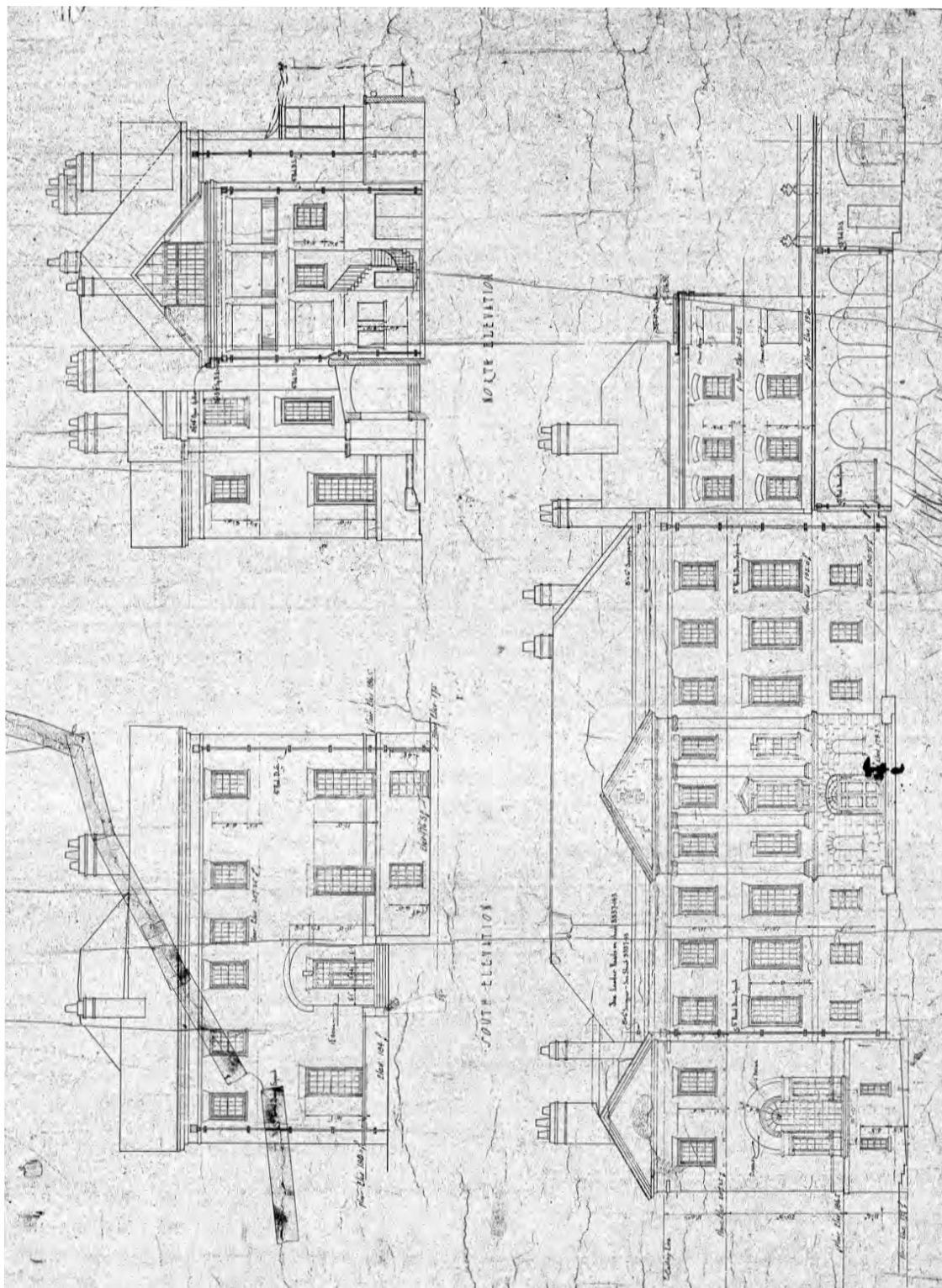


Figure 4.2: East, North, and South Facade Detail of Mansion from Original Blueprints.

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

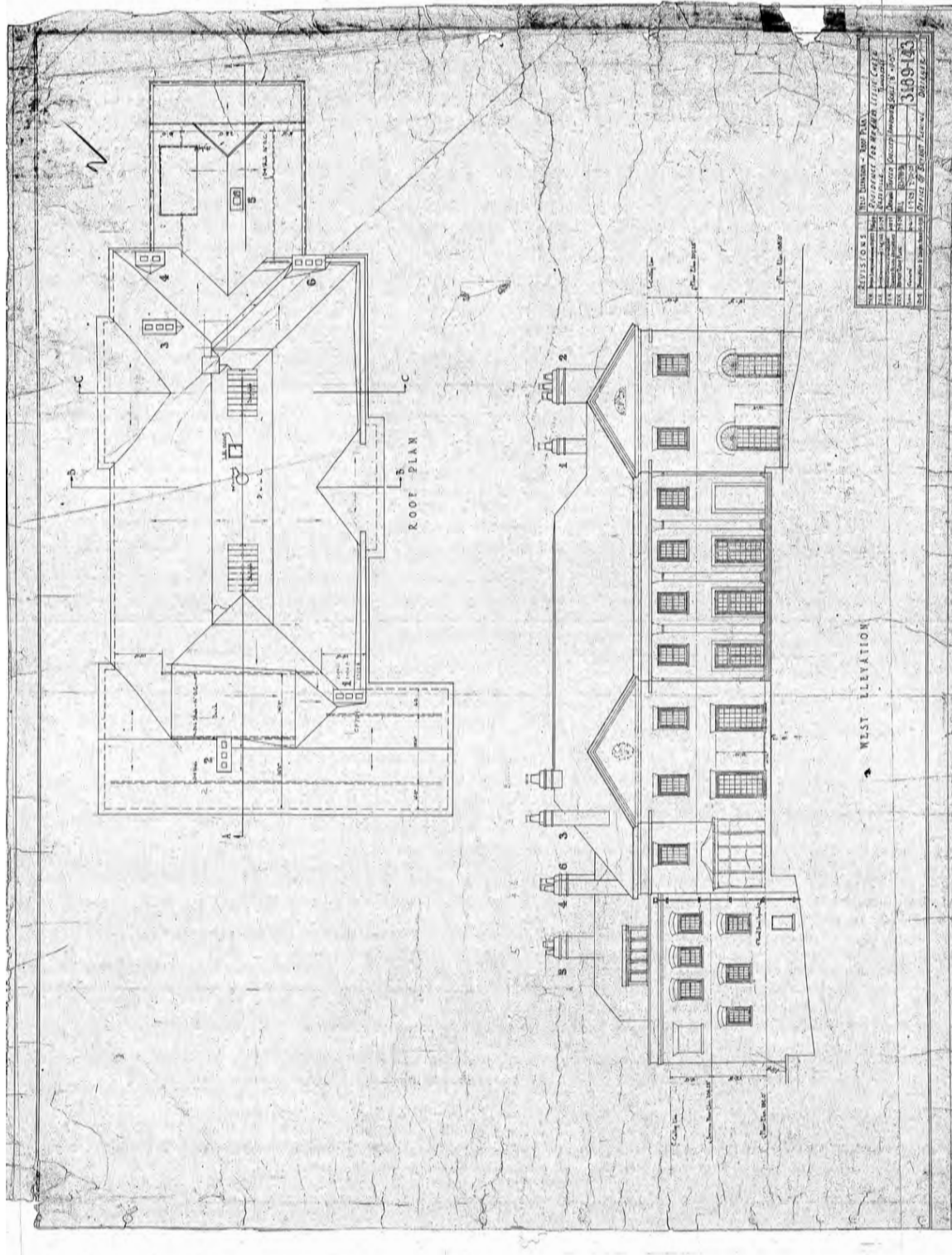


Figure 4.3: West Facade and Rood Detail of Mansion from Original Blueprints.

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 4.4: Historic Photograph of Front Drive to the Mansion

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

recessed from the main block. While the upper and main floor has four bays, the basement level is constructed of a five bay arched arcade which extends to the porte-cochère.

The west facade of the house also has a main block flanked by two supporting wings (Figure 4.5).³ Neither supporting wings, however, recede away from the main block. This creates a flushed portico situated between the two gables on the west facade. This covered porch was redeveloped nearly five years after construction was finished and is the only true change to the exterior of the house made by the Cheeks (Figure 4.6). Leslie Cheek, Jr., who was in college at the time of Cheekwood's construction studying architecture, redesigned the loggia to be enclosed by monumental louvers which fit inside the two two-story Corinthian pilasters supporting the portico's roof.

Because the left wing of the west facade acted as the service wing, the openings lacked the uniformity which exists throughout the remainder of the mansion, as the interior rooms of this wing were more compartmentalized than the rest of the property. This lack of open space is the primary reason the wing was renovated in the 1990s, as the wing could not facilitate a practical gallery or office space. This wing, therefore, has been completely reconfigured and described later within this chapter. The original design consisted of a main-floor with three irregularly spaced windows. The second-floor had three windows and a square opening to the mansion's upper floor porch. On the roof and above the three windows, a shed dormer existed with a string of five fixed, single-paned windows.

³ Bryant Fleming. (1929). *Residence for Mr & Mrs Cheek*. 3189-143. [Technical Drawing].



Figure 4.5: Photograph of West Facade before Loggia from Cheek Family Scrapbook



Figure 4.6: Photograph of West Facade after Loggia from Cheek Family Scrapbook

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

The right wing is a gabled projection with two symmetric bays. On the main floor, there were two floor-to-ceiling double hung sash windows topped by stylized shell-like lintels. The top floor had two windows in the same style as the rest of the second story windows.

The north facade (Figure 4.7) was by far the most visually complicated facade as it acted as the service entrance to the house and had multiple means of egress.⁴ This section of the building was also reconfigured with the Stalworth addition. The original Fleming design was three stories high. The basement level was comprised of the arcade entrance and a winding staircase which allowed access to the main floor of the house. The upper-floor had three symmetrical bays which created an upper-floor porch, closed off with ornamental metal balustrades. Above the porch was four stings of six-over-six windows that allowed light into the attic space above.

The south facade is six bays with a partially excavated basement (Figure 4.8). The upper floor had six symmetrical windows. The main floor has three windows with a french door as means to enter and exit the mansion. To the right of the french door, the ground was excavated to allow for two basement windows which allowed light into the recreation room.

Openings

On the main block of the east facade, the three bays both left and right of the central gable act as mirror images of one another.⁵ The upper-floor has three eight-over-eight double-hung sash windows with splayed limestone lintels. The first floor has three twelve-over-twelve

⁴ Bryant Fleming. (1929). *Residence for Mr & Mrs Cheek*. 3188-148. [Technical Drawing].

⁵ Bryant Fleming. (1929). *Residence for Mr & Mrs Cheek*. 3188-148. [Technical Drawing].



Figure 4.7: Historic Photograph of Service Wing and Rear of Mansion

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 4.8: Historic Photograph of South Facade with Wisteria Arbor

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

double-hung sash windows also with splayed limestone lintels. The ground floor has three six-over-six double-hung sash. Under the central gable, the upper-floor windows are six-over-six double-hung sash with flat limestone lintels. The first floor has two six-over-nine double hung sash windows with a flat lintel and keystone. Between these two windows on the first floor is an eight-over-twelve double-hung sash with a pedimented lintel and a long decorative apron. On the ground floor, the entry has a centered double door, flanked by fluted limestone Doric pilasters. These pilasters support a lunette window above the door.

The service wing of the east facade had the same openings on both the second and first floor. These were three eight-over-eight double-hung sash windows with discharging arches. On the furthest bay are openings to the mansion's porches. The ground floor level was comprised of the arcade.

Similar to the main block, the second floor windows on the left supporting wing are eight-over-eight double-hung sash windows with splayed limestone lintels. The first floor has one central Palladian window, copied from one at the Boodle Club in London.⁶ Although it was not in the original blueprints, outside the Palladian window is a limestone balcony with an ornamental metal balustrade (Figure 4.9). The basement windows is two four-over-four double-hung sash windows.

The main-block of the west facade has seven symmetrical eight-over-eight double hung sash windows on the upper-floor (Figure 4.10).⁷ The windows under the porch are absent of

⁶ Tennessee Fine Arts Center. *Cheekwood, the First 50 Years*. [Nashville, 1979.] p. 9.

⁷ Bryant Fleming. (1929). *Residence for Mr & Mrs Cheek*. 3189-143. [Technical Drawing].



Figure 4.9: Detail of Palladian Window and Front Entrance

Source: Author, March 28, 2016



Figure 4.10: Rear of Mansion with Stalworth Gallery in the Background

Source: Author, March 28, 2016

lintels, and the remaining windows on the second floor has splayed limestone lintels. The first floor openings under the porch were French doors. These doors have a four-over-four transom. On the first floor of the gabled section of the main block, two sixteen-over-sixteen double-hung sash are located.

All the windows on the service side of the west facade were eight-over-eight double hung sash with elliptical lintels. There were two other openings on this facade. One opening was located on the second floor and opened unto the mansion's second-story porch. The other was located on the ground floor. On the roof of the service wing and above the three windows, a shed dormer existed with a string of five fixed, single-paned windows.

On the right supporting wing, both floors has matching windows. The second floor has eight-over-eight double hung sash windows with splayed limestone lintels. The first floor has twelve-over-sixteen windows with stylized seashell lintels.

The north facade has the most irregularly placed openings.⁸ The ground level had the openings to the arcade, service staircase, and garage (Figure 4.11). The winding stone and concrete staircase connected the exterior of the ground floor to the exterior of first floor. This creates a recessed entrance allowing access to the two floors of the mansion. Above the arcade was a twelve-over-twelve double-hung sash window, and above that window was a sixteen-over-sixteen window on the second floor. The first floor of the service wing had one four-over-four double-hung sash window to the right of the two stairwell openings, and a similar window was incorporated into the recessed stairwell. The openings associated with the staircase had splayed

⁸ Bryant Fleming. (1929). *Residence for Mr & Mrs Cheek*. 3188-148. [Technical Drawing].



Figure 4:11: Photograph Taken under Porte Coche of Renovated Service Wing

Source: Author, March 28, 2016

limestone lintels. Above exterior stairs was a three bay porch with an ornamental balustrade. In the attic space gable, a string of four three-over-nine windows existed.

On the south facade, the second floor has six eight-over-eight double-hung sash windows with splayed limestone lintels (Figure 4.12). The first floor has three twelve-over-sixteen double-hung sash windows with splayed limestone lintels. The door is of the same design as the west facade's french doors with transom and has a splayed limestone lintel with a keystone. Around the door is a three-centered arch and is the connection point for the wisteria arbor. The ground level window closest to the arbor is an eight-over-eight double-hung sash window, and the window closest to the east facade is a casement window with an elongated apron.

Roof and Related Features

The original design of the house is a shingled hipped roof with three gables and one cross gable (Refer to Figure 4.3). Roof features include six chimneys, although not all of these exist today. These chimneys work with a system fireplaces and are associated with over ten mantels within the mansion. Also located on the roof are multiple skylights for lighting the attic space. These skylights are located on the deck of the roof, and a scuttle for access is located between the two skylights. Although there is an interior rotunda, this was not an exterior feature and is lit from the skylights and artificial lighting in the attic.

Projections

The most prominent projections of Cheekwood are the three-sided projection, which created the breakfast room, the arcade, and the terraces. The terraces acts as a transitional space



Figure 4.12: Photograph of Wisteria Arbor and South Facade from Terrace Below.

Source: Author, March 28, 2016

between the home and gardens. The arcade is used as an covered arterial from the motor court to the basement floor of the mansion. The breakfast room projection has a hipped roof with floor-to-ceiling windows on all three sides.

Materials

Part of Bryant Fleming's design is to create a structure that seems to coalesce with its exterior setting. To accomplish this goal, rough limestone that clad the mansion was locally sourced if not procured on the Cheekwood grounds.⁹ This evokes the feeling that the structure has grown straight out of the its hilly setting as the final feature to the gardens. The entire structure above-grade, excluding the wooden trimmed windows, roof, and decorative features, was built using this rough stone and gives the mansion a feeling of uniformity with an omnipresence from its robust construction. To continue the uniform material usage throughout the house, different materials are only used below grade, and the exterior walls of basement are constructed of concrete. The roof of Cheekwood is the only material to stand out in stark contrast to the rest of the facade. The roof is assembled with burnt umber asphalt shingles.

Details

Most of the lintels of the structure are assembled out of individually rough cut limestone pieced together to create their intended form (usually, splayed or flat). This deviates on sections of the house that are particularly ornate, such as the main entryway, the Palladian window, and the stylized seashells on the western facade. These, and a majority of the other decorative features, are of dressed stone.

⁹ Construction plan's "Key of Materials" specify local stone, and on page 136 of Gayle Sander's Knight thesis, author cites Denys Peter Myers unpublished manuscript on this matter.

The central bay of the main entrance is constructed of ashlar cut limestone at the basement level. This creates a visual distinction from the remainder of the rough cut stone. Situated above the ashlar section are four Ionic limestone pilasters. These pilasters support the limestone entablature and pediment. The pediment is adorned with a terra cotta cartouche. Two dressed stone belt courses run around the mansion between the basement and first floor and the second floor and attic. Above the attic belt course, a projecting cornice is located. These lines work to visually extend prominent architectural features on the house. The lower belt course extends the base of the pilasters. The upper belt course acts as an extension of the central gable's architrave. The projecting cornice is a mere horizontal continuation of the central gable's cornice.

The Palladian window was originally designed without a balcony. Above the window is an arch constructed of the same rough cut limestone as the majority of the house. The entire window structure is created out of dressed limestone, including the four pilasters, entablature, and arch. A floor above this window is a pedimented gable with prominent ranking and horizontal cornice. This gable is adorned with a terra cotta cartouche.

The east facade is dominated by the loggia designed by Leslie, Jr. This addition has four massive louvered doors that attached to the Corinthian columns of the porch. Above these doors are four circular opens that allowed light and air into the porch. The loggia is terminated by the two west facade gables. These are identical to the gable over the Palladian window and also are adorned with cartouches.

Many artisans worked on the house, however, the most well-known included Philip Kerrigan, Jr. Cheekwood was a springboard for Kerrigan's career, and his work is seen

throughout the estate. Objects such as the balcony to the Palladian window, the Wisteria Arbor, the exterior staircases and balustrades, and the metal electric light posts are Kerrigan originals. It is these features that fortified Fleming's amalgamation of the mansion with the grounds.

Setting

The mansion is placed at the center of the tallest hill on the grounds (Figure 4.13). To fit the structure in the surrounding undulations, the original hill was dug out to nestle the house partially in its peak. This endeavor allows for the grand, three-story entrance and the two-story garden facade at the rear of the house. Copious acreage gave Fleming the ability to design the many terraces and gardens that surround the house and eradicate the strict line of exterior and interior.

Original Ground Floor Layout

The ground floor acts as the main entrance as well as an integral part of the service and operational components in the Cheekwood Estate (Figure 4.14).¹⁰ The arcade had direct access to the service hall, and off this hall were the rooms associated with the operational activities of the house including the "Incinerator Room," "Heater Room," "Machine Room," "Vault," and "Elevator." Laundry was also executed in the basement and accessed through the service hall. This laundry complex included rooms labeled "Laundry" and "Laundry #2," as well as a "Cold Room" and lavatory. The "Garage" admittance into the house was accomplished through a "Passage" which led into the service hall.

