

Swannanoa



The Palace At Swannanoa - Waynesboro, Va.

3-D-145

A Gilded Crown on the Blue Ridge

The Gilded Age (1877-1890), which followed the Civil War and Reconstruction, was characterized by an expansion of industry and the polarization of wealth. The entrepreneurs of the Second Industrial Revolution created industrial towns and cities with new factories and an ethnically diverse working class to support them. Basic City, Virginia (now part of Waynesboro) was one such venture. The expansion of the railroads, the consolidation of industries and the explosion in technology produced a class of the super rich. The most familiar names of this period were Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and Cornelius Vanderbilt. However, lesser known but still highly successful industrialist and businessmen were to be found throughout America, including the South. These captains of business and industry demonstrated their power and wealth not only in their financial dealings but in an opulent life style they afforded their families. Newport, Rhode Island, is perhaps the best example of the display of the period's lavish architecture and social events. Gigantic mansions filled with art and European antiques and crafts were used for the short summer season. Although much of the excess of the Gilded Age was curtailed by the Panic of 1893, which took the nation into a deep depression, those who retained their wealth and built on it in the following years continued to construct lavish mansions. Swannanoa was one such masterpiece.

Crowning the top of Afton Mountain, Swannanoa was created as the summer home for Major and Mrs. James H. Dooley. James Dooley served in the Confederate Army as a private in his father's unit, Company C of the First Virginia Infantry, and was wounded at the Battle of Williamsburg. His title of Major was an honorific title conferred in recognition of his position in later years.



A graduate of Georgetown College (now University), he began his career immediately after the Civil War as a lawyer in Richmond. Combining his legal mind, business sense and superior oratorical skills, he distinguished himself and was elected to the Virginia Legislature (1871-1877). In 1880 he

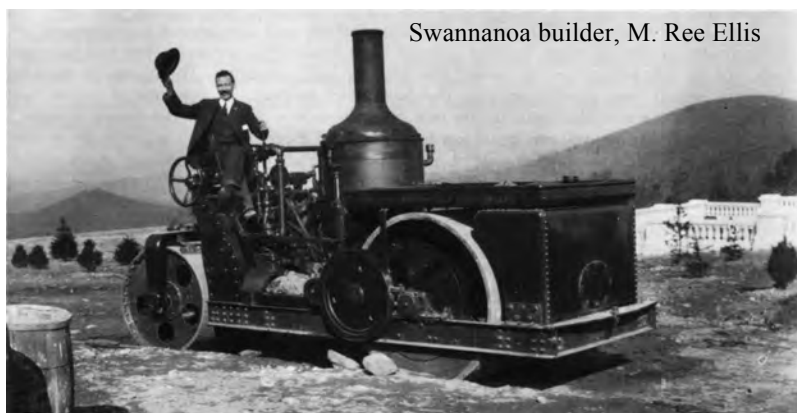
joined the board of the Richmond and Danville Railroad, which consolidated a number of small rail lines and expanded into the Deep South. Dooley also founded the Seaboard Air Line Railroad and was a director of the Chesapeake and Ohio. His many other business interests included land development, banking, and steel.

Mrs. Sarah (Sallie) Dooley was a member of a prominent Virginia family, which included early settlers, and a royal governor of the Virginia Colony. The Major and Mrs. Dooley married in 1869. The couple remained childless. Mrs. Dooley was active in a number of historical groups. She was a founding regent of the first chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Virginia, a charter member of the Colonial Dames in Virginia, a member of the Order of the Crown (Americans of royal descent) and a prominent supporter of the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities and the Virginia Historical Society. Mrs. Dooley was also a published writer of poetry and short stories.



In 1886, the Dooleys acquired a tract of land along the James River and created Maymont, an estate known for the splendor of its architecture and gardens. When the Dooleys died, he in 1922 and she in 1925, Maymont was left to the City of Richmond and opened as a park and museum in 1926.

