

Architectural Drawings and Plans at the Library of Virginia

The architectural drawings and plans collection at the Library of Virginia offers a glimpse into the past from a different perspective. This collection looks at history through our built environment and answers questions about the structures around us. What were the high styles of the 1890s? What changes were proposed to solve parking problems at Capitol Square? Why are those three houses so similar in style? When coupled with complementary sources (such as Mutual Assurance Society policies, Sanborn Company Fire Insurance maps, or city directories), this collection can help document and reconstruct a past environment. The drawings and plans can also assist those researching the men and women responsible for the structures that surround us today, as well as the designers of never-built or demolished structures.

The bulk of the architectural drawings and plans concern the city of Richmond and neighboring counties; however, the collection continues to grow through donations, purchases, and transfers from various state and local agencies. A wide variety of associated records often accompanies the plans and drawings, including correspondence, photographs, models, and maps. Social historians, students, professional consultants, landscape architects, architectural historians, and architects are among the researchers who use the collection. The material documents the histories of both existing and demolished structures, and contains information useful for researching house histories, restoring historic residences, nominating properties to state and local historic registers, and charting architectural styles.

Architectural drawings and plans can be found in all three of the major record divisions—state, local, and private papers—at the Library of Virginia. Researchers should access the online Archives & Manuscripts catalog for detailed bibliographic records of the Library's holdings. A number of the architectural collections have accompanying item-level finding aids that can assist researchers. These resources include a detailed history of the creating body, a scope and content statement explaining the breadth and depth of the collection, and an item-by-item listing of each drawing, plan, or related material.

Municipal Records

The architectural drawings and plans collection holds a large number of drawings for several Virginia localities. The **Office of the City Engineer** (Accession 34886a–b) donated several hundred drawings that chart Richmond's built environment from the antebellum period to the 1940s. The bulk of the records date from 1874–1907, the administration of city engineer Colonel Wilfred Emory Cutshaw (1838–1907). These

plans and drawings record the creation of many of the city's schools, armories, parks, and markets. The development of the western portion of the city, the annexation of Manchester, and efforts to control flooding in the Shockoe Valley are among the projects documented in the collection. The records are arranged by project type (such as bridges, cemeteries, fire departments, parks, police departments, and streetcar service), and a finding aid is available in the Archives & Manuscripts catalog.

The **Office of Building Inspection, Building Permits, and Drawings Collection** (Accession 37533) documents a significant portion of Richmond's public and private buildings from 1907–1976. The City of Richmond began issuing formal building permits in 1908, requiring the applicant to submit a set of architectural drawings and specifications with the permit applications for both new structures and alterations to existing structures. Reels 194–204 of the City of Richmond microfilm collection contain the Index to Permits, 1924–1969. The permits are arranged chronologically and then alphabetically by name of the architect, original owner, or street address. The existing plans on microfilm are arranged numerically by permit number. These records help illustrate Richmond's westward development and the boom in commercial construction in the downtown area. The collection contains information on residential structures, churches, theaters, warehouses, office buildings, and state and municipal buildings.

The collection has some gaps. Many of the earliest application forms and blueprints have been lost over time and, therefore, do not exist in any format. Some application forms and blueprints were not microfilmed in the correct order. Additionally, a number of buildings cited in the index volumes have no surviving architectural blueprints, either on film or on paper, because the City of Richmond discarded blueprint drawings for the majority of buildings with construction costs totaling less than \$10,000 in order to reduce the volume of materials and prepare for microfilming in 1964. Also, researchers must consider whether a structure stood within the boundaries of the city of Richmond at the time of construction. Much of the current city of Richmond belonged to the surrounding counties in the early 20th century. Similar records do not exist for neighboring counties. Researchers should consult the detailed catalog record available through the Archives & Manuscripts catalog for this complex collection.

The **City of Norfolk Department of Public Works Drawings, 1899–1934** (Accession 35996) document many demolished structures in the city of Norfolk. Some drawings have notations that record modifications to the structures. The collection documents a considerable number of fire station projects. An item-level finding aid is available through the online catalog.

The **City of Norfolk Building Inspection Office, Architectural Plans and Drawings, 1898–1980** (Accession 32256) consists of the surviving architectural drawings and plans submitted to the City of Norfolk's Building Inspection Office as part of the building permit application procedure between 1898 and 1980. A building permit was required for alterations and new construction. The structures documented include apartment buildings, banks, churches, commercial buildings, fraternal society buildings, garages, hospitals, hotels, municipal and state government buildings, office buildings, schools, service stations, single and multi-family

residences, synagogues, and the like. Of note are drawings for breweries, lard factories, baseball grandstands, bowling alleys, bakeries, and oyster packaging plants.

