



The VanLandingham Estate



*Original Report Prepared July 5, 1977
Updated August, 1997*

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the VanLandingham Estate is located at 2010 The Plaza in Charlotte, N.C.

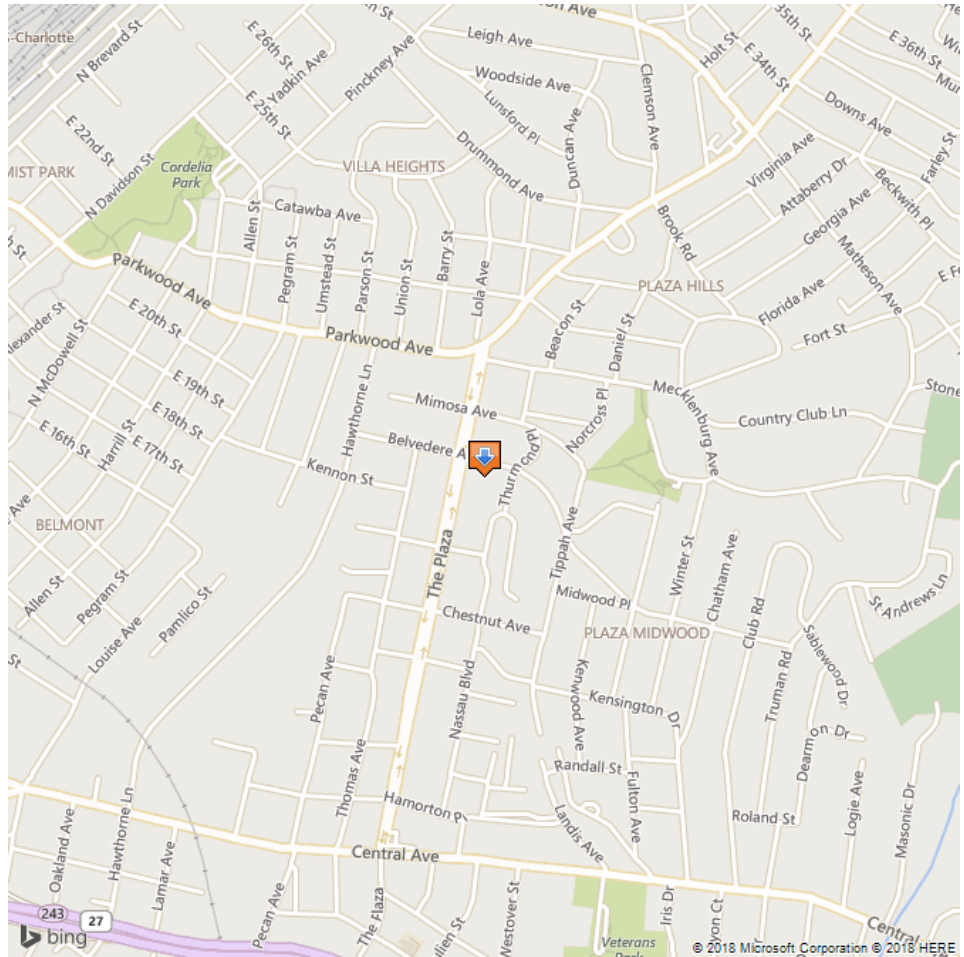
2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner and occupant of the property:

The present owner of the property is: Mr. And Mrs. Mark Gilleskie
2010 The Plaza
Charlotte, N.C. 28205

Telephone (704) 334-8909

3. Representative photographs of the property: This report contains representative photographs of the property.

4. A map depicting the location of the property: This report contains a map depicting the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the Property: The most recent reference to this property is found in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 5529 at Page 0824. The Parcel Number of the Property is 095-061-01A & 095-061-01B.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property:

Susie Harwood VanLandingham, wife of Ralph VanLandingham, purchased lots 6 - 9, located to the immediate southeast of the intersection of Belvedere Ave. and The Plaza, from Chatham Eatates, Inc. on March 13, 1913. The VanLandinghams moved to Charlotte, N.C. from Atlanta, Georgia in 1907. Mr. and Mrs. VanLandingham had initially lived with the former's parents, John Henry VanLandingham and Mary Oates Spratt VanLandingham, at 500 East Avenue (or E. Trade Street). Mr. VanLandingham had returned to Charlotte to join a cotton brokerage firm

headed by his father that would soon move its offices to the eleventh floor of the Realty Building, later known as the Independence Building.