¹⁰ Bryant Fleming. (1929). *Residence for Mr & Mrs Cheek*. 3184A-143. [Technical Drawing].

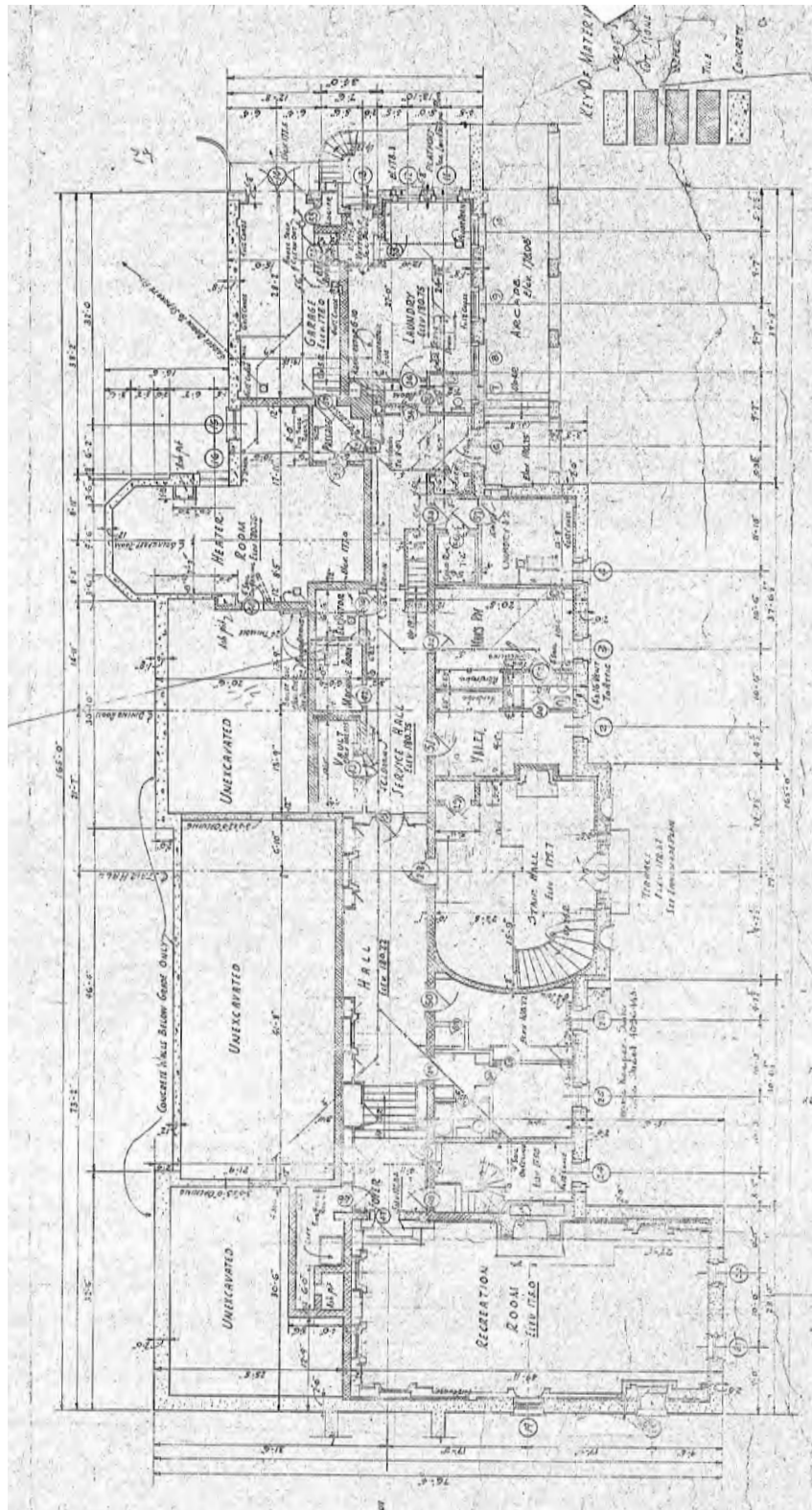


Figure 4.14: Ground Floor Layout from Original Blueprints

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

Rooms labeled “Valet,” “Man’s Room,” and “House Keeper’s Suite” were also found on this floor. Each of these rooms had a small wardrobe and access to a bathroom. While the house keeper, whose room was not connected to the service hall but the main hall, had the luxury of a private bathroom, the valet and anyone staying in the “Man’s Room” would have shared a bathroom.

The main entrance of the house entered into the “Stair Hall.” Off of this room, which housed a winding staircase and access to the main floor, was the “Hall” which would lead into the “Recreation Room” and its “Foyer.” Accessed through the “Foyer” and located behind the “Recreation Room” was a small spiral staircase that terminated in the upper floor’s “Private Hall.” These rooms were designed with larger windows and more opulent finishing than that of the service side of the house.

While this floor was essential to ensuring an efficient orchestration to household operations, three large rooms (nearly one third of the floor’s square footage) were labeled “Unexcavated” and unused. These rooms were associated with the two-story western facade and only accessible through a small opening in the “Heater Room.”

Original First Floor Layout

The first floor acted as the entertainment and dining space for the mansion (Figure 4.15).¹¹ The service wing housed all activities that dealt with cooking. This complex included a “Silent Pantry,” “Butler’s Pantry,” “Pastry Room,” and “Kitchen.” These were logically located adjacent to the “Dining Room” and “Breakfast Room.” These rooms were accessed through the

¹¹ Bryant Fleming. (1929). *Residence for Mr & Mrs Cheek*. 3184A-144. [Technical Drawing].

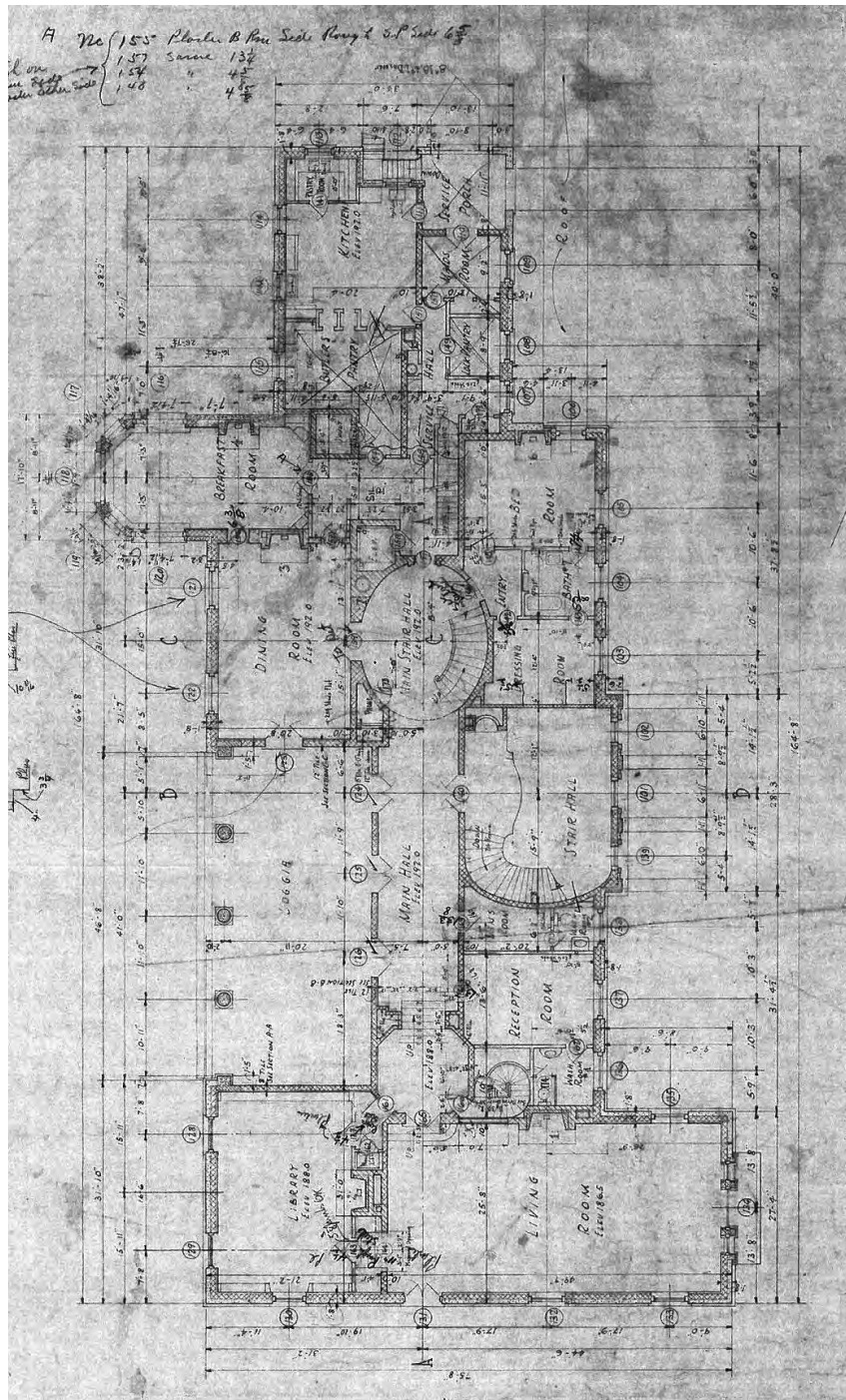


Figure 4.15: First Floor Layout from Original Blueprints

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

exterior “Service Porch” and to move about the house, a service stair and the elevator stop were located in the “Elevator Hall” directly behind the “Main Stair Hall.” Also located on the service wing was another “Vault.”

Off the “Main Stair Hall” were the “Dining Room” and the Mabel’s mother’s, Huldah Warfield Wood, suite. This suit was outfitted with a private entry hall that led to her bedroom and dressing room. Between these two rooms were a private bathroom.

The “Dining Room” and “Traverse Hall” were the only other rooms accessible from the stair hall. Two large doors opened into the “Dining Room,” which had an marble fireplace. Off of this room was the “Breakfast Room” and “Silent Pantry.” The “Breakfast Room” was constructed of the glassed in hipped projection on western facade of the mansion. This room was also outfitted with an ornate, marble fireplace.

The traverse hall lent entry to the “Loggia,” “Entrance Balcony” from the basement stairwell, “Library,” “Drawing Room,” “Reception Room,” and lavatories. The small stairwell that went from the basement to the owner’s private hall was also accessible from this hall.

It was the “Library” and the “Period Room” that spanned the entire southern wing of the mansion. These two room were reached by two small sets of stairs that created a terracing effect in the residence and created the “Octagon Hall.” The “Library” was accessed off the first landing and overlooked the back of the mansion. The “Drawing Room” was accessed through double doors that opened onto the second set of stairs. It was through the “Drawing Room” that opened up onto the wisteria arbor terrace.

Original Second Floor Layout

The upper floor's primary function was lodging and included rooms for two guests, Mr. and Mrs. Cheek, Leslie Jr., Huldah, and three maids (Figure 4.16).¹² The maids' rooms were sequestered to the service wing, where rooms labeled "Maid's Room #1," "Maid's Room #2," and "Maid's Room #3." These rooms were of similar in size and outfitted with closets. Two of these rooms overlooked the Swan fountain in the rear of the mansion, and the other overlooked the main entryway. All of the maids' rooms exited onto a small hall which allowed access to their small, shared bathroom, three utility closets, and the incinerator shoot. The hall terminated into the "Service Stair Hall." This hall devoted to the service sector of the mansion allowed access to the "Linen & Sewing Room" and a half flight of stairs that emptied into the foyer of the "Elevator Hall."

The "Elevator Hall" was the only direct means from the service wing to the remainder of the house. This hall acted as the means of egress to the elevator, the main floor service wing, and the "Main Stair." The "Main Stair" was used to take residents and guest from the main floor to their sleeping quarters. Off of the stairwell was a small closet, Leslie Jr.'s bedroom and dressing room, a study, a guest room, and the gallery, which acted as the main arterial through the upper floor.

Leslie Jr. was the furthest sleeping quarters away from Leslie Sr, Mabel, and Huldah, and had direct access to the study from his bedroom. This study was closet to the service wing and had an ornate marble fireplace and built in bookshelves. Leslie's bedroom was centered between

¹² Bryant Fleming. (1929). *Residence for Mr & Mrs Cheek*. 3186-143. [Technical Drawing].

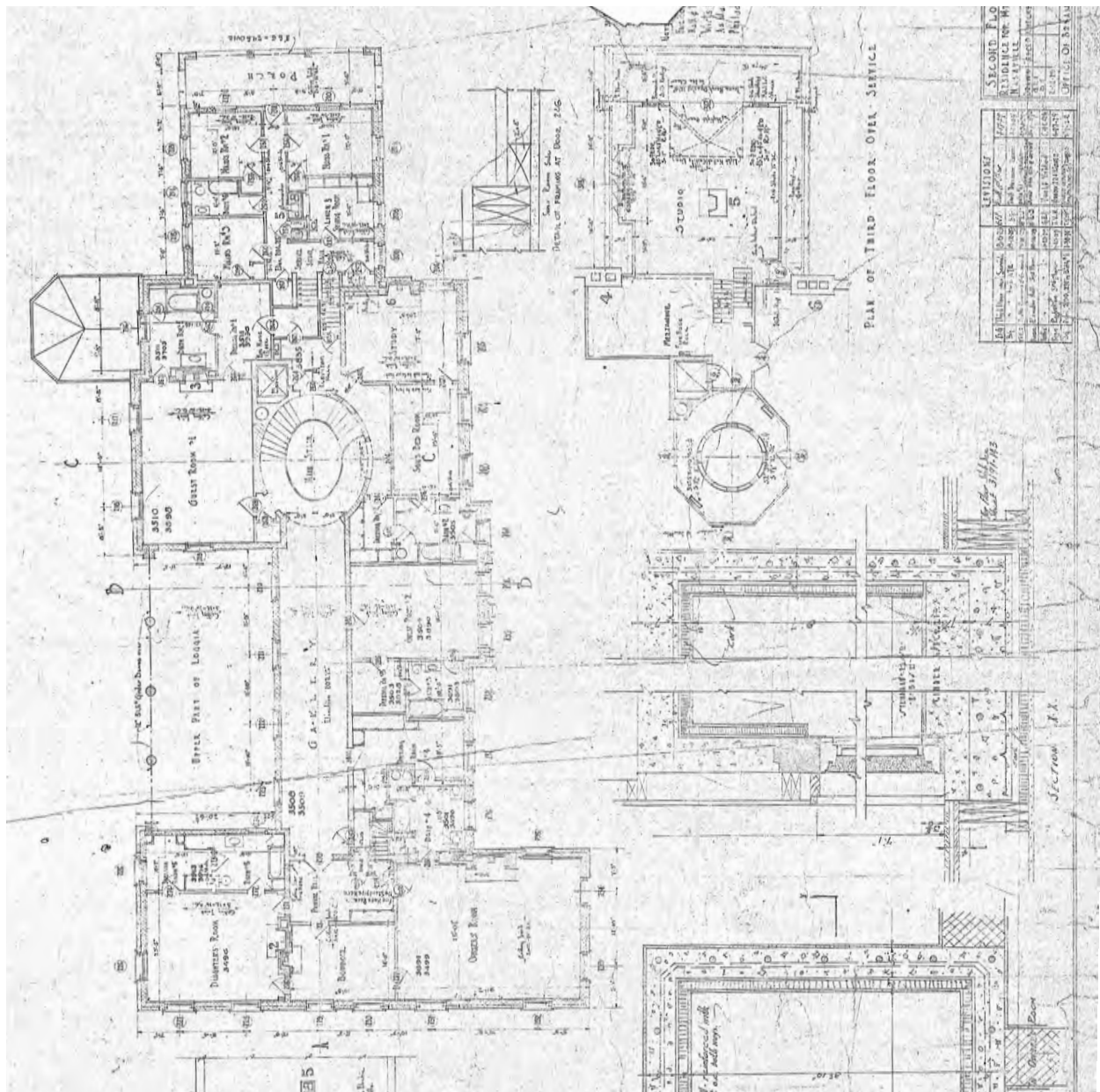


Figure 4.16: Second Floor and Attic Layout from Original Blueprints

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

the study and is bathroom. This bathroom had a water closet, bathtub, sink, small closet, and urinal. Adjacent to Leslie Jr.'s room was the guest room accessed through the gallery.

The guest room's were outfitted with their own bathrooms and private dressing rooms. Each of these bathrooms included a sink, bathtub, and toilet. The two rooms differed as they had the choice of either the main entry or rear gardens as their view, and the guest room off of the main stair was equipped with a fireplace and a water closet in its bathroom.

The last door to the "Gallery" was the entrance to the Cheek's and their daughter's "Private Hall." The "Private Hall" allowed entrance to their respective bedrooms and the terminus of the staircase behind the "Recreation Room's" fireplace. This hall also housed the third and final vault in the mansion's floor plan. Huldah and her parents' bedroom was also connected by the "Boudoir." This room acted as sitting room with fireplace between the two bedrooms.

Huldah's room had a large, ornate fireplace and private bathroom. The bathroom scarified the luxury of a water closet for a larger dressing room. The "Owner's Room," or Mabel and Leslie Sr.'s room, was the largest of all the bedrooms. This room was the front, corner of the mansion's second wing. The "Owner's Room" was attached to the largest bathroom, and its private dressing room, which was also the largest in the house. The dressing room wrapped around the bathroom in an "L" shape.

Attic

This attic space served three main purposes, housing the interior rotunda, Leslie Jr.'s architecture studio space, and the mechanical features associated with air-conditioning (Refer to

Figure 4.16). Both of these rooms were well-lit through the use of skylights. The shed dormer on the rear of the service wing and the windows that surmounted the exterior porch on the service wing were all accessible through Leslie Jr.'s studio. This allowed for ample light for his architectural drawings and studies. The rotunda was lit by the skylight built into the roof decking.

Leslie Jr.'s studio was located directly above the maids' rooms and spanned the entire service wing. This room was outfitted with a fireplace located in the center of the room. The studio was accessed through stairs located in the "Elevator Hall" of the upper floor. This staircase would terminate into Leslie's studio. There, a second staircase would ascend to the attic "Mezzanine." The mezzanine created access points to the last stop of the elevator and the remaining attic space.

The rotunda was created to enhance the grandeur of the "Main Stair" without interrupting the symmetry of the roofline. The rotunda was constructed of an octagonal housing well that acted as the skeleton for the rotunda and its eight annular window. This rotunda was illuminated with both natural light and artificial light.

The mezzanine was the means of egress to the "Blower Room" and "Main Organ Room." These rooms were associated with the mechanical rooms of the basement. These were necessities for the comfort of the mansion's residents.