In 1911, the Dooleys embarked on the creation of a second showplace on a 1000-acre parcel purchased from J. B. Yount. The land was an ideal location for a large summer retreat, having the advantage of being accessible by train from Richmond through Charlottesville to Basic City. The Dooleys engaged the Richmond architect Henry E. Baskervill of Nowland and Baskervill to build a house worthy of the station of the Dooleys and the status of their guests. A local contractor, Mr. Ree Ellis of Basic City, was hired to build the new mansion on an area referred to as “Mountaintop” on Afton Mountain near Waynesboro, Virginia. Work on Swannanoa began in earnest in 1912 and was completed in 1913.



Swannanoa builder, M. Ree Ellis



During construction

Building specifications for the estate required the general contractor to furnish quarters and bedding for workmen at the site, and meals were made available at the cost of 50 cents per day. The architect also noted that he expected to find sufficient common laborers for wages of

\$1.50 per day. The estimated cost of construction for entire estate was something over three hundred thousand dollars.

When completed, the 726-acre estate boasted terraced Italian gardens, a water tower, manager's house and a stable with quarters upstairs for the coachman and chauffeur. The quarters for house servants (five rooms of them) were in the basement of the mansion, as were the kitchen and wine cellar. Swannanoa also had its own electrical generating plant, located in the basement of the stable, and a private telephone system connecting the stable and main house.

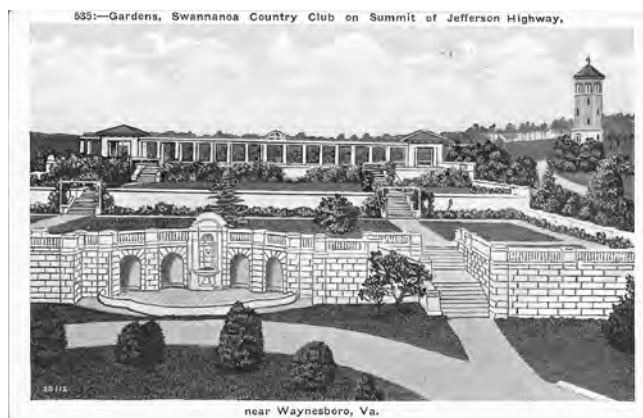
The Dooleys used the mansion from May to October as a summer home, employing a staff of 12.

After Mrs. Dooley died at Swannanoa at the age of 79 in 1925, the estate passed to her husband's sisters, who were nuns, and nieces (except of the furnishings, which along with Maymont were given to the City of Richmond). The property was then sold to Valley

Corporation, a Richmond syndicate, and in July 1926 the first promotional bulletins touting the charms of the new Swannanoa Country Club began to appear.



The Club planned to limit its membership to a select group of five hundred.





There was to be an 18-hole golf course, as well as swimming pools, tennis courts, and even an airplane landing strip. Building sites were laid out just below the crest of the mountain for “villas” in

the three to ten thousand dollar range.

In 1928 President and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge spent Thanksgiving weekend at the Club and the house and



grounds reportedly “...brought a succession of ‘ohs’ and ‘ahs’ and exclamations of pleasure from the president and first lady and

their party.”² Harry Byrd suggested to President Coolidge that the estate become the “Summer White House”, but the idea was defeated by a single vote. By 1935 the pressures of the Depression forced the



grandiose Country Club to close. The Dooley family repurchased the estate and made several unsuccessful attempts to continue developing it, finally leasing it briefly to an order of nuns for use as a convent.

Newspaper article with letter from President Calvin Coolidge

The Waynesboro News

"WELCOMING EDITION", HONORING THE DU PONT RAYON CO.