Portions of this collection appear to have been discarded by the locality, presumably utilizing some prescribed, though undocumented, criteria. In some of the early decades, alteration drawing sets are included with the original drawings. Where applicable, this has been noted in the item-level finding aid available through the Archives & Manuscripts catalog. Drawings and plans for never-executed projects have also been identified and noted.

State Records

Over the centuries, the government of Virginia—be it under king or commonwealth—spawned a number of building projects. The Library of Virginia maintains numerous architectural drawings of such state building construction, including period drawings of the state capitol and its renovations, monument competitions, and more recent office complexes that house state agency employees. In some instances this group of records includes drawings for unrealized projects that were submitted but not chosen during an architectural competition, were scuttled for aesthetic or financial reasons, or were defeated due to public outcry. In its role as the archival agency of the commonwealth, the Library of Virginia preserves the most complete collection of architectural drawings for state-sponsored structures.

Due to security concerns, access to architectural and engineering plans and drawings of current governmental buildings requires a written request from the prospective user and written authorization from the appropriate authority within the agency occupying the facility.

The architectural drawings and plans for the **School Building Service of the State Department of Education** (Accession 28487) cover the years 1920–1970 (bulk 1920–1950). The School Building Service used a variety of standardized plans, altering them to the specifications of a particular school district. They therefore represent both the uniformity of school planning and, in this period, the diversity of customized designs for individual localities. Arranged alphabetically by county or municipality, the collection consists largely of rural school buildings, but does contain some representative urban and suburban buildings. These records, microfilmed for preservation purposes, are available in the West Reading Room (Miscellaneous Reels 1830–1837). A detailed finding aid to the School Building Service Collection is available through the online catalog and lists the school names and microfilm reel numbers. A collection of photographs created by the Department of Education and available on the Library's Web site documents some of the structures found in the architectural drawings.

The Library of Virginia also houses drawings and plans for the **Virginia State Penitentiary, 1927–1992** (Accession 34441). Maintained under Record Group 42, Virginia Department of Corrections (formerly the

Department of Welfare and Institutions), the collection contains drawings, as-built plans, specifications, plats, blueprints, sepia prints, and maps of the Virginia State Penitentiary (Spring Street Prison) in Richmond. The state demolished the prison in 1992.

Private and Business Collections

The **Papers of Charles F. Gillette** (Accessions 34472, 35686) contain the largest group of architectural drawings and plans at the Library of Virginia. Seven thousand drawings and fifty cubic feet of documents make up this collection that charts Gillette's fifty-year career in Richmond, central Virginia, and North Carolina. Though he received no formal training in landscape design, Gillette received accolades for his work on private residences and historic homes, such as the Governor's Mansion, Agecroft Hall, and Virginia House. Researchers can access a detailed finding aid through the Library's online catalog. Additionally, a searchable database of correspondence and drawings is linked from the catalog record and the finding aid. Some photographs documenting Gillette's work in central Virginia have been digitized and are available on the Library's Web site. For more on Gillette, see George C. Longest's *Genius in the Garden: Charles F. Gillette and Landscape Architecture in Virginia* (1992).

The **Papers of Haigh Jamgochian** (Accession 41492) include correspondence, architectural drawings and plans, sketches, architectural models, photographs, manuscripts, diaries, film, videotape, art, theses, artifacts, publications, clippings, and ephemera that document the education, career, and life of controversial Richmond architect Haigh Jamgochian. Twice a finalist for the Paris Prize, Jamgochian challenged conventional architecture with his whimsical designs such as the Tree House and Spiral Building. Although he only executed two structures (one subsequently demolished), Jamgochian captured national and international attention for his designs and unconventional ideas. In addition to illustrating the architect's career, this collection documents architectural education after World War II, as well as drafting and design in the pre-computer era.

The Works Progress Administration, a Depression-era federal agency, oversaw the *Historic American Buildings Survey* (HABS) as one of its projects in the 1930s. A large number of HABS drawings can be found in a volume containing measured architectural drawings for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century structures in Virginia, as well as for a small number of structures in Maryland and South Carolina. Housed within the **Business Records Collection** and known only by its accession number (Accession 36424), the volume was compiled by an unnamed Richmond architect who apparently bound the drawings as a pattern book to be used in his practice. The entire *Historic American Buildings Survey* for Virginia is available on microfiche in the East Reading Room (Fiche 27). The Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs Division maintains the original HABS records.