From 1909 until 1914 Mr. and Mrs. VanLandingham lived in a house at the intersection of Central Avenue and Piedmont Street. In May 1913, Mrs. VanLandingham secured a loan of \$6000 from the Independence Trust Co. for purposes of erecting a residence on the lots which she had purchased from Chatham Estates, Inc. The VanLandinghams completed and occupied the house, designed by noted Charlotte architect Charles Christian Hook (1870 - 1938), sometime during 1914.

Ralph VanLandingham, born in Charlotte on November 9, 1875, lived in the house on The Plaza until his death on August 3, 1959, although he did spend considerable time at his summer home in Linville, N.C. He succeeded in establishing himself as an affluent cotton broker and prominent citizen in the community. He had an extended tenure as senior warden of St. Peter's Episcopal Church. For several years he was treasurer of the Charlotte Country Club. Indeed, his civic activities even extended to Linville, N.C., where he served as treasurer and senior warden of All Saints Episcopal Church.

Susie Harwood VanLandingham, born in the late 1860's in St. Paul, Minnesota, was an outstanding human being. In 1881, she moved with her family to Volusia County, Florida, where her father, Norman B. Harwood, became a high official with the Florida East Coast Railroad then being developed by Henry Morrison Flagler. After her father's death in 1885, she moved with her mother, Susan Drury Deane Harwood, to Atlanta, Ga. It was here that she would meet Ralph VanLandingham and would become his wife on September 17, 1901. In the intervening years, however, Susie demonstrated that she had acquired considerable executive ability. She was one of the founders of the Atlanta Art Association. She was an officer of the Atlanta Y.M.C.A. Even more significantly, she headed the company which built the first fire-proof hotel in the State of Georgia.

Mrs. VanLandingham continued to be active in civic affairs in the years following her arrival in North Carolina. *The Charlotte News* characterized her as "a woman of rare gifts and a person of unmistakable quality." Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of Mrs. Ralph VanLandingham the newspaper asserted, "was the range and depth of her interests." She served as regent of the Halifax Convention Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution. She was Chairman of the North Carolina Board of Approved Schools. She was president of the Board of St. Peter's Hospital, where she financed the building of the emergency waiting room in honor of her mother. Probably her most notable contribution, for which she received a personal commendation from President Woodrow Wilson, was her supervision of the Red Cross Canteen at Camp Greene during World War I. Finally, Mrs. VanLandingham provided generous support to the Crossnore Industrial School for Mountain Children near Linville, N.C. She died at St. Peter's Hospital on September 26, 1937.

Mr. and Mrs. VanLandingham had two children: Susan Deane VanLandingham, a nationally known golf star as a young woman, who married Norman Cordon, Jr., and resided in Chapel Hill, N.C.; and Ralph VanLandingham, Jr., a prominent stock broker and bachelor who resided at the house on The Plaza. The children were twins, born in Atlanta, Ga. in 1902. Susan

VanLandingham Cordon died in 1964, leaving her interest in the house in Charlotte, N.C. to her daughter, Susie Harwood Cordon.

Ralph VanLandingham, Jr., died on March 30, 1970. Securing sole ownership of the property at 2010 The Plaza on December 27, 1966, he established an arrangement by which the University of North Carolina at Charlotte would obtain the property upon his death. That Mr. VanLandingham decided upon this course of action is not surprising. He had demonstrated his support for UNC-C by establishing the VanLandingham Glen on the campus. This garden received plantings from the lavish rhododendron collection which Mr. VanLandingham had developed in honor of his father on the grounds surrounding the house. Further documenting Mr. VanLandingham's commitment to education was the fact that he provided scholarships for several students who attended colleges and universities in North Carolina.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains an architectural description prepared by Jack O. Boyte, A.I.A.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-399.4:

a. Historical and cultural significance: The VanLandingham Estate is historically and culturally significant for four reasons. First, the structure has architectural significance as a superior example of affluent domestic architecture of the early twentieth century. Second, the interior furnishings are largely in place and are superior in design and form. Third, the grounds contain a magnificent collection of rhododendron and constitute one of the most noteworthy gardens in Charlotte, N.C. Fourth, the property has associative ties with individuals of local, regional and state-wide importance.

b. Suitability for preservation and restoration: The house and grounds retain their initial integrity and are therefore highly suited for preservation.

c. Cost of acquisition and restoration: At present the Commission has no intention of purchasing this property. It assumes that all costs associated with preserving and maintaining the property will be paid by the owner or subsequent owner of the property.

d. Educational value: The property has educational value because of its historic and cultural significance.

d. Possibilities for adaptive or alternative use of the property: The house and the grounds could be used adaptively for a variety of purposes.

f. Appraisal value: The current tax appraisal of the house and outbuilding is \$90,460. The current tax appraisal of the land is \$112,790. The total taxable value is \$298,800. The Commission is aware that designation of the property as a historic property would allow the

owner to apply annually for an automatic deferral of 50% of the rate upon which the Ad Valorem taxes are calculated.

g. The administrative and financial responsibility of any person or organization willing to underwrite all or a portion of such costs: As stated earlier, at present the Commission has no intention of purchasing this property. Furthermore, the Commission assumes that all costs associated with the property will be met by whatever party now owns or will own the property.

