

Garden History & Landscape Design

The gardens at MacCallum More, like the house they surround, are an eclectic blend of historic objects and artifacts, and the design aesthetics and influences of at least four individuals – Charles F. Gillette, Lucy Morton Hudgins, William H. Hudgins, and Howard Hudgins. The 1927 and ca. 1959 sections of the garden are more formal in design and exhibit the influence of Charles Gillette while the incorporation of mature trees and less formal paths in other areas gives the garden a woodland feel and the entire garden is used to display artifacts, statuary, and architectural elements. Between 1927 and 1976, the property grew from its original 1.24 acres to a total of six acres. In 1941 and 1942, Lucy and her son, William, acquired additional lots to the north. In 1959, William acquired the last garden lots to the north on Berry Street, and in 1976, he acquired the lot to the east where the museum is located. In 1946, Judge and Mrs. Hudgins sold William the lot where the guest cottage stands. Upon his mother's death in 1964, William received half interest in the original 1.24 acre lot where MacCallum More stands and in 1965 he acquired his brother, Edward's half interest, which gave him ownership of the entire property.

The gardens were opened to the public for the first time in 1966 for Historic Garden Week and again in 1973 for the Chase City Centennial celebration. In 1983, Billy began construction on the Museum to house the Indian Artifact collection that he had purchased from Arthur Robertson. The Robertson collection contains over 50,000 pieces that were collected in and around Mecklenburg and Charlotte counties and the island at Kerr Lake. "Billy worked on the building until his death in February of 1986. The executor of the estate continued construction until 1991 when the current board of directors took over. The Museum was completed, the exhibit was installed, and the Museum had its grand opening April 19, 1996." The gardens are open seven days a week, year round and holidays for the nominal fee of \$2.00. The Museum and Gift Shop, housed in the former guest cottage, are open six days a week but closed on major holidays.

Lucy Morton Hudgins and Charles F. Gillette were the first to influence the appearance and design of the gardens. "Lucy Morton Hudgins had no formal training, just a love of gardening, and not being afraid to get her hands dirty did some of the manual work." In addition to the MacCallum More gardens, Mrs. Hudgins "did landscape planting at her church (St. John's Episcopal) and at Chase City schools." She was very proud of the fact the Mr. Gillette had designed her garden, but she selected the plantings including the acquisition of thousands of boxwood "from many of the old homes in Southside Virginia." Mrs. Hudgins' two grandsons recall:

having some memory of hearing my grandmother talk about the fact that her garden was designed by Mr. Gillette and it seems to me there were some follow [up] discussions. At that time, I think she was mostly talking about what she called the sunken garden. This was the area off the end of the house that was down a few steps that carried you from the upper level down to the bottom of a

sort of ha ha wall. It had a path as a central axis that went from the porch down to the goldfish pond. The path was lined with English boxwoods.

Charles Gillette had an unequalled influence on the Virginia landscape by establishing a regional style identified by an understated classicism, attention to detail, and the integration of architecture and the landscape. Charles Gillette was born in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin on March 14, 1886. His father, Orlando Gillette, was a farmer and herbalist. He “taught his son to love the earth and its seasons and to appreciate the beauty of nature and the magic of man’s relationship to his natural surroundings.” Gillette’s family was of modest means and at the age of fourteen he was sent to Madison, Wisconsin to continue his education where he received room and board in exchange for performing domestic tasks for his landlady. Gillette’s formal education did not extend to the university level. He taught for a few years in the Lafayette County, Wisconsin public school system and was on the staff of the Wisconsin Home for the Feeble Minded. In 1909, he was accepted as an apprentice in the office of Warren G. Manning, a Boston landscape designer who had trained with Frederick Law Olmstead. In 1909, Manning selected Gillette to supervise the extensive renovations of the landscape at Chelmsford, the Greenwich Connecticut estate of Elon and Blanche Hooker. Chelmsford was part of the Country Place era in landscape architecture, when wealthy patrons built impressive country estates surrounded by meticulously conceived gardens and dramatic vistas often based on European and English models.