THE WAYNESBORO NEWS, FRIDAY NOVEMBER, 13, 1929

Will Honor Employers In Banquet

Business and Professional Women Will Hold Annual "Employers' Night"

Full Program Is Completed

By Agreement to Make Welcome Address With Response by E. G. Vance, Songs Listed

Members of the Business and Professional Women's Club of Waynesboro will be business next Friday night (Nov. 22nd) to their employers at a banquet to be given by the Parent-Teachers Association in the Wilson High school Auditorium. Nearly 100 persons are expected to be present on the occasion which the annual "Employers' Night" given by the business group.

An interesting program including songs, after dinner talks, readings and other features will be rendered. Committee in Charge Arrangements for the banquet are: the boards of a committee consisting of Miss May Cullen, chairman, Miss Madeline Ford, tickets, and Miss Ruby East, programs.

Welcome and Response The address of welcome will be delivered by Miss May Maxwell, Vice-President of the Business and Professional Women's Club, while E. G. Vance, of the First National bank will respond. Mrs. Iva Hall, Publisher will act as toastmaster.

Program Announced The full program as arranged is as follows: Song, "America"; Invocation, Rev. J. H. Francis; dinner; article, "The Gypsy Trail"; poems, Patterson, Hunt, Whitcomb; and Fox; welcome by Miss May Maxwell; Vice-president of the club; speech by E. G. Vance; introduction of guests by Mrs. Iva Hall; speaker; solo by Miss Mary Anderson; reading by Mrs. M. B. Cox; article, "Ladies to my tale of me"; goodnight song.

Wayne Grocery Opens Saturday

T. J. Yancy and L. R. Crickensberg Open Establishment in Lambert, Barger & Bransman Building

Carrying a full line of fancy and staple groceries, fruits and vegetables, the Wayne Grocery Company, the city's newest addition in this line will open for business Saturday morning in the new Lambert, Barger and Bransman building.

The store occupies a room on Wayne Avenue on the extreme southeast corner of the building and the owners are T. J. Yancy and

There are only 32 more shopping days until Christmas

Ex-President Coolidge Sends Greetings To Waynesboro And Du Pont Rayon Company

It is with pride that the Waynesboro News presents herewith an exact reproduction of the letter addressed to the Editor of this paper by Ex-President Calvin Coolidge on learning of the "Welcoming Edition" to the Du Pont Rayon Company.

Since the visit of the Hon. Mr. Coolidge and the charming and gracious Mrs. Coolidge last Thanksgiving vacation to Swannanoa Country Club, Waynesboro has had more than passing interest in this illustrious statesman and his wife.

CALVIN COOLIDGE
NORTHAMPTON
MASSACHUSETTS

Mr. Louis Spilman,
President of the Waynesboro News,
Waynesboro, Virginia.

My dear Mr. Spilman:

Because of the very pleasant vacation that Mrs. Coolidge and I spent at the Swannanoa Country Club and the great hospitality extended to us by the people of Waynesboro, I am very much pleased to learn that your town is to be benefited by the establishment in it of a great industry by the Du Pont Rayon Company.

You are fortunate in having the most picturesque location for your town, a climate that is most agreeable and a population and atmosphere that invites enterprise and insures to it a cordial welcome and community co-operation.

I wish you would extend to this manufacturing plant my best wishes and my thanks again to the people of Waynesboro for the hospitality they gave me.

With kindest regards, I am

Very truly yours,

Calvin Coolidge



Ten Dollars Will Be Given to News Readers Each Beginning Monday



Congress are 1 Bus

STATE REPORTS SUPPLY SAY

Under date of Nov. 10 the monthly report of the geological examining of the water carrying note of "Stat. The report is sent by Col. Morgan H. Fishburne Military J. According to the city's supply shows unavailability. R. A. Col. A slight preformation is shown in

Retiring After Success

Mrs. J. B. Cullen Has Among Women of Success Conducted 33 Year

Retiring from business after thirty-three years of service Mrs. J. B. Cullen, owner of the millinery shop on Wayne Avenue to Waynesboro and is really that women in well as men in business in the face of the attempts and refusing to strain of worries and least the every day work. Mrs. Cullen began where she now conducts. She started with 1890 and for fourteen good and had fortune.