The Declarations and Board of Directors' Minute Books from the **Mutual Assurance Society Declarations and Revaluations of Assurance, 1796–1966** are available on microfilm in the West Reading Room. The Mutual Assurance Society insured properties against “all losses and damages occasioned accidentally by fire or lightning.” Policies include the name of the insured, place of residence, location of the insured property (with references to contiguous property), and a description and estimated value of each structure insured. Roofing material and distance from the street and other structures are also noted. A rough sketch of the insured property appears at the bottom of most policies. Indices exist for the pre-1867 policies; however, for post-1867 policies, researchers should consult the annotated Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps in the collection for the declaration number. Because the policies have not been thoroughly indexed after 1867, it can be difficult to determine a declaration number in that time period. For additional information (including material that has not been microfilmed), see *A Guide to Business Records in the Virginia State Library and Archives* (rev. ed., 1994) and Research Notes Number 24, *Mutual Assurance Society Records at the Library of Virginia*.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Virginia dating back to 1867 are available on microfilm, along with a checklist, in the Map Research Room. The maps provide the information once used by insurance agents to determine the cost and risk factors involved in property insurance. Drawn to the scale of fifty feet to one inch, the plans include information on elements of building construction, roofing style, window placement, wall thickness, height of buildings, and the distance of buildings from sidewalks. The maps also include text or abbreviations to describe the building's function (for example, dwelling, factory, or business). The Library of Congress maintains many of the original Sanborn maps. The Library of Virginia's map collection holds a number of original Sanborn maps for Virginia cities and towns. Please consult the online catalog or an archivist for more information.

Printed Resources

The Library of Virginia contains many reference works on the state's architectural history, including *The Making of Virginia Architecture* (1992), by Charles E. Brownell, et al.; *Lewis Ginter's Richmond* (1991), by David D. Ryan; *Richmond's Architecture* (1981), by Robert P. Winthrop; *Houses of Old Richmond* (1941), by Mary Wingfield Scott; *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape* (1994), edited by Carl R. Lounsbury; *Virginia Landmarks of Black History* (1995) and *The Virginia Landmarks Register* (4th ed., 1999), edited by Calder Loth; *Virginia's Historic Courthouses* (1995), by John O. and Margaret T. Peters; and *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture* (1986), edited by Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach.

Two publications of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources are especially helpful to those researching house histories: John Salmon's *Researching Your Historic Virginia Property*, online: http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/pdf_files/HowtoResearch.pdf (viewed November 2007); and *Virginia's Historical Registers: A Guide*

for *Property Owners*, online: http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/pdf_files/Virginias_Historical_Registers.pdf (viewed November 2007).

Additional information on Virginia architecture and architects may be found in Mills Lane's *Architecture of the Old South: Virginia* (1987); John Wells and Robert Dalton's *Virginia Architects, 1835–1955: A Biographical*

Dictionary (1997); and in the proceedings of Virginia Commonwealth University's Architectural History Symposium (1993–).

General reference works on American architecture in the collection include *Dictionary of Building Preservation* (1996), edited by Ward Bucher; *The Elements of Style: A Practical Encyclopedia of Interior Architectural Details* (1996), edited by Stephen Calloway; and *A Field Guide to American Houses* (1984), by Virginia and Lee McAlester. Researchers may also find information of interest in periodicals, such as *Architectural Record* (1891–present) and *Manufacturers Record* (1882–1958). The *National Register Bulletin* addresses researching historic properties and applying for the National Register of Historic Places.

Availability of Records for Research

Access. Due to the complexity and condition of these collections, patrons are encouraged to call the Library (804.692.388) to discuss projects before visiting to view original architectural records. All original drawings and plans are served in the Map Research Room under the supervision of an archivist. The Map Research Room is a secure area, and patrons will be asked to register, show photographic identification, and lock up personal items such as handbags and briefcases. Only pencils may be used to take notes and tracing is not permitted. Unless a researcher has prior permission or special circumstances (as determined by the supervising archivist), original documents are not served if a photocopy, microfiche, or microfilm copy is available.

Reproduction. As with all historic documents, preservation is a major concern with the drawings and plans collection. Reproduction of some material is possible. If the records have been microfilmed, a copy may be obtained in the West Reading Room from a microfilm reader-printer. Original drawings must be sent to Photographic Services for reproduction. (As these materials are often fragile and light-sensitive, standard architectural copying machines cannot be used.) Researchers may contact the supervisor of Photographic Services (804.692.3514) to discuss specific formats and media available for copying architectural materials. A pamphlet on photo duplication services and fees is available at any reference desk.

Notes



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