In 1911, Manning sent Gillette to Virginia to oversee work at Richmond College and other projects in the area. Gillette traveled to Europe and the British Isles in the spring of 1912, married in December of that year, and in 1913, he returned to Richmond where he made his home until his death in 1969. He established an office in Richmond in 1917 and over the ensuing years he would plan the gardens for hundreds of estates, both country and suburban. As the Country Place era came to a close with the Great Depression and World War II, Gillette turned his attention to larger scale academic, corporate and governmental projects. Charles Gillette drew heavily upon the work of eighteenth-century English landscape designers and Mediterranean influences “as revealed in his fondness for confining walls and hedges, secluded niches, shaded areas, ornamental fruit trees, fountains, pools, statuary, and vine-covered pergolas.” The extension of the house into the landscape by means of French doors and the open porch, the axial shaded walk, low stone walls that separate the garden from the lawn, and the gold fish pond are characteristic elements of a Gillette garden and are embodied in the earliest portions of the garden at MacCallum More.

Gillette’s involvement at MacCallum More does not end with the earliest portion of the garden. In 1944 and 1948, he worked on two other projects in Chase City – the layout for the adjacent Crestmede subdivision and a residential garden for J. T. Butler. According to local sources the Crestmede subdivision was not executed as designed by Charles Gillette and the Butler property has changed ownership numerous times in the ensuing decades and the Gillette garden no longer exists. Charles Gillette may have offered guidance to Mrs. Hudgins while in town when working

on Crestmede and the Butler garden, especially since two lots to the north of the original garden were purchased in 1941 and 1942. William Hudgins also consulted with Gillette after he purchased the last garden lots in 1959. This consultation is documented in an undated letter from William H. Hudgins to James Harrelson, Chase City government office. The letter states: "Thank you for meeting with me and the two landscape engineers, Mr. Charles Gillet (sic) and Mr. James Buck, whom I engaged to, come from Richmond for conferences and on the spot inspection of the acreage which I own between Berry, Walker and Hudgins street and Crestmede." There is no record of Gillette's work for Lucy or William Hudgins in the drawing or client files at the Library of Virginia, the official repository of Gillette's records. But there is a record for the design of a garden wall for Mr. and Mrs. E. M. Hudgins of Richmond, Virginia. E. M. Hudgins was the eldest son of Judge and Mrs. Hudgins. According to Selden Richardson, former Gillette archivist for the Library of Virginia," that there would be that kind of family connection is classic Gillette business practice, as all of his work was by word of mouth. You may find that Gillette came over and walked around the yard, and drew an idea on a napkin." The MacCallum More gardens represent one of Gillette's few projects in Southside Virginia. The majority of Gillette's commissions were in the Richmond area, followed by the Charlottesville vicinity. Fewer than 10% of Gillette's commissions were in Southside and the majority of those were concentrated around the larger communities of Danville, Lynchburg and Martinsville. The MacCallum More gardens are also the only significant landscape feature in the community.

William H. Hudgins took an early interest in his mother's garden and was instrumental in acquiring additional lots for the garden's expansion and "he had statues, fountains, gates, benches, well heads and all sorts of other garden accessories shipped from various places in Spain, Italy, the Middle East and other places" while in the Navy.³⁰ "In some cases he had a general idea what he wanted to do with these accessories. In other cases, he just liked the objects but had not yet developed a plan for them." In 1948, while negotiating with Dr. R. J. Walker to purchase additional land he gave the following description:

I am anxious to beautify this street because of the fact that it was named for my Mother. In 1910 my family built on the South East corner of Walker Street which then had only two residences on it in the block above (Mr. T. E. Roberts and Mrs. W. D. Norvell's) and your grandfather told her that he was indebted to her for starting the trek East and the sale of his lots. In 1928 when we bought the old ball park from Mr. Walker, she bought the woods below (to the east) our old house from Miss Hortense Drew. It then adjoined the ball park and was used as the town dump. She spent that entire summer with three men clearing it up and cutting the road (the extension of Walker Street) and creating seven beautiful lots on the South Side of Walker Street and faced our new house, thereon, making it quite the prettiest street in Chase City. This also pleased your Grandfather tremendously. The town later paved this street and developed the new street which we opened partially (now Hudgins Street on which your lots for sale are located).