Interior Details

The interior details of the estate were a culmination of imported architectural features and Bryant Fleming's design. These items were highly publicized as Nashville's socialites watched

four freight cars carry in doors, door frames, handrails, iron work, mantels, wall panels, molding, chandeliers, tapestry statuary, along with an innumerable amount of furniture.¹³

On the ground level of the mansion, guests were immediately introduced with the imported luxuries. The first item one would see walking through the front entrance was the 18th century mantel composed of white marble and carved with the flowers of England, Scotland, and Ireland — the rose, thistle, and shamrock (Figure 4.17).¹⁴ Through the imported doors of the ground floor, the rooms were paneled in pine until the “Recreation Room” (Figure 4.18). In the “Recreation Room,” the walls were clad in oak, and the room was dominated with 12th century Gothic brick fireplace. Little record was left of the remainder of the ground floor outside of the original blueprints as it was associated with the service quarters, mechanical rooms, and crawl spaces.

The first floor entrance was constructed of preeminent mahogany and gilt doors from the London home of the Dukes of Westminster.¹⁵ These doors accessed from the ground floor on an ornate stairwell and opened onto the “Transverse Hall” which was adorn with 19th century panels (Figure 4.19). The Italian-styled panels were said to represent the four seasons and different facets of art (Figure 4.20). Among the most significant element in the estate was the semi-oval marble spiral stairs that ascended to the second floor (Figure 4.21). These stairs have been attributed to Queen Charlotte of England and are located under Bryant Fleming’s dome. Through the “Main Stair Hall,” both the dining rooms were adorn with imported mantels, the

¹³ Jessica Bliss. “Cheekwood to Reveal Secrets, Restore Origins.” *The Tennessean*, March 21, 2015.

¹⁴ Louise Davis and Ginger Burress. *Cheekwood, The First 50 Years*. [Cheekwood Fine Arts Center, 1979]. p. 6-10.

¹⁵ Louise Davis and Ginger Burress. *Cheekwood, The First 50 Years*. [Cheekwood Fine Arts Center, 1979]. p. 6-10.



Figure 4.17: Main Entrance Fireplace Flanked by Mabel and Leslie Sr.'s Portraits

Source: Author, March 28, 2016



Figure 4.18: Historic Photograph of Recreation Room

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 4.19: Historic Photograph of the Entrance Hall

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 4.20: Historic Photograph of Traverse Hall

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 4.21: Historic Photograph of Main Stairway

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

“Breakfast Room” of black marble and the “Dining Room” of white marble (Figure 4.22 and 4.23). It was the “Dining Room” mantel that was attributed to 18th century designer, Robert Adams, and the room itself was painted a rich mulberry with light wainscoting to accent.

On the opposite wing of the main floor, the “Drawing Room” which was accessed through doors eighteen feet high from the Devonshire House, and the room was outfitted with an 18th century dark marble mantel adorned with a locally-crafted wooden over-mantelpiece (Figure 4.24). This mantelpiece extended up towards the ceiling and was terminated by a broken pediment. Within this pediment was a ornate eagle. The entire room was crowned with two 18th century chandeliers from the palace of the tenth Countess of Scarborough.

Outside the “Drawing Room” and off the “Octagonal Hall” was the pine-paneled “Library,” where original built-in bookcases were topped by a broken pediment to match the door’s molding (Figure 4.25 and 4.26). Above the mantel in the “Library,” a timepiece was located. This timepiece complimented the pine-paneling and was carved eagles carrying fabric that created a swag over the fireplace.

Each of the rooms of the mansion were designed with meticulous detail. Moldings associated for each room can be found throughout the original blueprints as well as the marble of each room, as each type was specified within these files as well.

Through the mansion’s transition into a museum, many of the prominent original architectural features have been retained, and a majority of the superficial details, such as paint color, have been changed. Throughout the museum, mantels and moldings have been maintained and can still be enjoyed by the patrons. These relics of the Cheek’s homestead exist in an environment where the artwork, instead of the architecture, is emphasized. This creates a



Figure 4.22: Dark Marble Fireplace of the Morning Room

Source: Author, March 28, 2016



Figure 4.23: Marble Fireplace of the Dining Room

Source: Author, March 28, 2016



Figure 4.24: Historic Photograph of Drawing Room

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 4.25: Historic Photograph of Octagonal Room

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 4.26: Historic Photograph of Library

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

dichotomy between the past and present life of the Cheekwood Mansion. It has been the service wing, however, that has been completely altered in the Stalworth Gallery addition to create necessities for a museum, including gallery space, storage, and offices.

Building Alterations

The transition from a private residence to an art institution called for many alterations. These adjustments not only changed the functions of the mansion's rooms, they forever altered the original design of the house. Of these changes, the most notable modification occurred with the addition of the Stalworth Gallery in the 1980s. This was the first major change to the exterior of Bryant Fleming's design since the addition of Leslie Jr.'s loggia. Prior to the two-story concrete addition to the west facade, only the interior was substantially altered.

After the transformation to the public museum in 1960, the layout of the main floor of the mansion remained very much intact (Figure 4.27).¹⁶ With little changes made to the structure, the floor merely stopped functioning as a house and was reorganized to facility a museum. Even the service quarters were still intact.¹⁷ The change primarily focused on the upper floor, which was gutted, excluding Leslie Jr.'s suite. This process was done by preserving the exterior walls of the rooms and removing all partitioning walls (Figure 4.28). This created expansive rooms to be used as gallery spaces.¹⁸ The transition for the private residence to the museum in 1959 ultimately cost the mansion its guest rooms and respective bathrooms, Huldah's suite, and master suite, as

¹⁶ Cheekwood Museum of Art, et al. *Cheekwood Ephemera Subject Files*. [Nashville, 1958-2016.]

¹⁷ Cheekwood Museum of Art, et al. *Cheekwood Ephemera Subject Files*. [Nashville, 1958-2016.]

¹⁸ Robert H. Street. *Alterations for Fines Arts Center*. Cheekwood Archives. 1959.

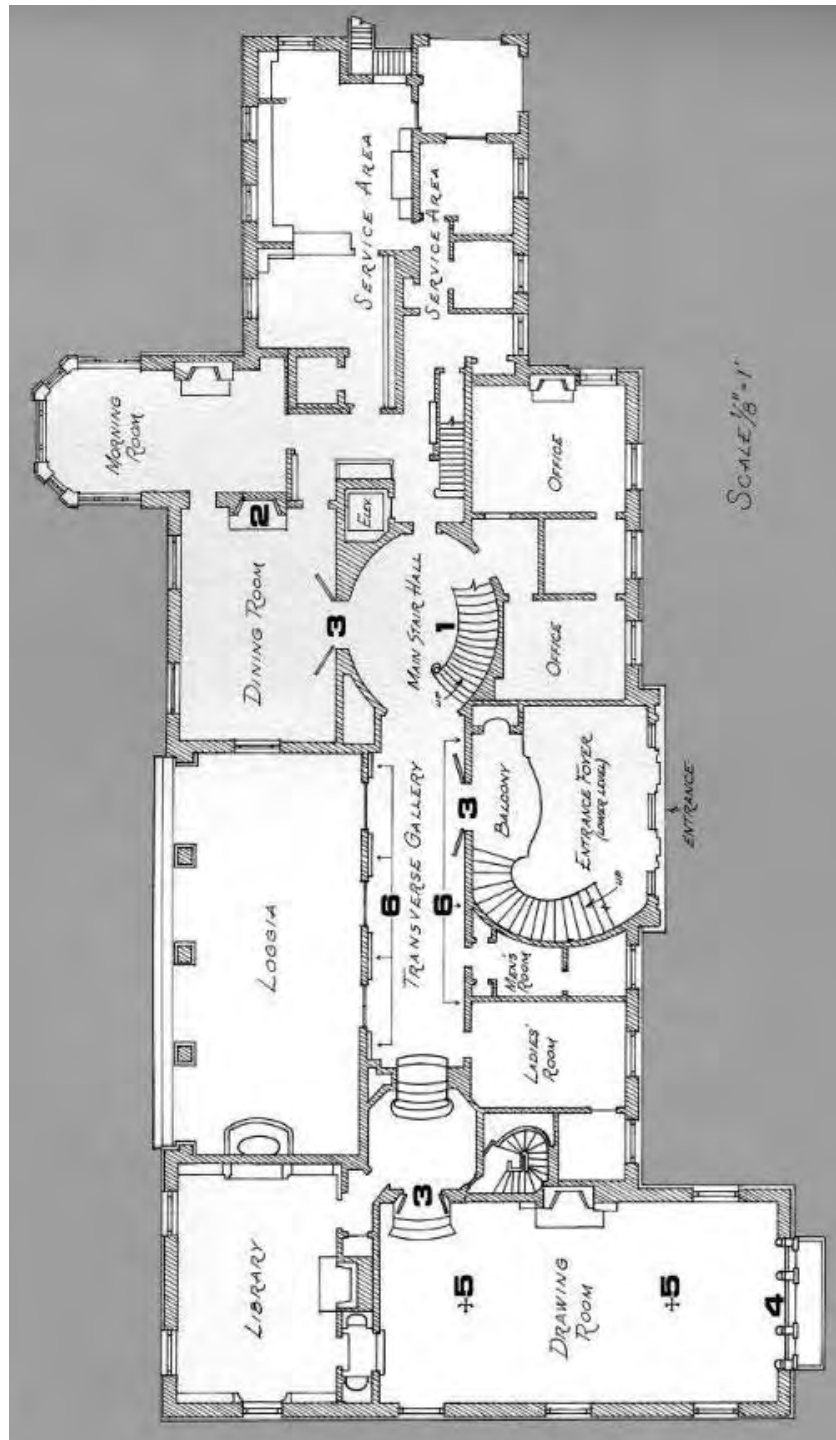


Figure 4.27: 1960s Ground Floor Layout of Museum

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

well as the private hall that connected the two. It was these demolitions that allowed the museum to gain four spacious rooms for displaying artwork or housed museum functions.

The museum's next sizable alteration was the construction of the Stalworth Gallery. This gallery not only added square footage to the service wing, it created much needed storage and office space for the operational side of Cheekwood. The museum was in need of larger spaces to support its growth which called for additional square footage. It was paramount that the architect hired would be sensitive to the original building as this was the first alteration to the exterior since its construction.

The architect for this major endeavor was Ed Street, who was quoted in the *Nashville Banner*, "...the concept of the renovation had been to do as little as possible to the house itself... the exterior appearance of the added area wouldn't pretend to mimic the style of the house, but would blend congenially with it and maintain its scale, tone, and texture."¹⁹ The addition of quarried limestone, concrete and steel was located from the "Breakfast Room" through the service wing (Figure 4.29, 4.30, 4.31, and 4.31). The basement floor was composed of office and storage, while the upper floors housed galleries. These galleries exceeded the amount of square footage available in any of the other original gallery spaces from the 1959 rehabilitation.

The museum continued well into the 1990s before any other large alterations occurred. In 1998, designer Albert Hadley and Graham Gund and Associates were hired to restore many of the public rooms of the museum back to their 1932 appearance. The loggia was also readdressed at this time. New wood and glass were used throughout the loggia to create a more climate

¹⁹ Carroll Van West. *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. July 20, 1990.



