



LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

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Librarian of Virginia

Matters of Scale: Charles F. Gillette in Petersburg

A new Library of Virginia exhibition at Petersburg Public Library opening during Historic Garden Week in Virginia celebrates the work of the renowned landscape architect.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RICHMOND & PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA – The Petersburg Garden Club, Petersburg Public Library, and the Library of Virginia present the free exhibition *Matters of Scale: Charles F. Gillette in Petersburg*, which celebrates the work of the renowned landscape architect. The exhibition opens to the public on April 27, 2022, during the Garden Club of Virginia's Historic Garden Week at Petersburg Public Library.

"From the 1920s through the 1960s, Charles F. Gillette's name was synonymous with the best landscape design in the upper South," said Dale Neighbors, the Library of Virginia's Visual Studies Collection coordinator. "Seeing his original plans and drawings offers a rare opportunity to appreciate the influence of regionalism on landscape design, and to acknowledge the legacy of Charles Gillette on contemporary Virginia gardens."

Although he is most remembered for his private estate work, Gillette's Petersburg designs serve as a microcosm of his broader career, encompassing residential, corporate, and large-scale educational projects. Projects such as Virginia State University (1930s–1950s), Blandford Cemetery (1928), and the private gardens of Petersburg residents George Cameron, C. L. Morris, and W. R. Seward incorporate many of what would later become recognized as Gillette's signature details, including highly crafted masonry construction, carefully selected garden statuary, and an overall concern for proportion and scale.

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Drawn extensively from the Charles F. Gillette Papers at the Library of Virginia, the exhibition includes garden designs, photographs, and client correspondence that have never been publicly displayed before, as well as a recently restored Gillette bench.

Charles F. Gillette (1886–1969) is nationally recognized as one of the premier landscape architects associated with the restoration and re-creation of historic gardens in the upper South and especially Virginia. Gillette established a regional style—known as the "Virginia Garden"—characterized by its understated classicism and attention to detail. He linked architecture and landscape in a manner seldom found today, not only emphasizing the traditional features of landscape design but also carefully shaping each of his creative outdoor environments to complement the most distinctive elements of his clients' homes and broader surroundings.

Born in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, Gillette by 1909–1911 was serving as an apprentice in the office of Warren Manning, a leading landscape architect at the turn of the century. Gillette married Ellen Cogswell in 1912 and moved to Richmond in 1913 to supervise the completion of Manning's landscape design for the University of Richmond's new campus. In 1915 he began designing the grounds of the Nelson House in Yorktown and in 1924 commenced work on the landscape restoration of Kenmore in Fredericksburg. A few years later, he initiated plans for the landscaping of Virginia House and Agecroft, both reconstructed English manor houses located in Richmond's Windsor Farms neighborhood. Extensive additions to the Virginia House gardens were completed in 1939. During the 1950s, Gillette redesigned the gardens of Virginia's Executive Mansion at the request of Governor Thomas B. Stanley, as well as designing the grounds for the Richmond headquarters of the Reynolds Metals Company and the Ethyl Corporation. His commissions also included hundreds of residential projects throughout Virginia and North Carolina.

The exhibition was partly inspired by Petersburg resident Bill Nicholson's acquisition of a garden bench attributed to Gillette—an item that will be included in the exhibition. After doing some research, he learned that it was originally one of a pair of benches created along with gardens designed by Gillette for Edward Victor Williams's residence called Kenwyn (now known as Wynandra), built in 1929 on Richmond's Amphill Road. Nicholson had also recently seen some works by Gillette on a visit to the Library of Virginia. "As a result, I offered to sponsor this exhibit for the Petersburg Garden Club in light of the volume of work Gillette planned for our fair city," said Nicholson.

"Bill has been a part of bringing this exhibition to Petersburg from the beginning," said Scott Dodson, executive director of the Library of Virginia Foundation. "He is a great partner, instrumental to building relationships in the city, and a huge supporter of arts, culture, and history."

“This is exciting and we are honored to have the opportunity to host this exhibit at the library,” said Wayne M. Crocker, Petersburg Public Library’s director of Library Services.

Matters of Scale: Charles F. Gillette in Petersburg will be on display April 27–June 30, 2022, at the Petersburg Public Library’s central branch, 201 West Washington Street, Petersburg, Virginia 23803, which is open Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday 10:00 AM–5:00 PM, and Tuesday and Thursday 1:00–8:00 PM. For more information, visit www.ppls.org or call 804.733.2387.

The exhibition will also be part of the Petersburg Garden Tour on April 26, 2022, the day before it opens to the public. Visit www.vagardenweek.org/tours for information and tickets. The Garden Club of Virginia’s Historic Garden Week runs April 23–30, 2022.

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Find related images here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/kjuzyzpg2f6wsl9/AABT6fzINZ0Mk2N15GyKHM0oa?dl=0>

About the Library of Virginia

The Library of Virginia is one of the oldest agencies of Virginia government, founded in 1823 to preserve and provide access to the state's incomparable printed and manuscript holdings. Its collection, which has grown steadily through the years, is the most comprehensive resource in the world for the study of Virginia history, culture, and government with over 130 million items in the collections. The Library also engages the public through in-person and virtual events, education programs, and online resources that reach nearly 4 million individuals each year throughout the commonwealth and beyond. Visit www.lva.virginia.gov.

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