With the exception of the museum lot that was acquired in 1976, the garden had reached its full expanse by 1959. At this time, the only parts of the property that were developed as gardens were the formal areas designed by Charles Gillette around the house, the guest cottage, and the sunken garden. The remainder of the land towards the museum and Berry Street was partly wild and cleared for vegetable gardens and later tennis courts. The land was allowed to become wooded. After, William Hudgins retired in the 1960s, he planned his expansions around those trees. The incorporation of these mature trees gives the MacCallum More garden the feel of a woodland landscape. A woodland garden is intended to mimic an informal forest landscape, with four vertical elements: the canopy layer, the under story, the shrub layer, and the ground layer. Another characteristic of woodland gardens is choosing plants with a cyclical rhythm in mind to keep the garden visually interesting throughout the year. This is achieved by incorporating spring blooming trees, shrubs, and perennials; a variety of shade loving summer ground layer plants such as ferns and hostas; colorful fall foliage; and a variety bark colors and vibrant berries add interest in the winter. Another important characteristic of a woodland garden is the use of native plants.

The gardens at MacCallum More exemplify the woodland garden type with its mature canopy of trees and the inclusion of seasonal plantings and native species.

Native dogwoods and redbuds predominate in the early spring and then give way to herb and wildflower gardens containing many native and naturalized species, attractive to both birds and butterflies. Native columbines, beebalm, cardinal flowers and jewelweed bloom in succession from the early spring until late fall, providing the natural food source of ruby-throated hummingbirds. Native elderberries and pokeweed berries attract eastern bluebirds, brown thrashers, northern cardinals and cedar waxwings. Purple coneflowers, black-eyed susans and tickseed sunflowers attract American goldfinches, house finches, mourning doves, Carolina chickadees, song sparrows and many butterfly species. Cultivated varieties such as parsley, dill and fennel serves as nurseries for black swallowtails, while monarch butterflies migrating through, are sustained by over 200 species of herbs and flowers including milkweed and butterfly bushes.

William Hudgins shared his parents' passion for collecting and this passion shaped the character of the landscape as a display garden. Whenever William "heard or read of anything being demolished he would rent a truck and pick out what he could use." These artifacts included stone for the walls, imprinted sidewalk brick for the terraces and walk ways, keystone and obelisks. In 1973, he had four tons of statuary shipped from Europe to be placed in his garden and in 1977, another 59,000 pounds of artifacts arrived in a transatlantic container.

Included in the latest shipment from Europe is a 12-arch Roman cloister with a fountain in the center. In addition, there are wall fountains, statues, urns, benches and carved stone plaques. The plaques are to be inserted in rock walls Hudgins is

having constructed along Walker, Hudgins and Berry streets, which border his property...his first priority is to finish the rock walls in which he is using more than 200 tons of old rock that he has already brought to Chase City from foundations and chimneys of old Colonial homes in Lunenburg, Mecklenburg and Charlotte counties. The rock has come from the old Tisdale place in Mecklenburg County, the Wilson property on the Middle Meherrin River in Lunenburg County, the Crafton home in Charlotte County, the old Oliver-Walker house in Mecklenburg and another old house south of Chase City. The new wall will be added to 450 feet of rock wall built 50 years ago by Hudgins' father. That rock came from Tucker's Mill, known as Burwell's Mill in pre-Revolutionary days, on the South Meherrin River.

William Hudgins' designs for the expanded gardens were, in the words of his nephew, Howard Hudgins,

influenced by his mother, Mr. Gillette, and the various estates he visited in his travels in this country and abroad. By this time I had my Masters Degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Virginia. I did a number of drawings and sketches of parts of the garden, in an attempt to bring some order to the garden. Uncle Bill implemented some of my suggestions and not others. In hindsight, I would say that my uncle stuck with the concept of developing a series of outdoor rooms and linking them with paths and numerous statues and other garden accessories he collected from various parts of the world.

The gardens possess a high level of integrity as each expansion was additive and respectful of the areas that came before. The museum was the final addition to the garden and it too was planned and constructed to complement the existing garden. The museum was placed on the eastern property line, tucked into the site. The building is very plain in design and unornamented. It is also constructed of stone so that it blends into the stone walls that enclose the garden.