

Gramercy Mansion

History of Gramercy Mansion & Carriage House

Gramercy is a magical location hidden uphill among beautiful gardens and old growth trees. One feels the tranquility and is captured by the natural beauty of the property before even entering the mansion. Upon entering the mansion, one can feel the majesty and grandeur of the people who once resided on the estate.

The history of Gramercy began in 1902 when Alexander Cassatt bought a heavily wooded piece of property in Greenspring Valley containing 45 acres of the present estate. This was to be a wedding present for his daughter Eliza who married W. Plunkett Stewart. Plunkett under the leadership of his brother Redmond was one of the school boys who started the second oldest steeplechase race in Maryland. He was also the founder of the still existing Greenspring Valley Hunt Club. Alexander Cassatt was famous in his day as the president of The Pennsylvania Railroad. During his tenure he doubled the railroad's total assets and increased track and equipment by 146 percent. He was also a horse enthusiast and a fox hunter. Today, Cassatt's fame is overshadowed by his now famous sister, Mary Cassatt. Mary was an impressionist painter who depicted the social and private lives of women. As of 2005, her paintings have sold for as much as \$2.87 million. Her work can be found in the National Gallery of Art as well as famous galleries throughout the world. A portrait of Eliza and her brother hangs in the Baltimore Museum of Art.

Alexander Cassatt was a generous father and wanted to give his daughter Eliza a magnificent wedding present. What better than a new home for the newlyweds? Gramercy was built to resemble Cassatt's summer home, Four Acres, on the ocean in Bar Harbor, Maine. In the style of an Old English Tudor Manor house, the mansion had 25 rooms including an eight room servant's wing, calling buttons throughout the house to summon the servants, pocket doors throughout the first floor and one on the second floor to provide privacy for the master suite and nursery, nine fireplaces, a wine cellar and a coal burning furnace. Construction on the property also included an 18-horse stall carriage house along with an ice pond and ice house (40 ft. deep where the ice was stored), a barn and creamery. Sadly, Cassatt died in 1906 before Gramercy was completed. The family moved to Philadelphia and the property was sold to Mr. and Mrs. Landstreet in 1907.

Felix S. Landstreet was the Vice President of the Western Maryland Railroad. His wife was the niece of a West Virginian Senator. The Landstreets lived at Gramercy for five years then sold Gramercy to industrialist Benjamin H. Brewster in 1912. The Baltimore Sun carried an article about the house mentioning the suitability of the house for all the anticipated parties.

Brewster was the only child of U.S. Attorney General Benjamin Harris Brewster and Mary Walker (Great great granddaughter of Benjamin Franklin). Brewster was also grandfather to Senator Daniel Brewster. Daniel Brewster was the Maryland Democratic Senator from 1963-1969.

The Brewster Family lived at Gramercy for thirty years. After Benjamin Brewster's death his widow, Elizabeth sold it to Hugo R. Hoffmann, builder and financier. The Hoffmann's lived at Gramercy for eight years and sold the estate in 1950 to the Koinonia Foundation.

The Koinonia Foundation was created by a group of twelve visionary Christians who in the aftermath of WWII wanted to attain the idealistic goal of spreading the importance of Christianity around the world. The emphasis was on combating problems in underdeveloped countries. Koinonian leaders recruited students who were taught organic agricultural and literacy skills as well as techniques on coping with language barriers, differences in religion, politics and attitudes. These missionaries went abroad to make the third world a more habitable place. The demise of Koinonia as a missionary center came after the creation of The Peace Corps in 1961. The Peace Corps mirrored many of the aims that the Koinonia Foundation had created. In the 1960's Koinonia changed its focus. A new age mentality arose and the foundation became tied to ideals of spiritual discovery and growth. It was one of the first self-determined learning centers in the area for teaching yoga, meditation, organic gardening, art, dance, music and psychology. Gradually, the foundation faced bankruptcy necessitating the sale of the estate. Koinonia was sold at auction to Dr. Ronald and Anne Pomykala in 1985.

In 1985, luck and opportunity was on the Pomykalas' side when upon visiting a friend in Baltimore they heard Koinonia was for sale. Not intending to buy a new house or engage in a new enterprise, their emotions overtook them upon viewing the estate. They fell in love with the property, placed a bid and won. The Pomykalas now had a new home and new challenges ahead.

The property required a tremendous amount of work. Massive restoration projects began including replacing 80% of the decorative beams on the roof, new shingles and eaves, removal of layers of paint and reglazing of windows, rebuilding of the chimneys and plumbing and electrical restoration in all buildings. Septic and wells also needed work.

In 1986, the Baltimore Symphony Show House helped with some of the restoration. The wallpaper in some of the rooms comes from the showcase as does the cloth swags in the dining rooms. That same year the Pomykalas opened one room for the beginning of what is now an eleven room bed and breakfast. Shortly after, Gramercy became a beautiful wedding reception and ceremony site. Gramercy Mansion and the Carriage House currently hold over 100 weddings and parties a year.

About the Mansion: The woodwork in the mansion has been kept in excellent condition over the years. The foyer, living room and parlor are paneled in American chestnut and the library is paneled in cherry wood. The historic tile above the fireplaces in the library, dining room and parlor is called Moravian tile. These are some of the first art nouveau tile produced in the U.S.. In the foyer there is a reproduction of Frederic Remington's statue of horses and riders-"Coming through the Rye". In the stairwell there hangs a turn of the century wall hanging made in Iran reproducing a scene from Omar Khayyam's "Rubaiyat." The chandelier was purchased in Turkey for \$800.00 and has a pulley to raise and lower it. In the library there are two musical instruments. To the left is a melodeon, a pump instrument with bellows, a predecessor of the organ. To the right is the organ: a player pump organ circa 1900 with 1,000 rolls of classical music. The chandelier is an English antique made of pewter. At the top of the stairs are two Spanish tooled leather and wood chairs from the Cloisters estate dating to the 17th century. In the parlor there is a brass collection of mostly WWI vintage shell casings that native Malaysians turned into decorative objects. In the dining room the collection of paintings are by Weintraub. They are painted with acrylic cut through to create grass and other plants.