Figure 4.29: Service Wing of Mansion Showing the Major Addition

Source: Author, March 28, 2016

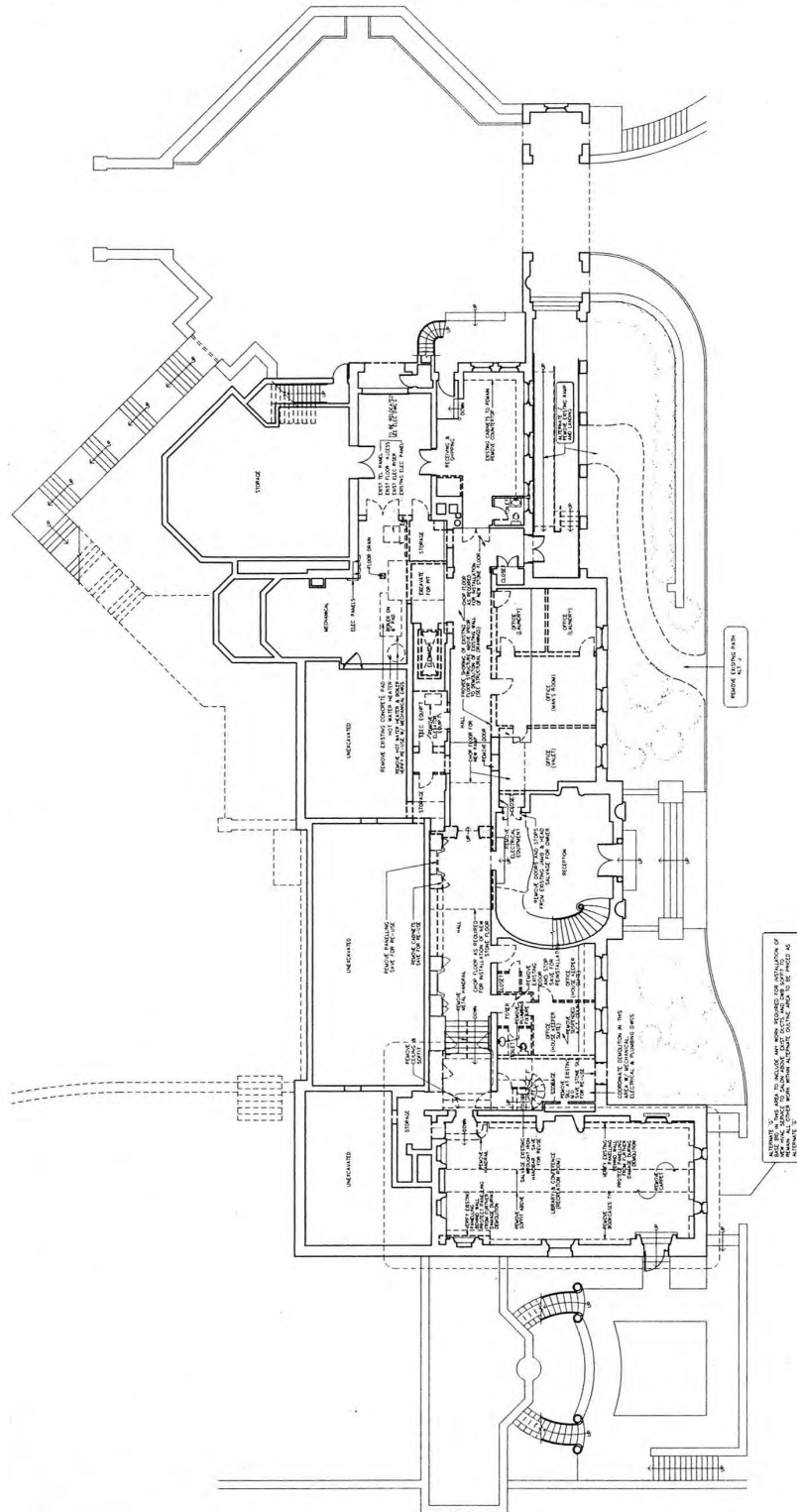


Figure 4.30: 1990s Ground Floor Layout of Museum

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

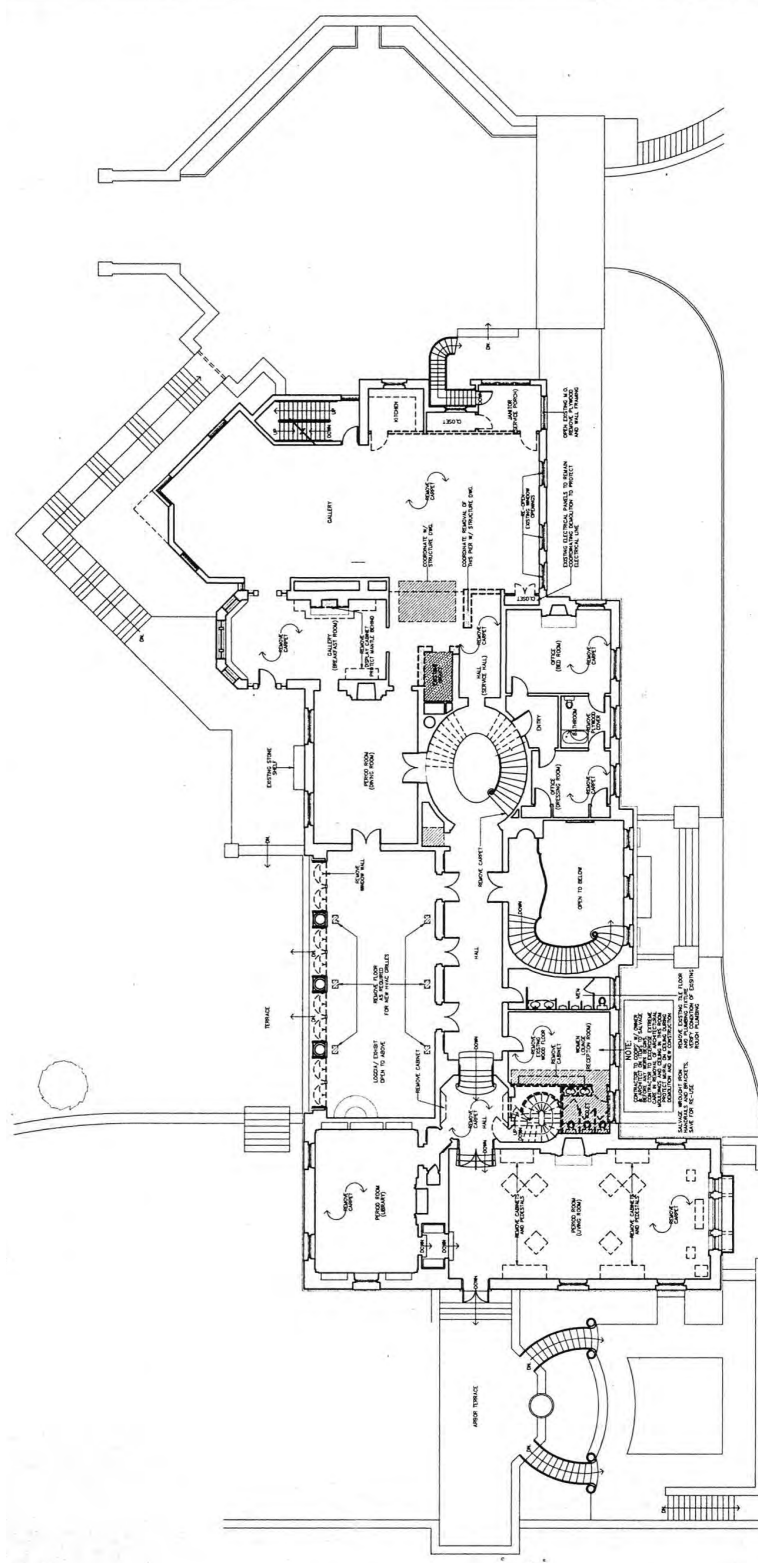


Figure 4.31: 1990s First Floor Layout of Museum

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

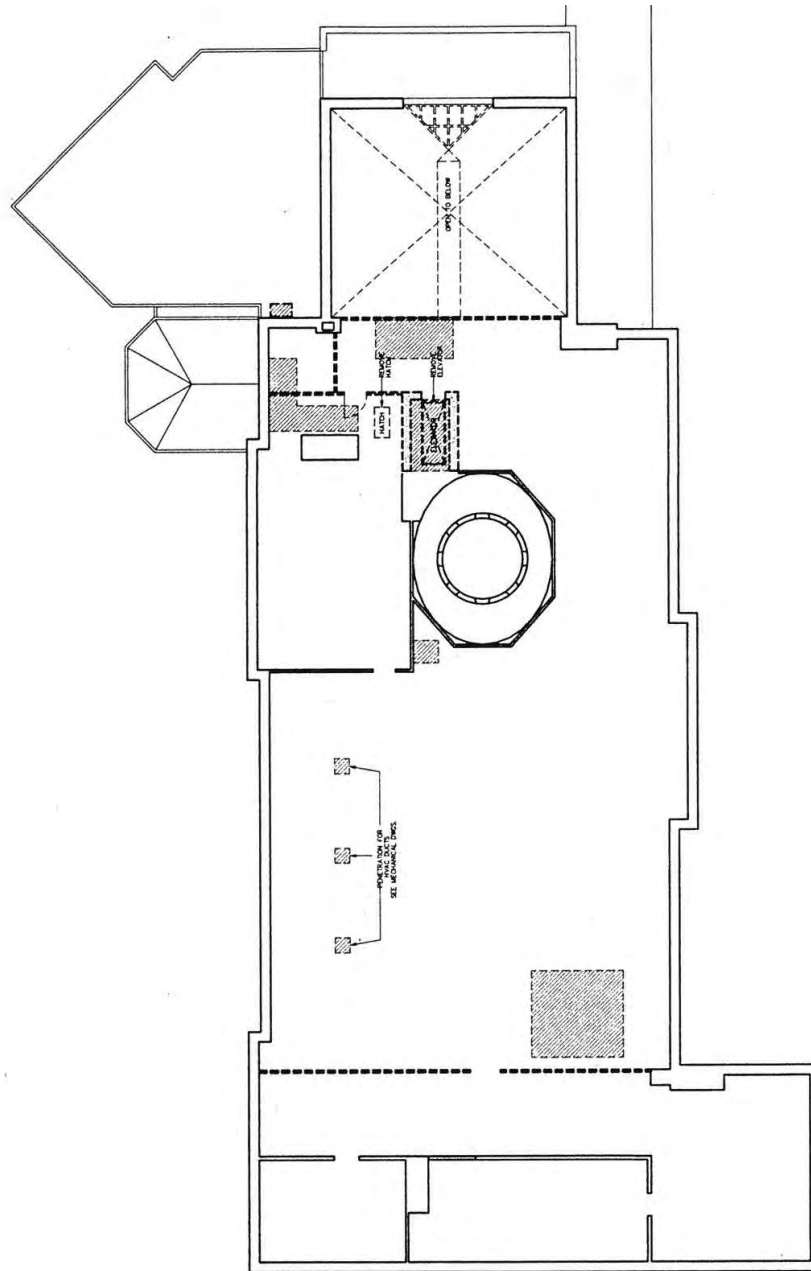


Figure 4.33: 1990s Attic Layout of Museum

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

controlled room for museum use.²⁰ Plans to fortify the stairwell in the northwest wing of the house also called for the main floor restrooms of the museum to be redesigned. Superficial alterations were also made, including carpet removal and repainting.

Keeping up with modern codes, building, fire, ADA, etc., have also been readdressed throughout the museum's life. Topics including relocation and re-sloping of handicap accessible ramps, installation of multiple fire suppressant systems, and reassessing means of egress have been constantly modify throughout the building's architectural narrative. While these transformations main objective is the welfare of the Cheekwood patrons, the building's historical integrity has also been paramount.

The Cheekwood mansion, since its existence in 1932, has experienced many changes throughout its life and has continuously been recognized as one of Nashville's architectural gems. This design was considered the masterpiece design of Byrant Fleming career were Nashville was considered his zenith, and Cheekwood was his pinnacle design. This mansion, however, cannot be appreciated as a single structure as it was the focal point to a complex system of integrated gardens. The gardens were not to be submissive to the mansion, but the mansion and its gardens were meant to strengthen the other. The following chapter will examine the Cheek mansion's equal counterpart, its gardens. Throughout the chapter, the narrative of the gardens' transformation of a private estate to a public garden will be addressed.

²⁰ Graham Gund Architects, Inc. *The Cheekwood Museum of Art Mansion Renovation*. Cheekwood Archives. November 24, 1997.

CHAPTER V:

THE GROUNDS

The Cheekwood estate was an expansive landscape of nearly one hundred acres when it served as part of the Cheek residence. These grounds were enjoyed privately until 1959 when 55 of the acres were donated to serve as the gardens for the Tennessee Botanical Gardens and Fine Arts Center. Today, the estate is not only known for its vast collection of plants but also as a backdrop to some of the most world renowned sculptures, including works of Dale Chihuly, Jaume Plensa, and Steve Tobin.

Fleming Design Elements

Nine reoccurring elements were incorporated in every Fleming design. These include aspects of the entry, circulation, integration of house and garden, change in elevation, transition between spaces, axuality, termination of axes, sculptural elements in the garden, and symmetry and balance. All nine are encompassed in his Nashville design, Cheekwood.

The intention of the entry to a Fleming house and garden was to establish the tone for the subsequent architecture and landscape. These entries were executed in three sequential elements, the entry marker, the drive, and the arrival court.¹ The entrance marker was designed to be the first glimpse of the estate. It was to reflect the architectural characteristics of the structures beyond. These markers were constructed of two brick or stone pillars of eight or ten feet in height that flanked either side of the drive, and in many cases, supported wrought iron gates

¹ Gayle Sanders Knight. *Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect: Residential Designs, 1905 to 1935*. Cornell University, August 1987. p. 167.

imported from Europe. The entrance marker pillars had a base of stone with a matching cap that incorporated a decorative motif. Cheekwood's entrance marker was adorned with the pineapple, an eighteen century symbol for hospitality (Figure 5.1). Generally, these pillars were the commencement and terminus of the property's boundary fence, and they were also the start of the estate's formal drive.

The formal drive ushered guests into the property, and the procession varied greatly from one project to the next.² When designing the drive, Fleming first considered the scale of the site and historical precedence. If space was available, as in the Cheek's property, the drive followed the contours of the land to emphasize the estate's natural setting. The drive, although broad at the entrance marker, would narrow, and remain so, until it entered into the arrival court (Figure 5.2).

The arrival court also varied by site.³ While all of the drives were paved, some drives became loops about a circle lawn, and others ended in paved courts adorned with a marked center of a planted island or statue. Some arrival courts were little more than a widening in the drive. In the case of Cheekwood, the drive widened to create an arrival court at the principal entry. A porte-cochère allowed access into the motor court (Figure 5.3).

The service entrances, a much needed attribute of these massive estates to ensure an efficient flow to and from the residence, followed this pattern on a less grandiose scale (Figure 5.4). These are seen in every Fleming design with sufficient acreage.

² Gayle Sanders Knight. *Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect: Residential Designs, 1905 to 1935*. Cornell University, August 1987. p. 169.

³ Ibid, p. 170.



Figure 5.1: Entrance Marker to Estate

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.2: Main Driveway

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.3: Main Arrival Court

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.4: Site Plane of Estate, Note Smaller Service Drive.

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

Circulation within a Bryant Fleming design was dictated by paths and drives.⁴ These routes directed movement and allowed individuals to travel from one point of interest to the next (Figure 5.5). Drives were planned to be highly visible, but to also not immediately illuminate the scheme of the gardens. The paths were used to unveil the richness of the landscape and guide the visitor through Fleming's design. He described the paths as the skeleton from which the garden spaces developed. Circulation patterns were also used to direct attention to distant landmarks and cut vistas used as the backdrop for the gardens.

Fleming's ability to harmonize the gardens to the residence was a hallmark trait.⁵ Fleming accomplished this with three basic strategies: visually linking the interior to exterior, repetition of forms in landscape and architecture, and including distinct architectural styles into his landscape plans. By visually linking the interior to the exterior, and vice versa, an axial linkage was created (Figure 5.6). To bring the outdoors in, key windows and doors were extended into the gardens for immediate engagement. To allow observers to see the relationships between the gardens with the house, manicured vistas were designed to show the house and reveal clues about the residential design from afar. Because of the commitment to creating a discernible axis between the garden and house, the two create a cohesive visual relationship (Figure 5.7). This was also accomplished by repeating chosen forms from the house that were brought into the gardens and allowed for the residence to be echoed throughout the landscape. The practice was also heightened by adopting the distinct architectural style, in Cheekwood's

⁴ Gayle Sanders Knight. *Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect: Residential Designs, 1905 to 1935*. Cornell University, August 1987, p. 179.

⁵ Ibid, p. 181.



Figure 5.5: Circulation Path in Garden

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

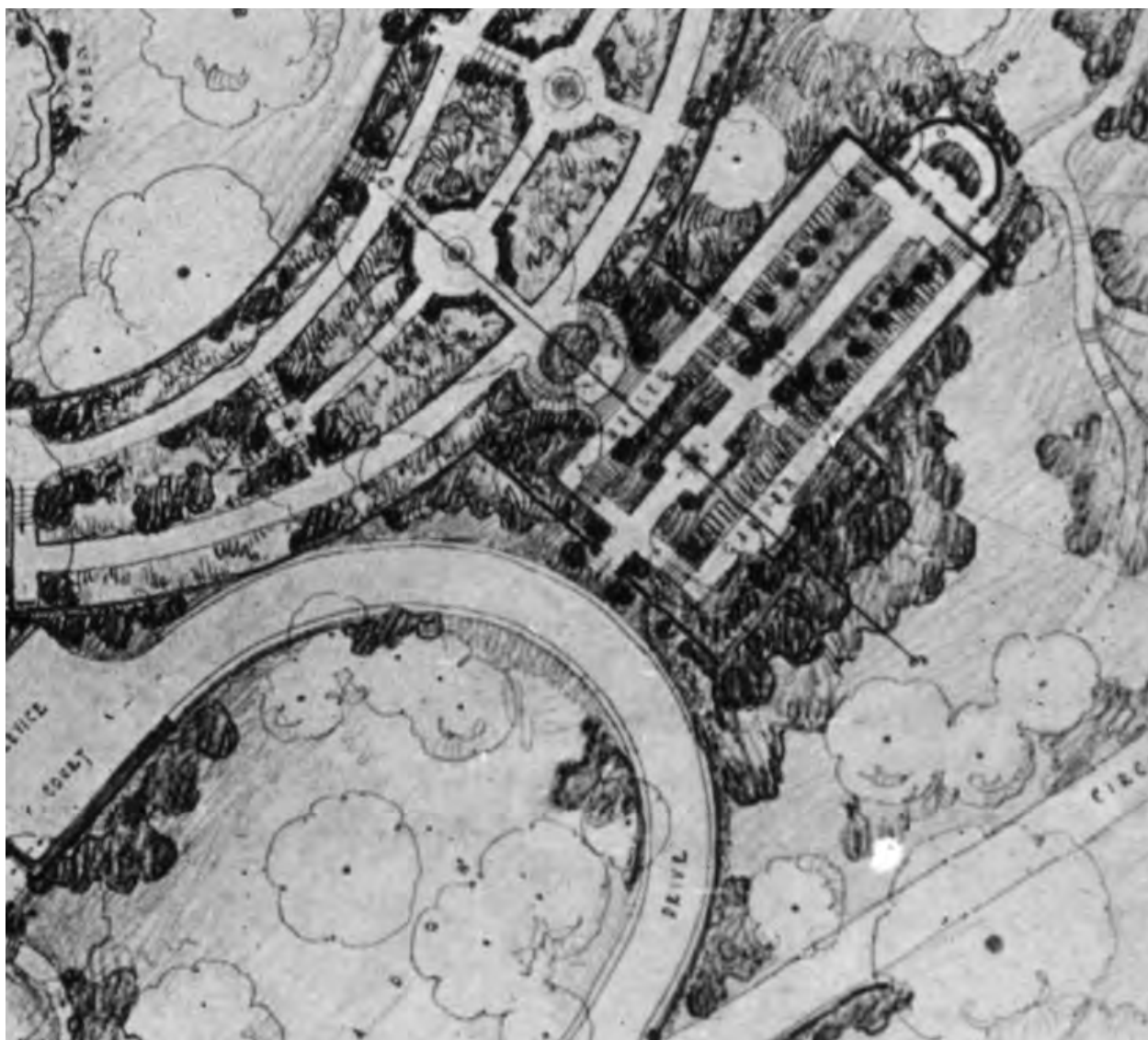


Figure 5.6: Detail of Site Place, Note Designed Axis Marked by Vertical Line

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.7: Mansion in View from Multiple Terraces Away

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

case a Georgian revival country estate, and allowed the historical influence to diffuse into all aspects of the garden's design (Figure 5.8).

The natural topography of the site was embraced and used by the act of terracing the gardens, which mimicked the change in elevation and made the grounds more functional.⁶ This tactic created spaces that could be used for outdoor enjoyment by opening up level planes and establishing vistas which may have gone unnoticed without the manipulation of the earth (Figure 5.9). These terraces were also used to encircle the house, which would sit at the pinnacle of the estate, and allows for an effortless transition from the interior to the outdoors. Each terrace was enclosed by a well-defined boundary of brickwork, stonewalls, or balustrades, and a stairway made for an easy transition to the proceeding level of garden. To amalgamate with the surrounding environment, local materials were used in the construction of the terraces. In the case of Cheekwood, this limestone was quarried on site was used in the cladding of the residence and throughout the grounds as decorative features.

By using terraces, it was evident that Fleming designed each space within the landscape to be unique. He meticulously designed the transitional zones to be conspicuous but not out of place. These transition zones employed stairways, brick arches, wooden trellis, or simply heavily vegetated areas (Figure 5.10). Moving through designated spaces of the garden was equivalent to moving through one outdoor room to another.

To organize elements in his landscape of intertwining spaces, Fleming used axes. In a typical Fleming design, multiple axial garden spaces existed without the use of a common axes. This was accomplished with each principle facade of the primary structure established an axis

⁶ Gayle Sanders Knight. *Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect: Residential Designs, 1905 to 1935*. Cornell University, August 1987. p. 189.



Figure 5.8: Georgian Statuary and Detail Repeating from Mansion to Garden

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.9: Three Terraces on South Side of Gardens

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.10: Heavy Vegetation used as Transition Zone in Garden

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

around which a garden space was built. However, the use of axuality was garden specific and did not govern the entire site.

Because of this use of axuality, the directional line of sight demanded a conclusion.⁷ The termination of the axes could be punctuated by a decorative niche within a garden wall, an ornate stature imported from Europe, or a voluptuous arrangement of vegetation (Figure 5.11). Not all axes, however, were terminated. Some merely trailed off to spotlight a picturesque vista (Figure 5.12).

Through travel, Fleming understood the importance of outdoor statuary, but he never depended on a statue to be used for sheer adornment. The use of statues within Fleming's designs could be cataloged in four events: to create a focal point for a space, to smooth awkward transitions and corners, to reinforce a significance in design, or as described above, to terminate an axes.⁸ Every statue was a genuine antique and appropriate to the residence's architectural period (Figure 5.13). This harmonized the house to landscape and the old to new.

A pivotal characteristic of Bryant Fleming's design was to create harmony with the use of symmetry and balance.⁹ Fleming would balance large masses throughout the design with smaller ones. In example, the primary house was usually counterweighted by auxiliary buildings, such as service quarters, stables, and garages. Formal and informal elements were reconciled to create a patchwork that complimented one another (Figure 5.14). It was through Fleming's senses of symmetry and balance that the design of Cheekwood gains distinction.

⁷ Gayle Sanders Knight. *Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect: Residential Designs, 1905 to 1935*. Cornell University, August 1987, p. 211.

⁸ Ibid, p. 220.

⁹ Ibid. p. 226.



Figure 5.11: Swan Terrace Axis Terminated by Swan Pond



Figure 5.12: Wisteria Arbor Axis extends to Vista

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.13: Decorative Urn Placed with Design

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

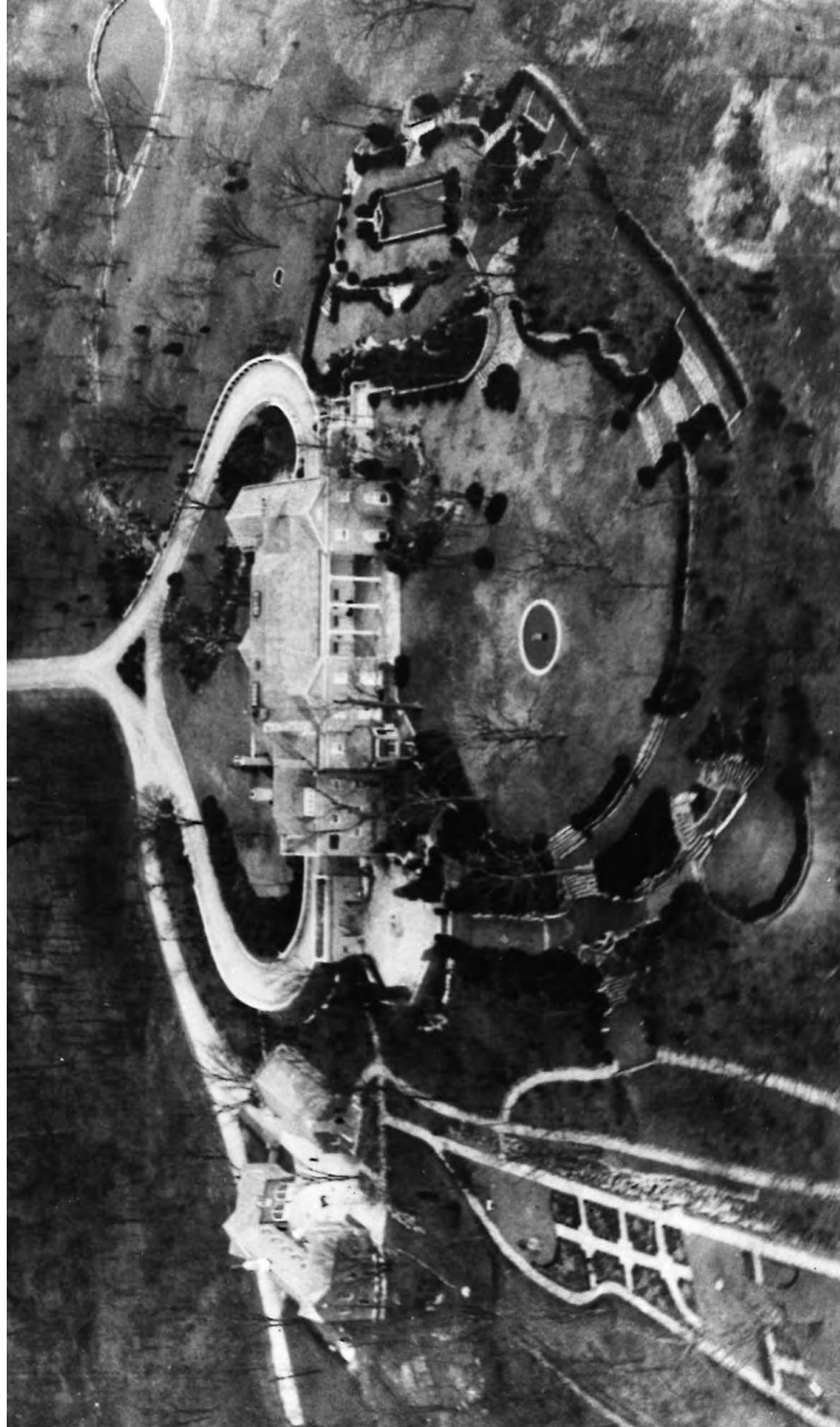


Figure 5.14: Aerial View of Estate, Note the Balanced between Front and Rear Garden and Mansion with Auxiliary Buildings.

