



# ELLEN GLASGOW HOUSE

## Highlights

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### ARCHITECTURE:

- Built 1841. National and Virginia Historic Landmark, highest category.
- Best Greek Revival mansion in Richmond, interior as well as exterior, and preserved as built, not restored, as has been continually in use. Unlike most Greek Revival houses in Richmond with columned portico on one side, Glasgow House has grand center portico with columns, symmetrical proportions under hipped roof, stucco over brick, scored to resemble stone, same as Virginia State Capitol, with Greek arches over windows
- Unlike most other Greek Revival houses, interior carries out the GR theme:
  - acanthus leaf topped pilasters, cove pediments over doors, classic floral ceiling medallions, different in each room, elaborate marble fireplaces and mantels in every room, 14-foot ceilings and a hanging stair.
  - Second floor almost as stylish: high ceilings, elaborate marble fireplaces, detailed woodwork
- High brick walls surround the peaceful rear garden

### HOUSE HISTORY:

- Built by tobacconist Thomas Mann Branch. The expense may have contributed to his financial downfall as he was foreclosed within 2 years
- Bought by Adolph Dill, a German baker, whose house on Marshall Street was until recently the Black History Museum
- Purchased by Isaac Davenport in 1846, principal in the first paper company and banker, died from falling debris when inspecting his burned-out factory after Civil War Evacuation Fire. House never converted to a hospital quarters during the Civil War but his daughter was active in caring for soldiers.
- Davenports continued to live here; the double house next door was built for children.
- Francis Glasgow, manager of Tredegar Iron Works, bought the house in 1887, raised 10 children. A strict Calvinist, he “never committed a pleasure”, per his daughter, Ellen Glasgow.
- Her father died in 1916 after falling down front granite steps. House had been deeded to Arthur Glasgow, Ellen’s oldest brother. He then upgraded the interior with bathrooms and electricity.
- Ellen continued to live here alone in the house until her death in 1945, with 5 servants and a secretary. She wrote all but one novel in the house.
- Ellen’s brother Arthur Glasgow gave the Glasgow House to the Virginia Historical Society after Ellen’s death in 1945.
- They immediately sold to APVA, who leased it to the University Center, a consortium of colleges

- The Richmond School Board then leased it for about 10 years to use for their Arts and Humanities Center.
- Attorneys McCaul, Grigsby, Pearsall, Manning and Davis purchased the house for offices in 1983

Jack and Tricia Pearsall purchased it in 1986 and returned it to a residence, when there were almost no other homes nearby. Their son (age 10) wrote a poem when they moved in. “The New house, Tremendously big, The rooms so large, The chandelier, The mirror, The New House, Six bathrooms! None of which totally work.”

#### HOUSE INTERIOR:

- The thirteen fireplaces were still being used until 1945.
- The crystal chandelier, which had been taken by the Davenports, was returned after Glasgow’s death, but never electrified, still gas
- The mirror above the mantel in the front western parlor was said to have been purchased from President Madison by Creed Taylor, friend of Madison’s, Chancellor of Virginia courts, founder and director of the Needham Law School and Ellen Glasgow’s great uncle who raised her mother.
- The hall light may have been a candle lantern.
- The stove in the kitchen is a 1945 (at least) Kenmore – 5 range and still in use.
- The electric refrigerator has been moved to the back room and was a 1930’s model. The compressor is still in the basement.

#### ELLEN GLASGOW:

- Ellen Glasgow never went to school, but read the books in her father’s library - Freud, Schopenhauer- risqué for a young lady in that day (and upon her death, those volumes were removed from her library by her sister and nephew.)
- Wrote 21 novels, and won the Pulitzer Prize for *In This Our Life*, only Richmonder to win for fiction. This novel was made into a movie with Olivia de Havilland and Bette Davis. Ellen refused to see, but accepted \$30,000 paid for rights.
- Ellen wrote in her private study on the second floor, which still has her wallpaper from the 1916 renovation and where no one was allowed, not even her publishers. We know from her cook’s daughter that she typed (and slept) in white gloves.
- Glasgow wrote about a realistic, destitute South after the Civil War, not moonlight and magnolias, and portrayed women as the silent strength that kept all families and such from falling apart. Her breakout novel, *Barren Ground*, 1902, “showed the female characters as stronger than the male characters. It was this new type of Southern fiction that made Ellen Glasgow one of the major writers of her time.”
- In her later novels, in *Queensborough* (fictional Richmond), she mocked many of Richmond’s characters including the nouveaux moving to Monument Avenue (her “Granite Avenue” in her novels)
- She knew many prominent authors including Joseph Conrad, Henry James, Willa Cather, Edith Wharton and was great friends with James Branch Cabell.

- She gave a noted dinner for Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas. (“Author Gertrude Stein’s stop in Richmond, Virginia was midway through her American tour. She arrived by automobile on February 5, 1935 in time for a dinner party at the home of author Ellen Glasgow. Others in attendance included James Branch Cabell, Carl Van Vechten, Mark Lutz and Hunter Stagg.”)
- Marjorie Kennan Rawlings was a protégé and was working on a biography of Glasgow at her death.
- In her later years, she was fonder of animals (dogs) than people and was instrumental in the foundation of the SPCA where the royalties from the sales of her books still go to this day. Jeremy, her favorite dog, was buried in the boxwood garden (see the older photos), but was exhumed along with another dog and buried with her in Hollywood Cemetery, which at the time prohibited the burial of animals. Bennet’s Funeral Home supplied an extra-long casket.
- She never married. Her autobiography suggests that she was deeply in love with a man very early in her life. She may have been engaged to a lawyer, Henry Anderson, who once ran for Vice President of United States (though his niece disputes that claim.) In World War I, he ran the Red Cross trains in Romania and when the Richmond paper ran a front-page story suggesting that he was a favorite of Queen of Romania, Ellen was supposedly crushed and severed that relationship for decades. In later life, they renewed their friendship with Sunday dinners on the back porch.

Living here makes one wonder how Ellen Glasgow would have regarded current events: she was an iconoclast in her disregard for the Southern myth, but appreciated tradition and beauty.

#### BEST MEMORIES FROM THE PEARSALLS

- Multiple concerts in the house for CMSCVA, the Central Virginia Chamber Music Society.
- The SPCA has hosted numerous functions at the house to act as fund raisers since Ellen Glasgow’s portrait is in the headquarters and she was critical to their success.
- The parlors are big enough to hold birthday parties with Jonathan Austin the Juggler.
- Huge family dinners around the big dining room table.
- Moving the Corinthian capital in the back yard from the demolished Sunday school building on Franklin Street. A front-end loader dumped it over the wall, and then we moved it into place using the old rolling log technique used by the Egyptians.

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