9. Documentation of who and in what ways the property meets the criteria established for listing in the National Register of Historic Places: The Commission believes that the property known as the VanLandingham Estate in Charlotte, N.C. does meet the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places. Basic to the Commission's position is its understanding of the purpose of the National Register. Established in 1966, the National Register represents the decision of the Federal Government to expand its listing of historic properties to include properties of local, regional, and State significance. The Commission believes that the VanLandingham Estate is of local and regional historic significance, and therefore, meets the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

10. Documentation of by and in what ways the property is of historic importance to Charlotte and/or Mecklenburg County: The VanLandingham Estate is historically important to Charlotte and Mecklenburg County for four reasons. First, the structure is architecturally significant. Second, the interior furnishings are superior in design and form. Third, the grounds contain one of the more noteworthy gardens in the City and hold a rhododendron collection of major importance. Fourth, the property has associative ties with individuals of local, regional and State-wide significance.

Bibliography

An Inventory of Buildings in Mecklenburg County and Charlotte for the Historic Properties Commission.

Charlotte City Directory (1907, p.434); (1908, p.325); (1909, p.339); (1910, p.359); (1911, p.404); (1912, p.420); (1913, p.425); and (1914, p.487).

Charlotte News (September 24, 1937, p.4 and p.11); (December 26, 1937, Sec. 2, p.1, and p.14.); and March 31, 1970, p. 58).

Estate Records of Mecklenburg County. (Will Book Y, pp.443-446, p. 529)and (Will Book 27, p.428).

Records of the Mecklenburg County Tax Office. Parcel number 095-061-01.

Sanborn Insurance Maps of Charlotte (1911, p.71); (1929, Vol. 2, p.228).

The Charlotte Observer (February 27, 1915, p.2); (September 27, 1937, p.1, p.3); (December 26, 1937, Sec. 2, p.1); (August 4, 1959, p. 1B); and (April 1, 1970, p.18A).

Vital Statistics of Mecklenburg County (Death Book 51, p.391).

Date of Preparation of this Report: July 5, 1977

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ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

There was an enormous building boom in the first several decades of our century. More houses were built during those years than ever before in so short a time. Designers and architects created residences which in terms of style pointed everywhere. Inspiration came from Georgian England, Renaissance Italy, Sixteenth Century France and Spain, Colonial and Federal America and elsewhere. But the most universal influences were the bungalow books, the stock ready-to-build houses, and mail order stores. Public tastes were profoundly affected by magazines offering plans for houses designed to improve living accommodations of Americans.

These plans had much of their design origin in the Bengalese 'bangla', a low house used by the British in India, which was surrounded by a veranda. Built at intervals along main roads, these bungalows were intended to provide only temporary or seasonal dwellings. But adapted to residences in this country by architects and designers, there was little other than the name that was Indian about the vast majority of bungalows. Designers most often drew from Japanese or Spanish sources. In California, where climate and social conditions were favorable, the bungalow flourished as nowhere else, with the result that 'California bungalow' was interchangeable with 'bungalow'. This style embodied spreading dormers, porch-verandas, lightness of construction, shingled walls, and stone chimneys. Additionally it was the bungalow

as much as any other kind of house that led to the general adoption of the living room and the outdoor - indoor living space.

In 1912 Charlotte, a well-to-do cotton broker and his family moved from the older Piedmont Courts section to the new suburban development at the end of the East Charlotte trolley line -- Plaza Hills. Here Mr. and Mrs. Ralph VanLandingham commissioned a prominent local architectural team, Hook and Rogers, to design a house in the 'latest' style, not dictated by obvious historic precedents. The designers embraced the most popular idiom of the day -- California bungalow -and adapted the style to the large VanLandingham house to be located on the many aced country site in Plaza Hills.

Resting solidly on a foundation of random granite ashlar, the expansive two story house is a rare local example of the Bungaloid style adapted to massive proportions -- an idea far removed from the style's simple origins. Having basically a center hall rectangular plan, the structure includes projecting wings on both floors which create asymmetrical exterior facades. Approaching the front entrance a circular carriage drive leads to wide steps which rise some three feet to a broad tiled platform. Over this entrance area is a low roofed canopy supported on stone piers at each side and joined at the front by an arched stone lintel. From the entrance platform, wide terraces extend across the full width of the house and turn down each side to form verandas.