Lost Everything In 1910 she lost a stock she had just owned, including \$1, which she had not yet lost came, when one horse's greatest loss. In spite of this her Cullen took her loss totaling \$1,000 and paid for her independence. Where her business stands with the rental built in 1910.

On this she also has credit for the building August 20, 1910 the completed and Mrs. Cullen's activities.

Since that time she has complete success. She has finished and through her efforts she has placed her among the successful business women.

Retires Because Recently, Mrs. Cullen impaired health, due from business and in the household only.

52

Pages today. A record for Swannanoa Valley.

The house then stood vacant for several years, and Swannanoa fell victim to vandals and the weather. It was purchased in 1945 for \$60,100 by a group of Charlottesville, Virginia businessmen known as the Skyline-Swannanoa Corporation, founded by the grandfather of the current owner. They soon built a motel and restaurant on the property near the Blue Ridge Parkway.

In 1948, Dr. and Mrs. Walter Russell selected Swannanoa as the site for their University of Science and Philosophy, and leased the house and gardens from the Skyline-Swannanoa Corporation. They moved in with eight moving vans filled with 36 tons of sculpture from their Carnegie Hall studio/living quarters and immediately set about restoring the mansion. Walter and Lao Russell deserve a great deal of credit for saving the house from, in all likelihood, destruction. When they took possession of the house the furnace was out of commission, many windows were broken and the



Dr. Walter Russell



Mrs. Lao Russell

elevator was inoperable. The marble hall was covered in brown paint, perhaps a renovation by the nuns who used the house briefly as a convent. In six months they had made the house livable. On May 2, 1949, the University of Science and Philosophy was officially opened to the public. Walter Russell died in 1963. Lao Russell continued to occupy the house until her death in 1988. The University of Science and Philosophy left the mansion in 1999.

Over the years, the parts of the original properties were converted or sold to other enterprises. A Howard Johnson restaurant was built after 1949, the Blue Ridge Motel in 1960 and the Holiday Inn in 1968. The latter still operates as the Inn at Afton. In 1954, Peter Lang purchased ten holes of the original eighteen-hole golf course. He restored the original ten holes and added eight more to return the course to eighteen holes. In the 1960's the federal government acquired 60 of the original acres by imminent domain for the construction



of Interstate 64. Near the entrance ramps of the new interstate was once an old hotel, *The Mountaintop Inn*. It burned in the 1920s and was the spot where Thomas Jefferson and

others met to create the University of Virginia. Currently, the state highway department has a brick utility building on that site.



Swannanoa Entrance Hall

The House

Swannanoa's façade is nine bays wide, having a three-story, five-bay central section flanked by two projecting four-story towers, with two-story pavilions at each corner. The towers are connected by a one-story vaulted arcade, with an open gallery continuing around each corner of the facade. The main entrance is flanked by marble relief carvings representing the four seasons, with the Latin names for each.

Constructed of brick with exterior facings of white Alabama marble, the house is built in the 16th century Italian Renaissance style, possibly based on the Villa de Medici in Rome. Swannanoa is also reminiscent of The

Breakers, a 70-room rendition of a 16th century Genoa palazzo built between 1893 and 1895 by Richard Morris Hunt for Cornelius Vanderbilt II in Newport, Rhode Island.

In speaking of Gilded Age homes such as The Breakers, it has been said that "...these ostentatious summer houses bedazzled visitors by the sumptuousness of their interiors, which typically contained entrance halls of two or three stories, encrusted with balconies, balustrades, carving, wrought iron, chandeliers, sculpture, nymphs, and allegorical ceiling paintings. There might also be Moorish and Byzantine rooms, ...and grand staircases fit for princesses in train to descend." Much of this description can be applied to Swannanoa, which contains 36 rooms and seven baths in its three principal floors and basement. The house measures 96 feet by 69 feet, and the east-west measurement of the front terrace is 122 feet across.