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

Auxiliary Buildings

On the estate, several auxiliary buildings worked to support the functions of the mansion. The three primary support buildings included the stables, garage, and gate house. The stables and garage were organized in an operational complex near the mansion and housed the Cheek family's automobiles and horses.

The stables were constructed as a long transverse gable with two terminating cross gables. Overall organization created a "C" shape and established an interior courtyard with the garage.¹⁰ The entire structure was constructed of red brick. The roof, composed of the same asphalt shingle of the house, was adorned with a central cupola. This cupola sat on a square, vented pediment with an octagonal cap (Figure 5.15). The cap was composed of eight arches which extended to a metal roof and was terminated by an ornate weathervane. While this cupola gave the stables a decorative flair, it also allowed ventilation for the hayloft.

The exterior of the stable was repetitious in nature. The courtyard level was comprised of an arcade of arches. These arches were created by three rows of header bricks and had limestone keystones. Stall doors were arranged between each arches on the transverse gable and were setback from the arches' piers (Figure 5.16). This created a covered walkway which could access every stall and also had two doors which accessed either cross gabled section. The cross gabled sections spanned the length of two arches. These sections were associated with the organizational sections of the structure included the tack rooms and service quarters (Figure 5.17). The arches on the right wing were closed off by arched double doors. One of arches on

¹⁰ Cheekwood Archives. Historical photos and original blueprints of auxiliary buildings.



Figure 5.15: Cheekwood Stables with Cupola

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.16: Detail of Stable Layout

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.17: Living Quarters of Stable

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

the left wing was bricked in while the other created a recessed porch. Associated with this wing was a limestone chimney that terminated the cross gable. Above the arches, segmental dormers were located between the two. These dormers gave access to the haylofts of the stables. The stables had six stalls and tack rooms on the courtyard level. Above this level, a hayloft and servants quarters once existed. To complete the stable complex, iron rings were fastened to all of the arches' piers and an ornate limestone watering trough was in close proximity.

Directly across from the stables was the garage. This structure was a two-story frame building, clad in the same red brick of the stable. The two gable-ends of the garage were crow-stepped (Figure 5.18). The facade facing the stables and courtyard had three bays and were symmetrical on a central axis (Figure 5.19). The left and right bay contain two large garage doors on the courtyard level and six-over-six double hung sash window above each garage door. The central bay had two garage doors and was a slightly projecting cross gable capped by brick pilasters. Although the doors reflected this arched shape, in all other aspects, the each bay's doors were the same. Above the central most window was an elliptical oeil-de-boeuf window. The facade facing the mansion was partially excavated, therefore only the upper floor windows could be seen. There were seven windows, which mirrored the placement of the seven front facade windows, and these windows were also six-over-six double hung sash. Off of the left crow-stepped gable, a single-story room projected. This room was lit by four small, two-paned windows. Above the room, a small porch was created with parapet walls as its perimeter and could be accessed by a door on the upper-floor.

The gatehouse is located at the entrance gate of the Cheekwood Estate (Figure 5.20 and 5.21). This structure is a square, two-story frame construction with a limestone veneer. The gate



Figure 5.18: Front Facade of Garage

Source: Author, March 28, 2016



Figure 5.19: Garage During Construction, Note Stepped Gable

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

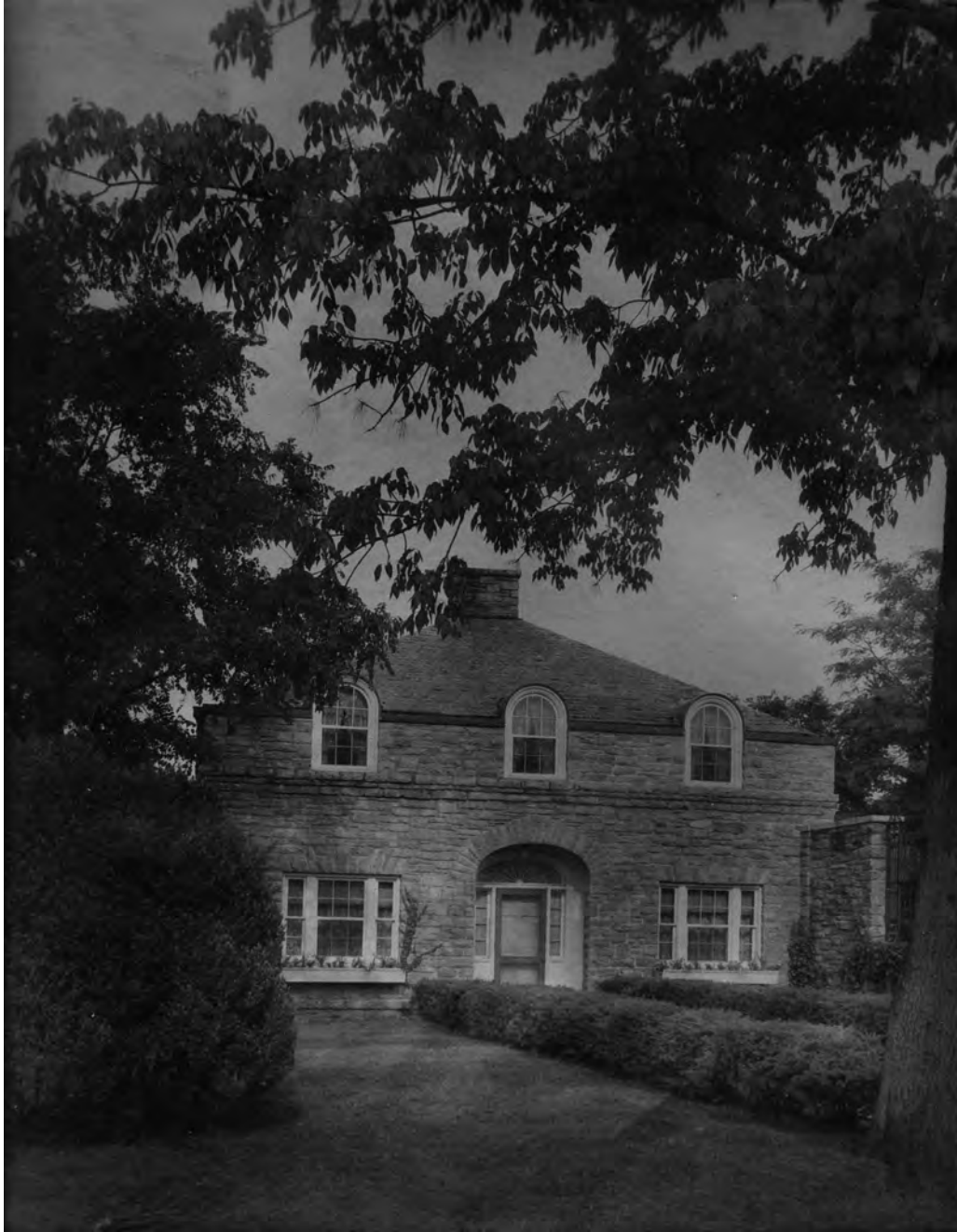


Figure 5.20: Photograph of Gate House

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

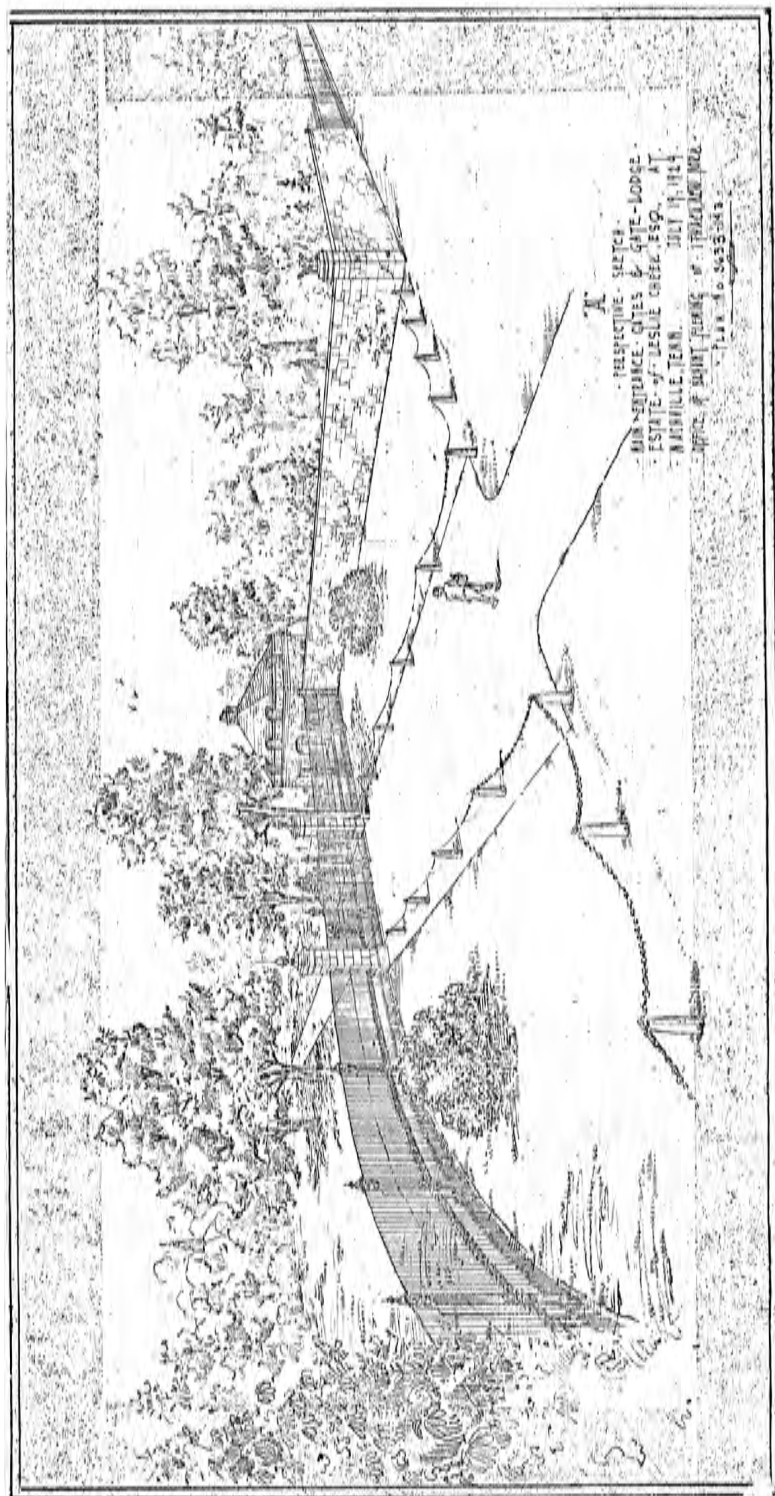


Figure 5.21: Original Sketch of Gate House and Main Entrance Layout

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

house is hip roofed and had a central limestone chimney. The entry way of the gatehouse is recessed under a segmental arch. The door is flanked by four side lights and base panels and capped with a large fanlight. On either side of the entry way, a Chicago window was located. These windows are adorned with a splayed limestone lintel and flower boxes. Segmental dormers surrounded the upper-story. Within each dormer, an arched six-over-six single hung sash window was located. This windows are located directly above the limestone stringcourse. Due to functioning as a gatehouse, the boundary line fence intersected with the building and the gate was in close proximity. The entrance marker pillars had stone base with a matching cap adorned with pineapple statuary (Refer to Figure 5.1). The gates were of ornate wrought iron. While a great majority of the Cheekwood boundary fence was this wrought iron, the portion of the fence immediately adjacent the gatehouse was constructed of matching limestone.

Porches, Drives and Terraces

The porches, drives, and terraces surrounding the house allowed the effortless transition from mansion to gardens. These entities were located directly adjacent to the mansion and were a means of egress to the gardens. They included the Wisteria Arbor, the Loggia, the Arcade, the Motor Court, and the Main Entry.

The Wisteria Arbor was immediately accessible from the first floor living room (Figure 5.22). A glazed double door opened from the living room out onto the expansive limestone porch. The porch was canopied by a large wrought iron arbor on which wisteria was allowed to clamber up. The porch extends out toward the reflection pool and creates the vista allée of Percy Warner park. This porch was enclosed by wrought iron and limestone balustrades and could be



Figure 5.22: Side View of Wisteria Arbor

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

exited through one of the two curved staircases which led down to a flat lawn. The two stairs were flanking members of a large fountain and created the basin for the water collection pool. With a small collection basin located under the Wisteria Arbor, the water could move around the fountain and create two cascades which were collected in a round cement pond on the flat lawn.

The Loggia is accessible by the one of three double doors in the main hall or the double door of the dining room. The Loggia was originally a large opened portico that allowed expansive views of the Swan Terrace and Pool. Soon after construction, however, the Loggia enclosed by large wooden, louvered doors designed by Leslie Jr. This did not alter the function of the outdoor space: it merely made the portico more protected and usable during inclement weather. Light and air were allowed to filter into the Loggia through four circular openings located above the two-story louver doors. Within the Loggia, a small fountain was located across from the dining room on the opposite wall. This was made of terra-cotta and the water was collected in a concrete basin. Surrounding the fountain was an ornate bas-relief molding. This entire arrangement was capped by a circular terra-cotta bas-relief of a male's head in profile (Figure 5.23). The dining room entrance was flanked by monumental pilasters, which support a large entablature and was capped by a broken pediment. Within the broken pediment was a matching terra-cotta bas-relief disk (Figure 5.24). Instead of a male figure, however, this bas relief captures a female's profile.

The Arcade acted as a covered transition zone from the Motor Court to the service quarters of the mansion. With access under the port-cochere, the Arcade was a long, breezeway created by five arches with two sets of four concrete steps. At the end of this opened corridor was a niche which housed a stone soldier statue with spear and shield.



Figure 5.23: Interior Detail of South Side Loggia



Figure 5.24: Interior Detail of North Side of Loggia

Source: Author, March 28, 2015

The Motor Court was also accessed through the large limestone port-cochere (Figure 5.25). The court worked as a circular drive and a large decorative water feature was located in its center. This water feature was a large column which supported an ornate urn. On the pediment of the column, a water spout was located. This spout filled the circular limestone basin with water. The basin, although not being of substantial height, could be reach by three winding steps (Figure 5.26). The Motor Court could be exited through through the service stairs, or through two large ornate gates lead to trails accessing the cutting gardening and bridle trails. Although the cutting gardening no longer exists, the present gardens resemble the historic gardens and include a sculptural walking trail and infamous boxwoods.

The Main Entry was accessed through a circular drive of a much grander scale than the Motor Court. Instead of winding around small statuary, the Main Entry encircled an entire front lawn (Figure 5.27). The entry was constructed of asphalt with flanking limestone culverts and was lined with boxwoods. At the entry of the house, a limestone wall separated the drive from the front garden as their was dramatic change in grade from the drive to the lawn beyond. A small overlook was created in front of the Palladian window to allow a viewing area from the mansion to the gardens below.

Original Gardens

Little documentation exists describing the original gardens of the Cheekwood Estate, with the exception of the few photos taken by the Cheek family. These records, however, provide invaluable information on Cheekwood's past. Many of the pictures were collected from



Figure 5.25: Motor Court and Port-Cochere



Figure 5.26: Motor Court Connection to Gardens

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.27: Main Entry to Mansion

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

the family's scrapbook and only represent the nature of the landscape closest to the mansion, drives, garage, and stable complex (as these structures were the primary subjects in the photos), or snapshots of different garden features have been taken with little context to provide the location of the subject material.

The Swan Terrace and Pool were probably the most photographed section of the estate, as this was the view immediately from the rear of the mansion. This terrace was an expansive, circular lawn crowned with a pool at the lawn's epicenter (Figure 5.28). This lawn was aptly named the Swan Terrace for the lead swan fountain which adorned the pool and sent jets of water into the air with a dramatic effect. The pool represented the highest elevation of the Cheekwood estate's water features, and from this fountain, the water flowed through the man-made brooks to the three pools south of the mansion, now known as the Robinson Family Water Garden.

Directly off the Swan Terrace, the Petite Swan Garden was located. This garden consisted of a babbling brook with a small swan fountain as its centerpiece (Figure 5.29). This section of man-made stream could be heard and enjoyed in the Library and was component of the system of streams and fountains designed by Fleming, which created congruence throughout the landscape. The design of the garden's paths were to follow alongside the brook, and ultimately reached another terrace and formalized section of garden.

At the terrace below the Wisteria Arbor, two limestone curved steps with ornate wrought iron balusters gave access to the Reflection Pool. The Reflection Pool was a long rectangular basin constructed of the same rough hewn stone lined the basin (Figure 5.30). This pool was capped by two women statues, who represented "Urania" the Muse of Astronomy holding a globe and compass, and "Thalia" Muse of Comedy clutching a mask and smiling.



Figure 5.28: Swan Pool and Terrace Prior to Loggia Reconstruction

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.29: The Petit Swan Garden, Note Small Swan Water Feature in Background

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.30: Reflection Pool

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

These two statues formalized the vista experienced from the Wisteria Garden, the allée of Percy Warner Park.¹¹ Both statues had small water spouts on their pediments that fed the pool and allowed for a continuous flow of fresh water in the basin for the aquatic plant life. Around the perimeter of the Reflection Pool, young boxwoods were planted. This terrace was succeeded by a second terrace that was less manicured and would eventually lead to wooded areas and the rock quarries used for the estate's limestone.

The Grotto was positioned on the terrace immediately below the Wisteria Arbor. This was designed with a more natural aesthetic, as the basin was amorphous in shape and heavy vegetation of Boxwoods and Cyprus flanked the Grotto (Figure 5.31). The backdrop to the Grotto was an arched cavern that was carved into the upper-terrace's limestone wall. To create a balance with this "natural" pond, the cavern was adorned with rubble limestone voussoirs and an ashlar limestone keystone. This arrangement was capped by the upper-terrace balustrade to give the illusion that the designed architecture was growing out of the site. This idea was reinforced by the placement of statuary. The statue by the Grotto is *La Baigneuse aux Cheveux Lisses* circa 1757.

The Front Lawn set the stage for the house. The landscape was designed for the boxwoods in the foreground to be pruned and shaped. As the boxwoods extended towards the house, they became fuller, taller, and less manicured. By manipulating the vegetation of the Front Lawn, this fortified the appearance that mansion had grown out of this hilltop, in this natural setting.

¹¹ Cheekwood Archives. *Cheekwood Garden Guide*. Unpublished, 2004. p. 24.



Figure 5.31: Grotto

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

Around the stables, the landscape was designed for function as well as fashion. A paddock and an exercise ring for horses were located just outside the garage and stable complex.¹² The exercise ring was surrounded by vegetation and was designed to seem as if the boxwoods had naturally grown into a circular clearing.