Arched glass doors form the main entrance and lead to a small tile floored vestibule. Beyond this are additional double doors opening to a wide center hall. Decorative millwork is limited to broad, simply molded casing surrounding the two pairs of doors. Elsewhere there is only rectilinear molding and trim, classical molded shapes being noticeably absent.

Exterior design is severe, even stark, and generally exhibits machined woodwork of simple shapes. Wall surfaces are uniformly gray stained cypress shingles laid in alternating wide and narrow bands. Windows are tall double hung units with large single glazed sash in upper and lower panels. Window grouping varies in each bay and reflects directly the wide variations of the plan and room sizes. In no instance is there deliberate effort made to present a symmetrical placement of design elements.

At the roof overhang, exposed rafter ends are sawn in undulating pattern to create a bracketed soffit extending out some three feet from wall surfaces. There is no crown molding or other elaboration at the cornice. Reflecting the wing projections and dormer features, the tall hipped roof presents a variety of shapes. Covered with terra cotta tile, this large roof mass dominates the exterior. Rising here and there from the roof are tall granite chimneys.

At the sides and rear the window placement again reflects plan irregularities. Facing the broad, carefully landscaped grounds to the right(south)side is an expanded circular terrace which opens from the interior through the double glazed doors. Above this terrace is an iron trellis erected to provide support for climbing vines. At this side the double doors are arched, and in one section which connects to a solarium they are surrounded by granite ashlar laid to form a carefully proportioned stone canopy with projecting wood brackets in the arch. On the opposite(north)side

the drive is extended to join a service entrance. Here also there is a low roofed canopy supported by granite piers and connected by an arched lintel.

The rear (east) side is the handsomest facade of the house. Featuring an arched, triple unit window which lights and ventilates the large dining room, this side also has two carefully proportioned arched stone encased doorways from the solarium. On the second floor there are wood frames with copper wire panels enclosing sleeping porches adjoining two major bedchambers. Also at the rear a delicate slatted screen conceals a rear service entrance and cellar stair.

Through the main entrance the large foyer is encountered. From this high ceilinged hall, four rooms radiate to the sides and rear. At the front right, double sliding pocket doors open to a large rectangular living room. On the long inside wall a centered fireplace includes an iron coal burning grate and an elaborately carved black marble mantel. Flanking this fireplace are double doors, with multiple glazed lights, opening to a solarium at the rear. Featuring a large stone chimney, also centered on the interior wall, this sun porch is enclosed on two sides by continuous arched windows and glass doors which open to a rear terrace. Finished with rustic simplicity, the solarium has a herringbone brick floor, stained cypress wall shingles, and board and batted painted ceiling.

Again just inside the front entrance, another pair of sliding pocket doors open from the foyer to the left into a book-lined study. Another small fireplace, similar to that in the living room, is centered in the far side wall and features a fine carved, imported marble mantel.

The center hall forms a long axis from front to rear. Terminating at high arched glass doors, the hall leads directly into a dining room of banquet proportions. This room has huge windows on the east and south oriented to exploit the natural beauty of the immense gardens leading away from the house on these two sides.

From the north side of the dining room, doors lead to the pantry and in turn to a large kitchen. Here are early examples of gas and electric services. Also at the rear the center hall turns left to enclose a wide stair leading to the second floor. Rising some fourteen feet in two runs, this broad stair features delicate turned balusters and elaborately carved heavy newel posts hinting of Victorian origins.

On the second floor are four large bedchambers, each with separate baths. These rooms vary considerably inside and the three largest rooms have adjoining sleeping porches or 'outdoor rooms' designed for warm weather sleeping. Curiously, these outdoor rooms are floored with canvas.

Interior finishes in the house are uniformly simple. Walls and ceilings are plastered and have little or no molded trim. Chair rails and wainscot paneling are not used. Window and door casing consists of simple rectangular boards with square rabbeted back bands. Flooring throughout is narrow oak strips, with the exception of ceramic tile in the bath rooms.

A visit to the VanLandingham house offers a glimpse into the 'honest' woodwork and unpretentious design of the post-Victorian age. Escaping from the staid formalities of Victorian fashion, many designers over reacted with detailing which reflected only the efficient lines of machined wood -- leaving little or no evidence of the skill and creativity of earlier wood hand craftsmanship. This imposing house and its marvelous gardens are unique in Charlotte. Not necessarily easy to admire, the strong statement of the design speaks eloquently of the early twentieth century architecture in Charlotte.