The massive entrance hall on the first floor features trims of red Sienna and white Carrara marble, with a marble and bronze double staircase at the north end. Also, at the north end are doors leading to the porte-cochere entrance. On the landing, above a window seat, is the central feature of the hall, a Louis C. Tiffany Studios stained glass window, supposedly depicting a romanticized Sallie May Dooley in white with the Blue Ridge Mountains and Swannanoa's Italian gardens as a back drop. A domed ceiling with allegorical frescoes encloses the staircase.



A mural on the right wall of the landing contains the heraldic crest of England; the one on the left displays the state seal of Virginia.

To the right of the entrance hall is the Florentine style dining room, with its carved and coffered ceiling and oak three-quarter paneling topped by a plate rail. The remaining wall is covered in hand tooled leather. The room has oak parquet flooring and retains its original light fixtures (as does the entrance hall, library, and landing). Flanking the fireplace are two doors concealed in the paneling, which lead to the butler's pantry (now a kitchen) and servants' stairs. Also of interest is the "D" carved on either side of the oak mantle. The small breakfast room to the east of the dining room retains its original decorative border of painted morning glories.

On the west side of the hall is the Italian style walnut-paneled library with built-in glass-fronted bookcases, on which are found the following quotations in Latin:

“HOMINEM PAGINA NOSTRA SAPIT”

Our page discerns man

“INVOLUTA VERITAS IN ALTO LATET”

Involved truth lies hidden in thought

“HOMO LOTUS IN SE SEMPER DIVITIAS HABET”

A learned man always has riches within himself

“NON REFERT QUAM MULTOS LIBROS SED QUAM BONOS HABEAS”

It makes no difference how many books you have, but how many good books

It appears that there were once figures placed at each side of the bookcases but these are now missing. Near the ceiling in the center of each of the four walls are large walnut escutcheons, each bearing a carved “D”. This room also features an elaborately painted ceiling, with most of its decoration having fortunately survived intact.

To the north of the library is the gold damask Louis XV Drawing (or music) room, with oak parquet flooring and its original wall covering. Above the door and window frames and mirrored overmantel are depicted musical instruments and sheet music. The mantel itself is of white Carrara marble, and is signed “Professor Rafael Romanelli”. A cherub on the left holds wood for the fire, while the one on the right holds a bellows. The central medallion pictures Cupid with his bow.

The short hall off the drawing room retains its original painted trim. The entrance hall once featured this same pineapple motif, but this has at some time been obliterated. The door on the north side of the hall is for the elevator.

The smallest room on the first floor is the elaborate Persian style teakwood den, thought to have been Major Dooley's study. The room features intricate pierced carvings, particularly at the mantel. The scene in the overmantel may represent the Taj Mahal. The brass chandelier is patterned after an over-large incense burner. Just off the den is a small half-bath. This is the only room on the first floor with a closet.

The second floor contains eight rooms (six of which are bedrooms) and four full baths. Mrs. Dooley once



occupied the room in the west front corner, over the library. Four swans are painted on the ceiling of this room, one at each corner, and it was here that Maymont's "swan furniture" was used.

Sallie May passed away in this room. Over each

of the three doors in the room is a blue Wedgwood plaque. It should be noted that one of the three original telephones in the house was in this room, the other two being in Major Dooley's study and the butler's pantry. Adjoining the bedroom is a small room in the west tower, and a loggia of nearly equal size. This room arrangement is repeated (in reverse) on the east side for what was probably Major Dooley's bedroom. Also on the

second floor are the stair and east and west halls, as well as a rear hall with servants' staircase.

The third floor contains two bedrooms, connected by a full bath, as well as small room in the east and west towers containing stairs to the fourth story. All bedrooms on the second and third floors have fireplaces.