Another important original aspect to the Cheekwood estate was the Pet Cemetery. The Cheeks were obvious animal lovers as a number of their pets could be found on the pages of the family scrapbooks. Ten formal tombstones placed in celebration of the lives of their beloved pets existed on the Cheekwood Estate (Figure 5.32). With blessing from Huldah, the tombstones were moved from their original location and placed beyond the stables.¹³

The gardens between the mansion and the stable complex were perhaps the most manicured. This was the location of the Parterre, and the boxwoods were more meticulously trimmed (Figure 5.33).¹⁴ This section of garden included many series of steps and paths that would open up to great vistas or ornate, monumental statuary. It was the most labor intensive segments of the estate as it called for continuous maintenance and trimming. Even the planting of these boxwoods was not an easy task. Explosives were needed to blast holes in the limestone bedrock to create spaces large enough for the placement and growth of the plants.¹⁵

The Robinson Family Water Garden was an original feature to the Cheekwood Estate, although it was never depicted on Bryant Fleming's site plan. This water garden was the lowest

¹² Bryant Fleming. *Cheekwood Diagram*. Cheekwood Archives, 1929. Technical site plan.

¹³ Cheekwood Archives. Letter from Huldah Sharp to Bob Brackman, September 10, 1996.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Leslie Cheek Jr. *Unpublished Manuscript*. Cheekwood Archives, 1929.



Figure 5.32: Relocated Pet Cemetery

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.33: The Parterre, the Most Formal Aspect of the Original Garden

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

point of Fleming's stream system and consisted of seven levels of ponds.¹⁶ These gardens were constructed same limestone that lined the other water features on the estate and were arranged as the last collection point from the system of streams and fountains throughout the estate (Figure 5.34). Within the original design, this was the last designed terrace, and the remaining gardens were considered opened "Glens" or "Meadows" which would eventually evolve into the wild, unkept forest.

Alterations

The transformation of the Cheekwood estate into the Cheekwood Botanical Gardens called for a reinterpretation and a reconfiguring of the original estate's design. Instead of acting as a private estate, the landscape would have to be manipulated to host a multitude of new patrons with varying backgrounds, abilities, and interests. The grounds had to ensure each visitor would have a safe and stimulating experience.

When the transformation occurred, the focus of the gardens shifted from highlighting the mansion to accentuating the prominence of the landscape itself. The seven acres surrounding the mansion were nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, and many of the terraces, limestone stairs, water features, statuary, and planting schemes have remained fairly constant with what is believed to be the original design. This left the remaining 48 acres free to be reinterpreted and transformed into imaginative and complex gardens.¹⁷ Since Cheekwood's transformation, gardens such as the Shomu-En (the Japanese Garden), the Howe Wildflower

¹⁶ Cheekwood Archives. *Cheekwood Garden Guide*. Unpublished, 2004. p. 33.

¹⁷ Cheekwood Archives. *Cheekwood Garden Guide*. Unpublished, 2004. p. 33.

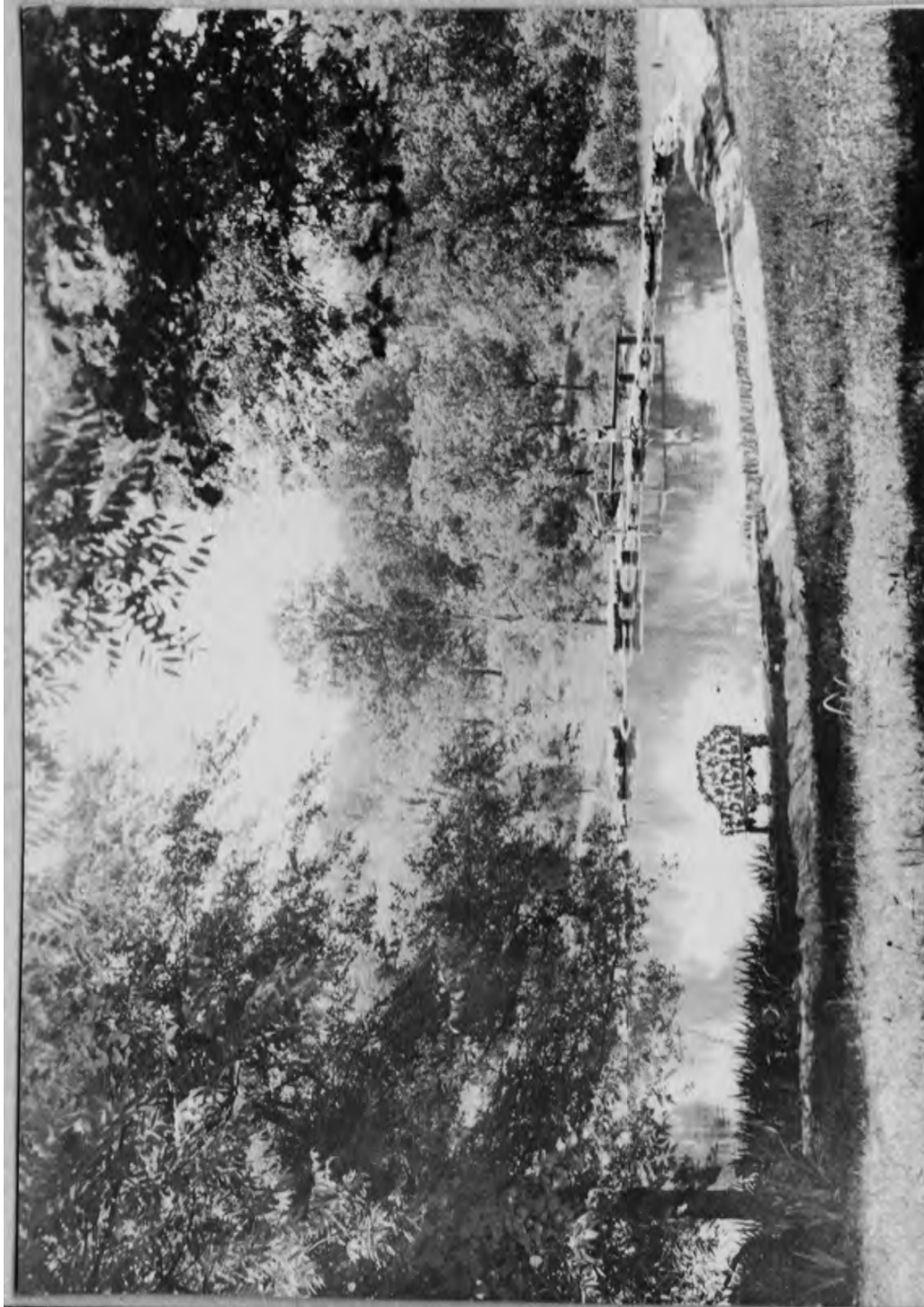


Figure 5.34: Part of the Original Pond System

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

Garden, the Burr Terrace Garden, the Willis Perennial Garden, the Turner Seasons Garden, the Herb Study Garden, the Carell Dogwood Garden, Robertson Ellis Color Garden, and the Sigourney Cheek Literary Garden have been installed. To the visitor experience, a number of support buildings were added, the Reception Center, the Botanical Hall, and the Frist Learning Center are of the most well known structural additions. (Figure 5.35).

The Shomu-En Garden can be seen from the Robertson Ellis Color Garden (Figure 5.36). This garden, like many Japanese gardens, has a very limited color palette when juxtaposed with the previous garden. Shomu-En can be translated to “pine-mist.” The garden gets its name from the puffy flower heads of the smoke trees, which have been manicured to remain low. The puffy heads were chosen, as they look remarkable similar to fog rising from the ground, a scene common in the Tennessee valleys. The entrance gate is brings visitors through a crooked path where visitors can enjoy the bamboo grove, Japanese pavilion, and viewing garden.

The Howe Garden was originally known as “Wildings” and was located in East Nashville. This garden was created and cared for by Cora B. Howe. This garden took many years for Mrs. Howe to develop, and after many years of cultivation, include massive boulders, birdbaths, and native plants which could be used as housing for birds and animals. The “Wildings” garden was moved to Cheekwood in 1968 (Figure 5.37). During this time, the stone tollhouse and rock walls were dismantled and reconstructed on the estate. Several of the original birdbaths and wrought iron decorative pieces also made the relocation. In keeping with the spirit of the “Wildings,” the Howe Garden features mainly native plants.

The Burr Terrace Garden was installed in 1972 (Figure 5.8). This garden was influenced by what is considered the oldest surviving botanical garden in the world. The garden

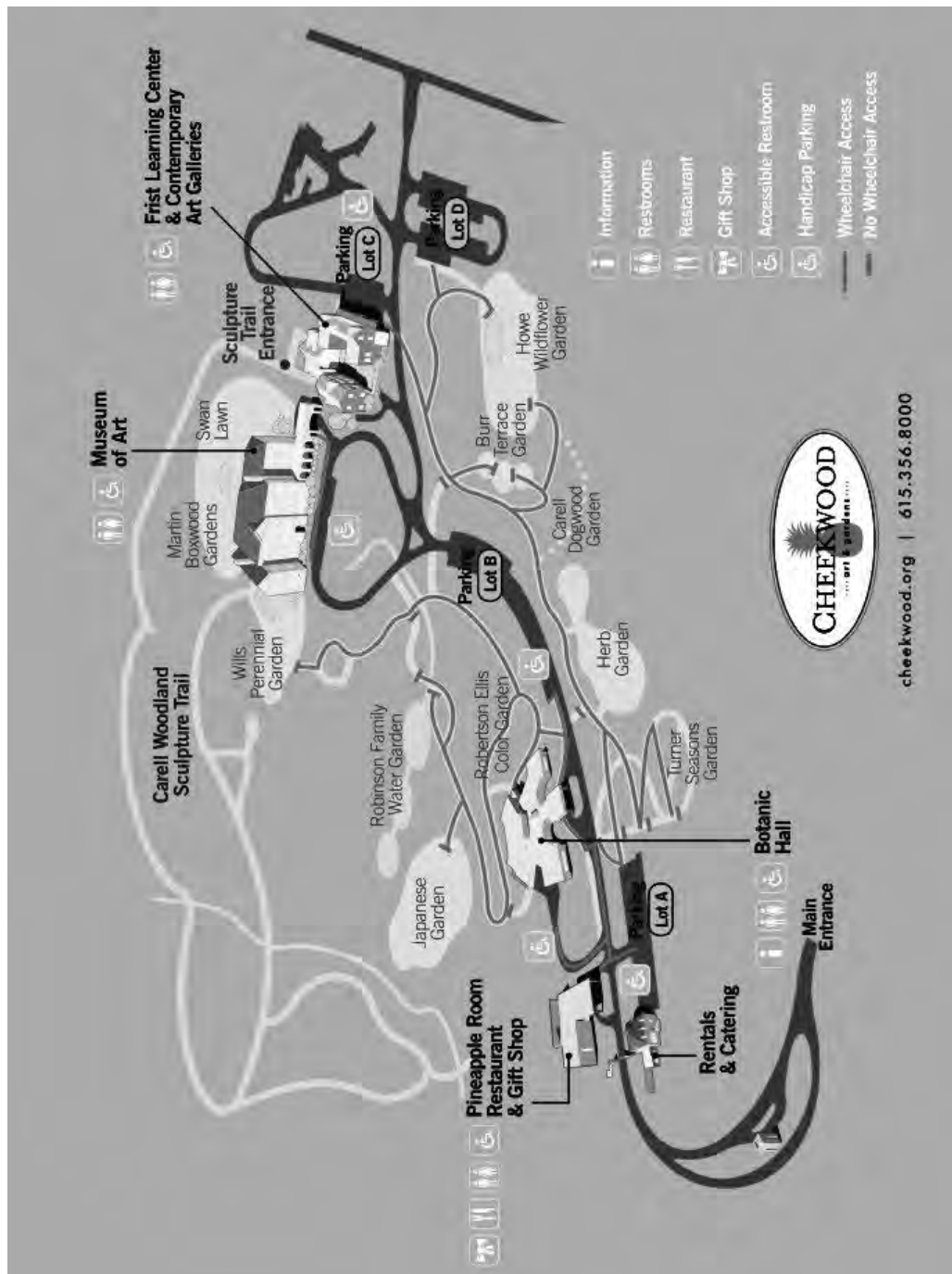


Figure 5.35: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum Grounds Map

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.36: The Shomu-En Garden

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives



Figure 5.37: Cora B. Howe Sitting in Front of Potting Shed

Source: Nina Cardona. *Cheekwood Garden has Roots in East Nashville*. Nashville Public Radio, April 19, 2012



Figure 5.38: Burr Terrace Garden

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

was located in Padua, Italy, and built in 1542. This garden strove to please all the senses. Water features, as well as highly fragrant plants with unusual textures were cultivated there. Much like the Padua Garden, the Burr Terrace Garden works of the basic design of hardscapes, including walls, changing slope, and inclusion of water features and statuary, and softscapes, encompassing the vegetation. This was designed to be in perpetual motion, as colorful perennials changed through spring to fall. These plants were predominately white, yellow, pink, and blue, with intriguing textures and fragrances. Because of these qualifications, unusual cultivars can be experienced in the garden.

The Willis Perennial Garden was created in 1981 and dedicated to Jesse E. Willis, a local iris hybridizer, businessman, and poet of the infamous group, “the Fugitives,” which originated in Nashville, Tennessee (Figure 5.39). This garden is located on a west-facing slope, which allows for ample sun needed by the perennials. These flowers are changed seasonally, and a wrought iron gazebo is located within the gardens for patrons to sit and enjoy the views.

The Carell Dogwood Garden was installed between the Daffodil Garden and Burr Garden in 1982 (Figure 5.40). This was designed to be a linear garden with three vertical layers of vegetation. At ground level, hostas, hydrangeas, and other shade loving ground cover were planted. Above these bushes, the dogwoods would act as an intermediate level. Although the dogwoods were surmounted in height by larger trees, it only reinforced their beauty. Within the garden, a gazebo is located where small classes or groups can gather, immersed in the dogwood canopy.

The Herb Study Garden was created in 1983, and was devoted to the study and evaluation of herbal plants (Figure 5.41). Attempts were made to discover which herbal plants faired best in



Figure 5.39: Willis Perennial Garden

Source: Article by Sandy Nelson. Photographs by Jessica Lorren. *Taking Vows January 2014—
Irion and Yungfleisch*. NFocus, January 3, 1014.

More than 500 people registered for the Richland Creek Run on Saturday, April 5, the seventh annual event to benefit the non-profit Greenways for Nashville. Shawn Fehr (30:00) and Leah Sawyer (31:21) led the way in the 5-mile course for men and women runners. - photo by Jenny Upchurch

Cheekwood honored for dogwood trees

Just in time for spring, Cheekwood botanical garden's treasured dogwood collection has been granted membership in the North American Plant Collection Consortium (NAPCC), making it the first NAPCC Collection in Tennessee. It is also the first dogwood collection in North America to be recognized by the organization.

This places the Belle Meade garden among a prestigious group of 62 gardens and arboreta across the U.S. committed to the conservation and care of specific plant collections.

Jane O. MacLeod, President and CEO of Cheekwood said this is "another important step in growing Cheekwood's national reputation as one of the country's most beautiful gardens."

At its Cheekwood currently exhibits 14 species native to both North America and Asia that thrive in Middle Tennessee's climate. The highlight of the collection are the 23 cultivated varieties of flowering dogwood, *Cornus florida*.

Now is the perfect time to enjoy the trees. Cheekwood's garden staff anticipates flowering to start this third week in April. Typically the native dogwood trees begin flowering the second to third week but this year's chilly spring has delayed them a bit. The evergreen Chinese dogwoods will bloom in early June.

Cheekwood's dogwood collection dates back three decades to 1982, when Mr. and Mrs. Monroe Carell Jr. donated the original collection of dogwoods to the botanical garden. Most of Cheekwood's flowering dogwoods can be found in the Carell Dogwood Garden, and visitors will find dogwoods in other locations on the grounds as well — all 343 specimens on the Cheekwood estate are considered to be part of the NAPCC-certified collection.

Visitors to the botanical garden and art museum can experience the beauty of the dogwoods and learn more about the organization's recent accolades on a Self-Guided Arboretum Tour, available at Visitor Services.

The dogwood is a spring signature across the mid-South, with the vibrant whites and pinks of the native flowering dogwood appearing in gardens, courtyards and parks across the region.

Cheekwood has special activities all this month for Cheekwood in Bloom, including music and art and children's activities each Saturday and Sunday. For information, go to cheekwood.org or call 615-396-8000.

Garden staff at Cheekwood Museum and Botanical Gardens expect dogwoods to begin flowering now and continue through June.

Figure 5.40: Newspaper Article Highlighting Cheekwood's Dogwood Collection

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives, Article from West Meade

News, April 11, 2013.



Figure 5.41: Herb Study Garden

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

Middle Tennessee and could survive through the hot summers and cold winters. This garden was expanded and redesigned in 2001. This plan included seven distinct gardens and included herbs selected for culinary uses, texture, fragrance, and historical usage by colonist and Native Americans. This garden's paths culminated in an amphitheater which has grassy terraces for seating.

The Robertson Ellis Color Garden, completed in 1998, surrounds the Botanical Hall (Figure 5.42). This garden includes several Crape-Myrtles, azaleas, yew and barberry. These trees and bushes add height and color to the garden which is dominated in the spring by thousands of blossoming tulips. This garden's trademark includes a long walk under eight ornate wrought iron arches. These arches, sometimes used for climbing plants, creates an axial connection with a large urn, nodding to the original design techniques of Cheek residence.

Similar to the Willis Perennial Garden, the Turner Season Garden is planted with season specific flowers to create a colored mosaic of flowers throughout the year (Figure 5.43). Opened in 1999, the garden was designed to be entered through parking area where the visitors could travel down the sloping ground and enter into four different gardens flanked by the earlier Daffodil Garden. Each of these gardens were designed to represent a season. To reinforce this idea, a decorative mosaic rain basin created by Jennifer Strachan personified the season and specific flowers were planted. Engraved stones featuring local children's poetry could be found in the spring, summer, fall, and winter gardens, respectively.

One of the newest additions to the property includes the Sigourney Cheek Literary Garden. This garden was established in 2012, and the garden was created to celebrate the life of Sigourney Cheek and literature. This area allows visitors the chance to seek solace on the



Figure 5.42: Robertson Ellis Color Garden

Source: Author, March 18, 2016



Figure 5.43: Turner Season Garden featuring Autumn Decorations

Source: Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art Archives

Cheekwood grounds. This garden creates an amphitheater setting designed to host poetry and book readings where listeners can enjoy the readings while looking out to the beautiful vista of Tennessee's rolling hills (Figure 5.44).

These gardens demand much care and attention from not only the gardeners but the visitors. With 55 acres of ground to cover, Cheekwood was in need of places of respite for their guests. The Botanical Hall was built in 1970 and designed by Robinson Neil Bass (Figure 5.45). This building provided facilities for flower shows, exhibits, workshops, musical presentations, and the annual Trees of Christmas event. This hall also housed the horticultural staff for the Cheekwood grounds, as well as the estate's botanical library. In 1997, the Reception Center was created. This was the first building the visitors would arrive at when visiting the grounds (Figure 5.46). Inside, patrons could dine at the Pineapple Room Restaurant or visit the Garden Shop. To allow for better educational experience when visiting Cheekwood, the Frist Learning Center was developed. In 1999, the garage and stable complex was converted into a large art compound. Although the exterior of the garage and stables were left unchanged, the two buildings were conjoined by a modern glass atrium (Figure 5.47). This room acted as a lobby, and guest could visit the multiple galleries and studios now associated with the complex.