The doors on the upper floors are white oak on the hall side, and mahogany on the room side, with the interior room doors being mahogany on both sides. Register faces throughout the house are solid bronze.

Swannanoa Today

For a house that stood vacant and open to vandals and the elements for at least ten of its ninety-six years, Swannanoa is in remarkably good condition.



Dr. and Mrs. Russell in the long pergola

The terraced Italian gardens, with their long pergola across the back, are in poor condition. The brick pavement has buckled in a number of places due to settling and shifting of the ground, and the marble steps should be negotiated with care. The balustrades of the pavilions appear to have been heavily damaged by vandalism, and their decorative trim has suffered badly from time and weather.



The Light of the World,
Created by Dr. Russell

In 2000, the current owner, James F. Dulaney, Jr. took on the task of restoring the mansion in hopes of returning Swannanoa to life as a 'boutique hotel.' He has replaced the tile roof and cleaned the exterior marble at a cost in excess of a million dollars. Although Swannanoa hosts occasional wedding receptions, meetings and photo shoots for advertising agencies, much remains to be done.

The once gilded crown on the apex of Afton Mountain awaits its return to glory.

CHRONOLOGY

April 21, 1911

The Waynesboro Valley Virginian reports that Major Dooley and twenty of his friends spent last week with a surveyor laying out the site for his new house. M. Ree Ellis of Basic City has been selected as the contractor.

May/June 1911

Date on the plans and elevations of the house.

September 1911

Date on the specifications for the house.

February 1912

Date on the specifications for the water tower.

May 1912

Date on the specifications for the stable (plans).

September/October 1912

Date on Plans for interior trim

1913

Photo of the house (with a horse in the foreground) bears the note “Construction Dooley (sic) mansion in 1913” – bare trees in the background would seem to indicate that it was taken in the early spring.

April 1913

Date on the specifications for the manager’s house.

June 1913

Date on the specifications for the stables.

November 16, 1922

Major Dooley dies of a stroke in Richmond.

November 24, 1922

WV reports in Dooley’s obituary that “At the time of his death he had carpenters employed, working on a schoolhouse and chapel near his summer home here.”

September 5, 1925

Sallie M. Dooley dies at Swannanoa. Her funeral is held here.

May 7, 1926

WV reports that Swannanoa had been sold “...for the purpose of converting this splendid property to the uses of a Richmond club.”

July 16, 1926

Swannanoa is open for public inspection – WV reports that a Richmond syndicate will purchase the house for a club and provide villa sites. “...It is intimated that the mansion will be furnished in several weeks.”

WV reports that the Hiserman Studios have photos of the Dooley estate on display and notes they have “...delicate coloring and tinting effects...”

July 23, 1926

A large article in the WV details the charms of the new Swannanoa Country Club.

November 1928

President and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge visit the Club over Thanksgiving weekend.

1935

The Dooley family repurchases the estate and attempts unsuccessfully to continue developing it. As local tradition has it, it was briefly leased to an order of nuns at this time for use as a convent.

1945

Skyline- Swannanoa Corporation purchases the property for \$60,100.

November 1948

Walter and Lao Russell lease the house and gardens and move in. They reportedly spend six months in returning the house to a livable condition.

May 2, 1949

Swannanoa is formally dedicated and opened to the public by the Russells.

1963

Dr. Russell dies.

1988

Mrs. Russell dies.

1999

University of Science and Philosophy leaves Swannanoa.

The Waynesboro Historical Commission would like to thank the following individuals for their outstanding support in making this project a success.

James F. Dulaney, Jr.

Dale Wheary

Karen Vest

J.B. Yount III

**Compiled by
The
Waynesboro Historical Commission
2008**

**Cathy Lang
Constance Paradiso
Joseph E. Morse
Judith Walden
Kerford Brooks
Jerry Layman
Mary Echols
R. Allen Brahin
Megan Montgomery
Clair F. Myers**