Although the grounds have gone through considerable change since their first design, the gardens and mansion still act in unison with one another. This is especially seen when large sculptors use the grounds as exhibition space. When world renown artist such as Chihuly or Plensa came to Cheekwood, the distinction between the mansion acting solely as an art museum or the grounds as botanical garden were completely obliterated. Both the grounds and mansion became the backdrop for awe-inspiring creations, as the grounds could accommodate

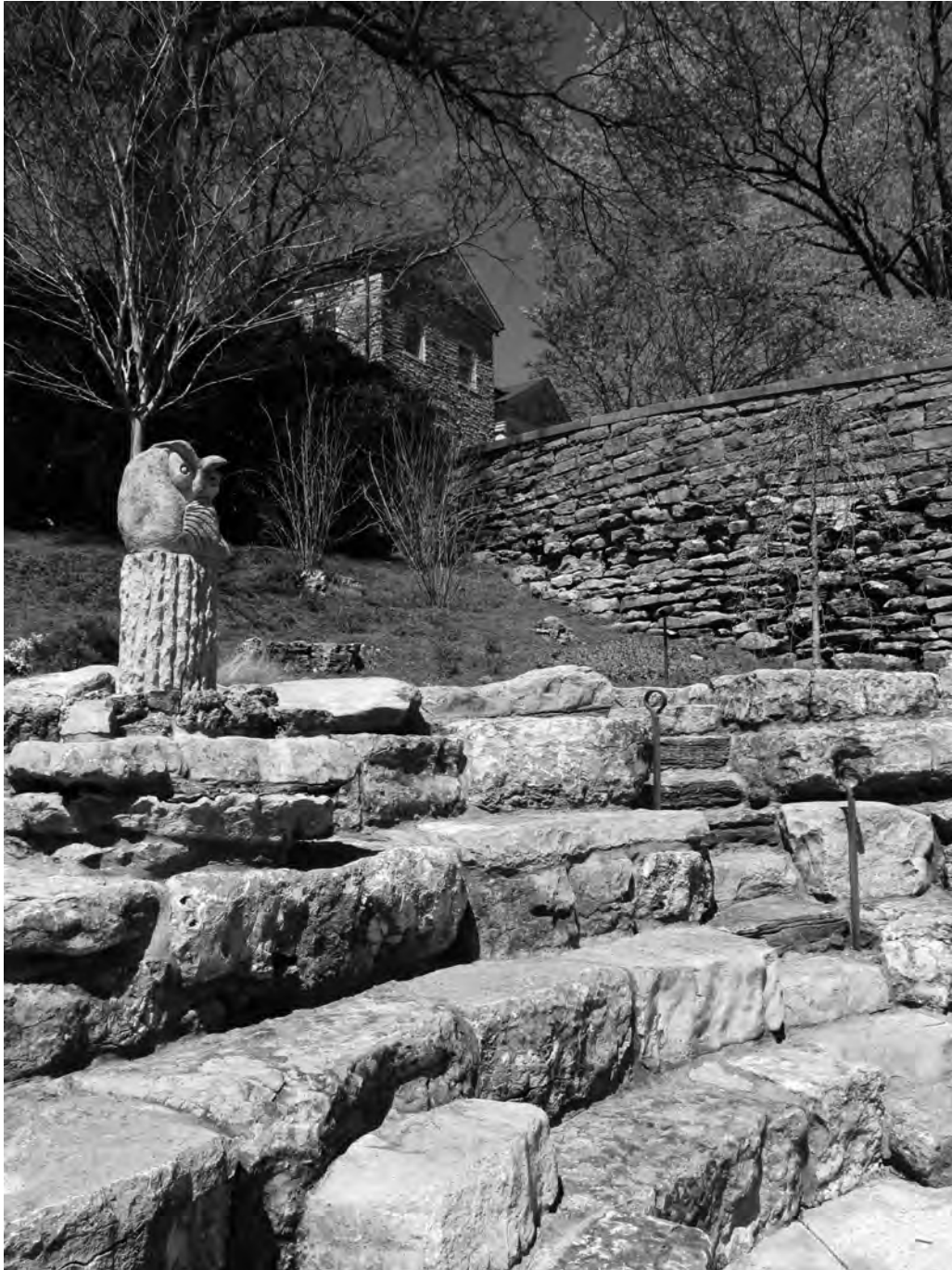


Figure 5.44: Sigourney Cheek Literary Garden

Source: Author, March 18, 2016



Figure 5.45: Cheekwood Botanical Hall

Source: Author, March 18, 2016



Figure 5.46: Cheekwood Reception Center

Source: Author, March 18, 2016



Figure 5.47: Cheekwood Frist Learning Center

Source: Author, March 18, 2016

monumental sculptures, the mansion could house smaller, more delicate pieces created by the artist (Figure 5.48). Since the beginning, it has been this relationship of interior interactions with exterior spaces and visa versa that has created such an exceptional atmosphere at Cheekwood. The following chapter will address how continuous efforts in preservation are made on both the residence and the grounds to ensure that this Tennessee treasure can exist for present and future generations while maintaining a respect for the past.



Figure 5.48: Cheekwood Garden Decorative Elements with Art Installation in Background

Source: Author, March 18, 2016

CHAPTER VI:

THE PRESERVATION

Preservation is prudent for a number of reasons. A structure or object that possesses immediate usefulness, economic feasibility, social or personal significance, aesthetic importance, or spiritual value increases the argument for its protection.¹ Cheekwood would not have prevailed without efforts put towards its preservation. While maintenance of the property ensured a prolongation of the County Estate's existence, it was the perpetuation of its usefulness that secured its survival. Cheekwood architect, Bryant Fleming, agreed. In his letter to Phil Kerrigan, designer of the many cast iron features on the estate, Fleming expressed his aspirations for the estate:

My dear Phil—

Thanks for your letter of the 14th. I have been busy or would have answered sooner. The clipping is interesting, and I am pleased that Huldah has been given Cheekwood. She is a fine girl and I hope that she can retain it and keep it in good shape. I did not know of her marriage before this. I hope that he is a fine fellow—I very much doubted if she would ever marry. Who is Walter Sharp—a local fellow? I presume that Huldah is living at Cheekwood. I wish however that the estate could have gone to the State as a Governors Home. This would have protected it for all time. It is too good to be held by a private individual.

B.F.²

Fleming believed that by converting Cheekwood into the Governor's Mansion, the estate's fate would be forever protected. The estate deemed "too good to be held by a private individual"

¹ Michael Tomlan. *Historic Preservation: Caring for Our Expanding Legacy*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015. p. iv.

² Cheekwood Archives. Boxwood Anthology. Unpublished, 2010.

needed a use whereby the whole Nashville community could enjoy it. One could argue that comparatively few people have gotten the opportunity to appreciate the property were it given to Tennessee government. By converting the estate into a museum and botanical garden, by contrast, Cheekwood continues to be an important entity, open to the lives of Nashville residents, Tennesseans, and the greater world.

This rehabilitation, however, caused many changes within the interior of the mansion. The discussion that follows addresses the past, present, and possible future efforts, attempting to insure that the estate maintains its high degree of authenticity while making the necessary changes to continue its operations as a public museum.

Past Preservation of the Mansion

The mansion was a mere thirty years old when it was converted into an art institution. While the property has always been revered for its exceptional design, the house was not considered “historic” at the time of conversion and the preservation of the its interior was not a priority for the Cheekwood owners. Granted, the transformation occurred six years prior to the passing of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and the primary concern was establishing a Fine Arts institution not creating a house museum.

The house was retrofitted into a museum that highlighted the art collections in 1960. While the interiors maintained most of their architectural details (trim, molding, flooring, etc), they were whitewashed and left devoid of any personal effects of the Cheeks. Many of the original interior space’s paintings and finishes were lost over the years to accommodate these efforts. In one particularly instance, the hand painted ceiling of Leslie Jr.’s study was nearly lost

when a maintenance worker on the estate misunderstood which sections of the mansion needed painting.³ To this day, a corner of the study has a large black patch of ceiling where the incident occurred.

Although a majority of the house retains much of its architectural detail, the service wing of the property has been completely renovated. The Stalworth Gallery addition provided much needed museum operational space. It was this addition, however, that completely removed the interior of the service wing of the mansion. These compartmentalized rooms, including servants rooms, pantries, the kitchen, laundry facilities, etc, were too small to work as gallery space and museum storage. This addition was completed in 1981 and was the first and only time in Cheekwood's history that the exterior of the mansion had been significantly altered.

While Cheekwood is currently experiencing a new trend in its preservation efforts, it is not the first time in the estate's history that restoration has occurred. In the 1990s, Cheekwood undertook a large campaign to raise funds to restore many of the original interiors of the mansion, particularly on the ground and first floor.⁴ The substantial changes were not made to the second floor as they were still acting as contemporary gallery space. These restorations brought the interior to its general appearance at the time the mansion acted as the Cheek's residence, and further alterations were made to update the interior, bringing it up to profession museum standards and improving its access for Cheekwood's patrons. This renovation was opened to the public on August 29, 1999.

³ Interview with Leslie Jones, Curator of Decorative Arts and Historic Interpretation of Cheekwood. March 28, 2016, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁴ *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History & Culture*. Nashville, Tenn. Tennessee Historical Society, p. 237.

Although they were needed for the access, comfort, and safety of Cheekwood patrons, the updates have altered the estate. In the recent initiative to reconnect with the past, these updates will have to be addressed as the museum attempts to restore rooms to their original appearance when the first residents, Mabel and Leslie Cheek, lived on the property.⁵ Assisted by \$1-million dollars from the Andrea Waitt Carlton Family Foundation and Bill Andrews, Cheekwood will take two years to complete this restoration. It will be opened to the public in 2017.

Past Preservation of the Grounds

The conservation of the grounds poses an interesting set of problems for the past, present and future caretakers of Cheekwood. Excluding a site plan of the grounds immediately around the mansion and a few photographs, there were no true records left behind from the original owners or designer. Many of the decisions made within the grounds were, are, and will be based on conjecture, partiality, and practicality.

When the estate was converted into a public museum and gardens, the physical infrastructure, limestone steps, fountains, etc, acted as a template for what the museum operators believed to be the original design.⁶ These features substantiated what was to be deemed the historic gardens and created a permanency of the ground's configuration. This permanent footprint was validated when the museum happened upon the original Fleming site plan. The site plan was found within the archives, and a majority of their beliefs were then transformed into facts.

⁵ Jessica Bliss. "Cheekwood to Reveal Secrets, Restore Origins." *The Tennessean*, March 21, 2015.

⁶ Interview with Sarah Lowe, Botanical Garden and Horticultural Manager of Cheekwood. March 28, 2016, Nashville, Tennessee.

While the limestone steps, terraces, and water features have remained character defining features of the grounds, the treatment of these entities has been significantly reshaped and redefined with each new Cheekwood committee, CEO, or garden manager. The subtle changes of treatment, brought on by the opinions of each new wave of leadership or made in the name of upkeep and repair, transformed Cheekwood from private residence to public gardens.

In the creation of a botanical garden, events such as the relocation of the Pet Cemetery or ornamental garden statues, the redesigning of flower beds, or the repair of the water features were considered small alterations on the fifty-five acres, as they did not alter the original skeleton of the garden and were made to create a “more cohesive” experience for the patrons of the gardens. Because an innumerable amount of changes of the same nature occurred, the material in the archives does not provide a complete record of the evolution of the estate, and since the 1960s, there has been little record of these minor changes. Unfortunately, what is considered inconsequential changes evolve into substantial alterations over time.

This has been particularly problematic for current conservators as the new trend at Cheekwood is the reinterpretation of the Cheek’s lives at the estate. Originally, the Cheek property was considered a green garden as a majority of the vegetation was boxwoods. Present day Cheekwood is known for its one hundred thousand plus bulbs planted and bloomed annually. Respecting the current memory of the estate while addressing the Cheek’s private yard is a balancing act that should be confronted and could have been an easier burden with more complete records.

While balancing past and present memory was important, upkeep of the estate continues to be the primary concern. Without property maintenance, the estate would fall into disrepair

and become unusable to patrons. If Cheekwood were to be deemed inaccessible, the fate of the estate would immediately become uncertain. As it was the new-found use that secured Cheekwood's existence, and so alterations of the gardens were inevitable.

In addition, because the original gardens were never intended to facilitate public enjoyment, major changes have occurred in the name of maintenance and safety. At times, these endeavors were counter productive to the preservation of the original Fleming design. Other times, the efforted worked to mutual benefit.

For example, alterations occurred and obliterated original sections of the gardens. The parterre, which was once the most formal garden on the estate, was removed in the 1990s.⁷ After decades of neglect and under utilization, Cheekwood finally removed the overgrown cutting garden to make an expansive lawn which had the ability to host 300 seated guests and could rented out for a number of occasions. Although the parterre was not practical for the museum, the removal of the garden allowed the space to become functional entity for Cheekwood once more.

At other times, preservation of the original garden and maintenance was a single effort. This was seen within infamous boxwoods and vistas of Cheekwood. As the foliage of the estate matured, their canopy concealed many of the views around the gardens and mansion and rendered paths unnavigable. Because pruning of a boxwood and other greenery is a time sensitive endeavor, it has taken an army of gardeners to keep the estate functional for patrons. Due to the lack of records on what Fleming or the Cheeks intended for the mature gardens, conjectures are made to decide how the shrubby needs to be trimmed. It was clear, however,

⁷ Interview with Sarah Lowe, Botanical Garden and Horticultural Manager of Cheekwood. March 28, 2016, Nashville, Tennessee.

from old photographs that certain vistas were paramount in the design. Luckily for Cheekwood, a vast majority of these vistas, a pivotal feature for a Country Estate, have been preserved. The lack of high-rise develop around the estate are a result of its close proximity to parks and golf courses. These vistas merely called for annual trimming to ensure visibility. In one particular vista, however, an apartment complex has risen into view. Since the apartment building's construction, the vista has been allowed to grow up to create the illusion that Cheekwood is in the middle of relatively uninhabited land. The question does rise if this should be trimmed to the original views or is the visual isolation of the estate more important. A particularly large effort to restore the grounds to their original appearance coincided with the interior restoration of the 1990s.⁸

Some aspects of the estate call for maintenance and reinterpretation for the better use of grounds. Although Cheekwood applauds Fleming on the ingenuity of his stream design, the water features on the estate demand an exorbitant amount of care. Major renovations have occurred on nearly every section of the streams and ponds in the designed limestone stream bed, and today, nearly all of the water features have concrete linings covered by the original limestone acting as a veneer. While many of the features closely resemble the original arrangements, there have been some alterations made for the convenience of the grounds keepers. This can be seen at the Reflection Pool. Instead of the limestone finish, patrons find a refined design of finished concrete.

For convenience sake, the streams that were once an interconnected water feature have been divided, and today, they are operated and controlled by separate pumps. This not only cuts

⁸ Interview with Sarah Lowe, Botanical Garden and Horticultural Manager of Cheekwood. March 28, 2016, Nashville, Tennessee.

down on the amount of dependency on one pump, it also lessens the amount of investigation needed to find the source of the problem if one were to arise. While there is less of a question of where the water feature is failing, it does not stop the water levels from randomly dropping. Because of the patrons' intimate access with these designed streams, there is the concern of children playing in the streams and creating dams. This create complications as it directly alters water levels throughout the streams and can also lead to major pump impairment.

Balancing preservation with safety is also a concern of Cheekwood. While the streams offer one set of problems, they are not the only ones that arise by the increase of public use. Because the grounds were intended to used privately, less thought went into the safety features of the grounds.

The limestone steps pose the most hazardous of the design features. Their rugged appearance was intentional, as Fleming wanted the steps to seem as if they occurred naturally within the landscape. Consequently, less effort was put into the functionality of the stairs. This presents a problem for contemporary Cheekwood as some patrons with limited mobility have difficulty traversing these character defining features. This ultimately raises the question of how the estate should be interpreted: as the original gardens or as the public botanical garden the grounds have become?

Because the estate functions as an art institution, the management of Cheekwood must answer to the board of trustees. Instead the grounds functioning solely for a family, the board members wish to see that the Cheekwood estate caters to a diverse group of patrons. Hence, Cheekwood must provide enjoyable experiences for its guests and the artists that use Cheekwood as an exhibition space on both the interior and exterior.

While Cheekwood does not typically provide specific background themes for incoming artists, if an artist is scheduled early enough, some considerations to the artists' requests will be made. This has been solely dependent on the timing and prestige of the exhibit.⁹ When Chihuly came to Nashville, the artist wanted the glasswork to be revered as superior to the flowers. Because enough time was allotted for planting, Cheekwood could meet these requests. In the current exhibit, Tobin's large scale sculptures merely called for the removal of some minor flower beds.

Donors have also played a role within Cheekwood's grounds. Some entire gardens have been the effect of a major donor. Other gifts have been made with smaller ambitions, such as the addition of the new bulbs for the Color Garden. In fact, it has been through the efforts of an army of donors that the number of blooming bulbs on the estate has reached over 150,000.

Although these changes were needed to ensure Cheekwood can function as a public botanical garden, the alterations that have occurred within the grounds have forever altered the estate. With the movement towards reinterpretation, the garden's originality been questioned. Now, the museum has had to look at its efforts and redevelop how the Cheeks used the estate.

Present Reinterpretation

The current preservation treatment of the mansion and its grounds encompasses the "restoration" of the estate as well as reinterpreting the Cheek's lives on the property. These efforts are considered an avant-garde approach to historic preservation, according to Jane

⁹ Interview with Sarah Lowe, Botanical Garden and Horticultural Manager of Cheekwood. March 28, 2016, Nashville, Tennessee.

MacLeod, Cheekwood's president and CEO.¹⁰ The rooms chosen to portray the lives of Leslie Sr., Mabel, Huldah, and Leslie Jr. will allow the museum patrons to step back in time and walk around the rooms how they appeared when the Cheeks lived at the residence.

This is intended to be a full sensory experience and will not be guarded by the red ropes so often seen in house museum. The visitors, therefore, will be able to sit in the period correct chairs, pull books off the Cheek's book cases, and even listen to music popular in the 1930s. Introducing machines infused with scents, such as cigar smoke from one of Leslie Cheek's favored cigar brands, has also been proposed in reinforcing the visitor's sensory experience. The rooms slated for restoration focus primarily on the first floor and ground floor rooms, including the Drawing Room, Library, Dining Room, Loggia, Morning Room, Recreation Room and Mother-In-Law's Bedroom Suite.

In order to begin the process of instituting the restored rooms to the museum, Cheekwood hosted a two-day, private symposium with ten leading experts from around the county. These specialists included the fields of decorative arts, historic interiors, museum practice, and visitor interpretation. This event gathered a variety of perspectives for the proposed interpretation of the Cheek's lives and helped inform the plans for the restoration and refurnishing.¹¹

The first endeavor in the reinterpretation includes looking at each room and asking what the room once represented and how it portrayed the story of the Cheeks.¹² By studying the archives, documents aid in identifying the the conversation pieces of the room. These items

¹⁰ Jessica Bliss. "Cheekwood to Reveal Secrets, Restore Origins." *The Tennessean*, March 21, 2015.

¹¹ "Cheekwood Takes Important Steps Towards Restoration of Mansion's Historic Interiors." Cheekwood Press Release. March 21, 2015.

¹² Interview with Leslie Jones, Curator of Decorative Arts and Historic Interpretation of Cheekwood. March 28, 2016, Nashville, Tennessee.

often stick out, as they are the components of the room that are included in letters, photos, and oral histories left behind by the Cheeks. The conversation pieces are the most pivotal pieces of the Cheek's possessions and are the items Cheekwood are fervently trying to acquire as they embody what was important to the family.

The process of acquisition poses a difficult problem for the museum.¹³ Through the use of the household inventory completed in 1932, receipts from the Cheek's travels with Fleming, Mrs. Cheek's will, family letters, scrapbooks, and the article featuring Cheekwood in the *Country Home Magazine*, there is a substantial amount of information known about what was once in the house. It is uncertain, however, where some of the Cheek's belongings are today. Mabel Cheek divided the estate equally between her son and daughter, and her will is the last artifact that itemizes that estate at the time of her death. The inheritance of the Cheek family has further been passed down to their respective families, and this tradition has occurred several times. The exact fate of the furniture, books, and decorative pieces, therefore, is obscure. This spurs Cheekwood curators to obtain reproductions and replacements of the Cheek's furniture for the reinterpreted rooms. Some items, however, are irreplaceable. Personal interest items of the Cheek's, such as Leslie Sr.'s mustache mug collection, have been lost through the ages and cannot be reproduced. They can only be reinterpreted with anecdotes.

Another problem that arises with acquisition is working with the existing accounts from the former owners of the estate.¹⁴ While a vast majority of the accounts seem to be appropriate, the provenance of the artifacts obtained by the Cheeks must be checked for authenticity. While

¹³ Interview with Leslie Jones, Curator of Decorative Arts and Historic Interpretation of Cheekwood. March 28, 2016, Nashville, Tennessee.

¹⁴ Ibid.

these antiques appear to have been purchased from reputable means, their sale is an important question in the story of Cheekwood. Within this reinterpretation effort, experts on interior decorative features have poured over the archives of Cheekwood to determine which antiques acquired by the original owners were authentic and not fakes or forgeries. This is particularly true of the architectural features of the estate. By validating the acquisition of items such as the “Queen Charlotte Staircase,” the history of the estate only becomes more vibrant and significant.

Not every item seen within the historic photographs of the house is needed to retell the story of Cheekwood. Many of the paintings of hunting scenes in the former recreation room, for example, were considered filler pieces and were only needed in completing the decor of the mansion.¹⁵ This gives the curators the opportunity to introduce historic photos, anecdotal stories, and other memorabilia of the Cheeks not actually displayed in the mansion during their lives. This allows for a broader reinterpretation of the estate and adds a level of further understanding of the Cheek family to the museum’s patrons. It also strengthens the aesthetics of the restored rooms. By incorporating history within the decorative features, there will be a lesser need for signage. This will allow visitors a more authentic experience when visiting the estate.

Although, the current efforts of restoration focus on the lives and rooms used by the Cheeks, addressing the sections of the mansion which no longer exist remains problematic. With the addition of the Stalworth Gallery, much of the service halls and quarters were completely removed. Today, it is difficult to even imagine the service wing of the house and the loss of this wing leaves a considerable gap in Cheekwood’s history.

¹⁵ Interview with Leslie Jones, Curator of Decorative Arts and Historic Interpretation of Cheekwood. March 28, 2016, Nashville, Tennessee.

Because this portion of the house was an integral part of the maintenance and everyday operation of the Cheek's residence, it is vital that it is remembered. In an attempt to respect the memory of those who provided support to estate, a rendition of the service stairs will be completed and installed where they once existed. This will allow visitors to understand a little of what the service wing was once like. Also along the wall of the service stair painting, photographs and stories of the multiple families that worked on Cheekwood will be displayed. The procurement of these extraordinary artifacts provides the curators of Cheekwood with substantial advantage and will enrich the history of the estate and the visitor experience. The continuation of the research of the families that worked on the estate is on-going and will be of the utmost importance in future reinterpretations.

Addressing structural changes that have occurred since the Cheek's lives also poses questions. The necessary means of egress, including ramps, rails, and fire escapes, must remain in the museum to provide safety and accessibility to both the staff and patrons. Additions made for everyone's comfort and conservation of the museum's collections, including HVAC and humidity control, must also be considered. These items must keep with the aesthetics of the mansion while not being misconstrued as original features. This is considered a balancing act in the new design as the curators are trying to make each visitor's experience more authentic.

While the restored rooms will add an exciting new level of understanding to the estate and who the Cheeks were, the alterations cannot impede Cheekwood's primary goal of functioning as an art museum. Because the Cheekwood museum does not have the option to expand the mansion's footprint for more gallery space, the reinterpreted rooms will work in tandem with the galleries. It is anticipated that Cheekwood will begin to function as two

museums in one building, and to ensure the new efforts coalesce with the remainder of the museum, a trial period of the exhibit will occur. During this pilot study, Cheekwood members will be allowed to move about the room and experience it as a new visitor would. This will allow for the museum to sort out any faults in the rooms' accessibility or understanding of the incorporated history before the rooms open to the public.

Although a vast majority of the reinterpretation focuses on the mansion, the gardens will also be restored to their general appearance when the grounds acted as a private residence.¹⁶ Efforts will be made pruning the boxwoods and planting vegetation available in 1930s seed catalogues. Another endeavor that has been proposed is the reestablishment of the parterre garden. This will allow for the gardens and mansion to once again act in support of one another.

This reinterpretation has been possible through the hiring of qualified curator of decorative arts and historic interpretation. This has facilitated the research into the museum's history through archives on-site and many others sources. By meticulously studying the historic photograph, inventories, and will, many of the acquisitions have been completed.

Future Efforts

Though it has been nearly fifty-five years since its conversion, Cheekwood still maintains a considerable amount of its original design, a major achievement seeing the house was only thirty years old at its rehabilitation. By the forethought of the many organizational leaders of Cheekwood's narrative, the estate's historical integrity has been well-preserved, and a continuation of these efforts in the future is paramount.

¹⁶ Interview with Sarah Lowe, Botanical Garden and Horticultural Manager of Cheekwood. March 28, 2016, Nashville, Tennessee.

While it is impossible to tell if the reinterpretation of the Cheek's interiors will continue as a permanent exhibit throughout the remainder of the museum's lifetime or if the rooms will be converted back to traditional galleries, what is more important is continual maintenance of the estate and sustained patron interest. Caretakers and organizational leaders of Cheekwood must continue the balancing act of bettering the current memory of the estate while respecting the past.

To ensure the protection of the estate, the archives of the estate must be maintained and even minimal alterations to the property should be included in Cheekwood's records. While this will be a tremendous undertaking, it is necessary to continue building the estate's history and becomes exponentially crucial as the estate ages. As the interior and exterior spaces become more significant and impressive with age, the archives must create the narrative of why alterations of the estate were made. By establishing a more thorough history of the estate, Cheekwood will be able to make future decisions based on facts, instead of conjecture which has been a current means of resolution. This would ensure that the historic integrity of the estate remains unimpaired.

Although significant, Fleming is not a widely recognized name in the world of architecture. Establishing a Bryant Fleming conservancy should be contemplated. By creating a relationship between other Fleming designs, much like the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy, a comprehensive knowledge of Bryant Fleming's could be inaugurated. By instituting a prevailing knowledge of a Bryant Fleming design, the magnitude of Cheekwood's significance would only increase and aid in the efforts of protecting this estate. This would also assist in establishing a larger archive, outside of the one found at Cheekwood. The knowledge of the construction of Cheekwood could be cross-referenced with the Bryant Fleming archive when

a problem arises, and thus, strengthen the decision making process at the museum. Establishing a conservancy of Fleming houses and landscapes would not only help the Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum, it could help advocate for other Fleming designs that may be facing adversity due to their grandeur and lack of knowledge of the designer in the architectural community.

To further solidify its significance, Cheekwood could apply for National Landmark status, particularly for the estate's grounds. According to Charles A Birnbaum, President of the *Cultural Landscape Foundation*, "Cheekwood is one of the finest examples of an American Country Place Era Estate in this country—contributing, in no small measure, to its significance are its panoramic vistas that remain largely intact today."¹⁷ With fewer than 2,800 historic places of landmark status in the United States, only six are located within Nashville's borders. None of these landmark, however, are designated for their significance in "Landscape Architecture." This could make Cheekwood the first of its kind in Tennessee. Although it is unlikely that the mansion would obtain landmark status alone, the intact vistas of the Country Estate give the property elevated significance. If Cheekwood were successful in this endeavor, they would have far more the opportunities at procuring assistance in its future preservation efforts as well as acquiring greater recognition for the estate.

While Cheekwood is not presently endangered, becoming lax in its maintenance and its usability would certainly have a devastating affect on the estate. Constant efforts, therefore, must be made for Cheekwood to continue into future generations and reconmenations such as the ones above could help solidify its existence in perpetuum. This thesis on the Cheekwood Estate

¹⁷ Cheekwood White Paper. Cheekwood Archives. Published for Institutional Use, 2012.

has attempted to manifest the property's importance in Nashville's history and perpetuate its preservation efforts for the enjoyment and education for Tennessee's future generations. The following chapter will highlight the findings of the previous chapters, pinpoint flaws with this study, address future research questions that still need to be pondered, and bring this thesis to a close.

CONCLUSION

While the construction of Cheekwood was spearheaded by sale of the Maxwell House Coffee rights to the Postum Company and a dire need to house Mabel Cheek's beloved ceiling-high Victorian mirror, it was the perpetuation of its usefulness that secured its survival. During the estate's construction, an inordinate amount of effort went into the design. Between the extensive travel that occurred to assemble the architectural and decorative features for the property and the sheer amount manpower needed in terracing the limestone grounds, Cheekwood personifies the lifestyle of the affluent socialites in the City of Nashville, during a period where grandeur was scarce and still relatively meager in modern times.

Cheekwood acted as a private residence until 1959, and by the following year, it was opened to the public, establishing one of Nashville's greatest fine arts institution. Because the museum underwent many iterations of maintenance and restoration, a number of the interior details have been lost over time. Present preservation efforts, however, have been made to reinterpret the Cheek's lives at the estate. By reintroducing the Cheek's interior furnishes to the estate, patrons will gain a new found appreciation for the sumptuousness of the estate.

While it is impossible to tell if the reinterpretation of the Cheek's interiors will maintain a permanence throughout the remainder of the museum's lifetime or if the rooms will be converted back to traditional galleries, what is more important is continual maintenance of the estate and sustained patron interest. Caretakers and organizational leaders of Cheekwood must continue the balancing act of bettering the current memory of the estate while respecting the past. Perhaps this is why Mabel's Victorian mirror hangs in the office of the museum president and CEO, as

the ceiling high artifact, so treasured by Mrs. Cheek, acts as the looking glass of Cheekwood's past, present, and future.

Although it is impossible to say the fate of Cheekwood had the property been passed down through the Cheek family or sold to a private buyer, it is undeniable that the opulent estate would have had a less of an impact on Nashville's collective memory if it had acted solely as a private residence. A study, however, of Cheekwood's grounds, mansion, and preservation was superfluous to prove this. Just by a single visit, it is easily seen that Cheekwood captivates young and old with its consummate mansion, expansive gardens, and world-class collection of art. Not only does Cheekwood resonant fond memories of warm days among the blooming perennials for its patrons, the estate has been given the opportunity to become the premiere venue for outdoor exhibitions and weddings alike, thus diversifying its audience even further. Ultimately, this transition imparted a new life for the Country Estate, which its own designer deemed "too good to be held by a private individual." Nearly fifty-five years since its conversion, Cheekwood still maintains a considerable amount of its original design making the property one of the best surviving examples of an estate from the American Country Place Era.

Ultimately, this study validates that Cheekwood has been an exemplary specimen of Nashville's architecture from construction as a private residence through its evolution to a world-class institution. Cheekwood indisputably sets the bar high for any new construction in the area, residence or institution alike. The findings of this investigation go beyond the confining conclusion that Cheekwood was and is a palatial design. This thesis solidifies its significance and gives reason to perpetuate its preservation efforts if a question of the estate's fate ever were to arise.

The limitations of studying Cheekwood, with its irrefutable significance, is that the property still holds much of its history a mystery. Even with an entire room devoted to housing the estate's archives, it would be near impossible to fully comprehend its evolution. Particularly due to the vastness of the Cheekwood archives, the understanding the organization of the information could lend to an entirely new thesis. With two (sometimes disputing) finding guides and the need to schedule time with a Cheekwood employee to gain access to the archive room, research on the estate is no small feat. This creates a problem only to be multiplied by the missing records on the estate after years of renovations.

While the Cheek's adored their Fleming masterpiece, few photographs were taken during the estate's duration as a homestead. The archives, therefore, are particularly lean on original documentation of the estate. This is especially true for the operational side of the mansion. Photos of the service rooms, kitchen, and stable and garage interiors are rare.

A whole viewpoint, therefore, that was so integral in the maintenance and operation of Cheekwood has been completely forgotten. After the addition of the Stalworth Gallery, much of the service halls and quarters were completely removed, and today, it is difficult to even imagine the service quarters of the house. This beckons the efforts of further research as this was once such a vital wing to the estate. By finding the families that once worked on the grounds, a new perspective of Cheekwood could be gained. Additional research through census records could possibly lend to more information on this matter.

Another limitation that continues to be problematic is working with the existing accounts from the former owners of the estate. While a vast majority of the accounts do not cause pause, the provenance of the artifacts obtains overseas must be check for authenticity. Although none of

these antiques were accumulated by unscrupulous means, their authenticity is an important question in their preservation. By fully understanding the artifacts of the estate, a more comprehensive understanding of Cheekwood can be established. This will not only led to better practices in Cheekwood's protection, it will create a more vibrant history to the estate.

This leaves ample room for further research on the residence. By interviewing living family members of the Cheek's it could be possible to collect the remaining living memory of Cheekwood acting as a private residence. This, too, could lead to answers about the service sector of the Cheek estate and further add to the Cheekwood archives.

Overall, Cheekwood continues today as one of the grandest estates within Nashville's borders. With its remarkable Georgian revival mansion that seems to effortlessly interlace with its meticulously designed and kept landscape, this Bryant Fleming masterpiece is nothing short of splendid. While the estate still holds an air of mystery of the lives once lived on the property, perhaps, that just adds to Cheekwood's mystique.

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APPENDIX

COMPARATIVE INTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHS



Present Stair Hall



Past Stair Hall



Present Stair Hall



Past Stair Hall



Present Library



Past Library



Present Transverse Hall



Past Transverse Hall



Present Entry Hall



Past Entry Hall

COMPARATIVE EXTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHS



Present Drive



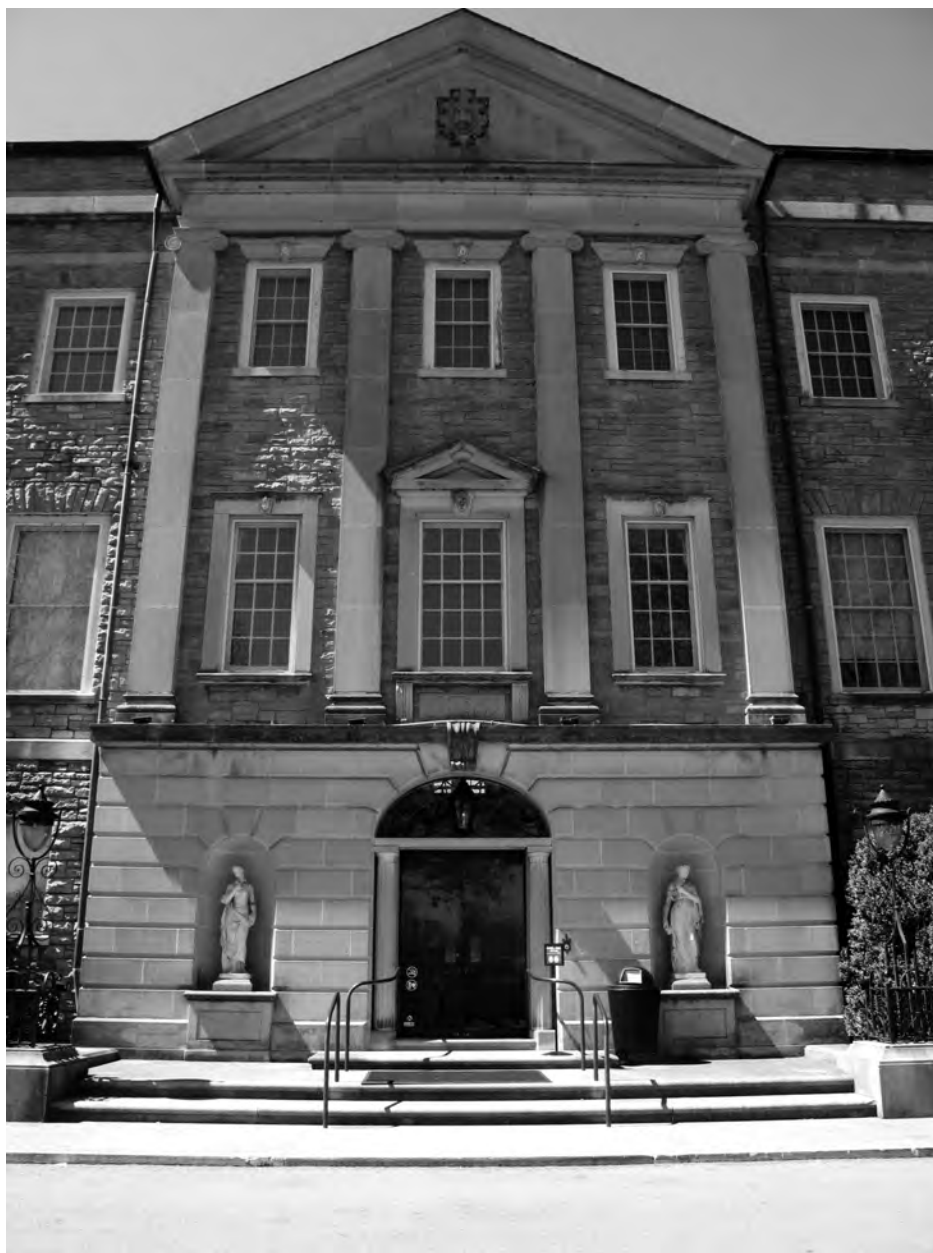
Past Drive



Present Palladian Window



Past Palladian Window



Present Main Entry



Past Main Entry



Present Wisteria Arbor



Past Wisteria Arbor



Present Reflection Pool Statue



Past Reflection Pool Statue



Present South Facade and Terraces



Past South Facade and Terraces



Present Pond



Past Pond



Present Swan Pool



Past Swan Pool