FAMILIAR FRIENDS:
SELECTED ARCHITECTURAL PLANS
OF SWEET BRIAR LANDMARKS

Presented by the Art Collection and Galleries
Benedict Gallery
October 10-December 15, 2013

View of the College’s four original buildings, 1906
from The First Year Book of Sweet Briar Institute 1906-1907
This selection of 12 plans and one model represents a small segment of the Sweet Briar collection of architectural documents from the Boston firm Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson, headed by Ralph Adams Cram. Salvaged from misadventure and neglect by individuals such as Ann Marshall Whitley ’47, founding director of the Sweet Briar Museum; Carma Fauntleroy, first director of the campus art gallery, and her successor Rebecca Massie Lane; Charles Kestner, long-time head of the buildings and grounds department; and Aileen H. Laing, professor of art history emerita, these materials document the long, multi-faceted association that Cram enjoyed with Sweet Briar College.

Ralph Adams Cram was initially invited to Sweet Briar in 1901 by John McBryde, a member of the new school’s board of directors and president of Virginia Tech. McBryde presented Cram’s concept drawings to the College’s trustees at their third board meeting, in the late summer of 1901. After scrutiny of the plans and “extensive” discussion, McBryde was instructed to request from Cram’s firm “the approximate cost of an academic building, and two dormitories”. At the time best known for his ecclesiastic architecture, Cram leveraged the Sweet Briar commission to broaden his repertoire and during this same decade worked for a number of high profile academic clients: Princeton University (1906), Rice University (1908), and the University of Richmond (1910).

Cram envisioned a grand Beaux Arts scheme of monumental buildings in a Georgian Revival style in keeping with Virginia’s architectural heritage. Today’s Sweet Briar community will recognize his original quadrangle at the heart of campus, crowned by the cupola of The Refectory (now called the Pannell Center). Three of the campus’s first four original buildings are featured in this installation: Academic (Benedict); Dormitory Number One (Gray) with the Pavilion (Bell Tower); and The Refectory (Pannell). All were open in 1906 when Sweet Briar welcomed its first students. These three buildings are part of the Sweet Briar College National Historic District, having been placed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places in 1995.

Evident throughout these plans and the hundreds more architectural documents in our care is the fact that Cram and Sweet Briar’s first trustees and administrators struggled with the same issues that we do today: how to create a practical physical space for a community; how to integrate buildings into the landscape and match them to each other; and how to enable teaching and learning.

The installation was framed and installed by Nancy McDearmon, with the aid of student workers Mariah Miller ’16 and Ariel Taylor ’14.

Karol A. Lawson
Director, Art Collection and Galleries and the Sweet Briar Museum

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1 The bulk of Ralph Adams Cram’s papers and plans are held by the Boston Public Library. The hundreds of Cram plans at Sweet Briar today are the working blueprints and reference copies of original ink on linen drawings that were used by architects and engineers on site. His business partners at the time of the Sweet Briar work were architect Bertram Goodhue and draftsman Frank Ferguson. Goodhue left the partnership in 1913. The firm of Cram and Ferguson is still in business in Boston.
2 See Aileen Laing, Sweet Briar College and Ralph Adams Cram: Dreams and Reality. Sweet Briar, VA: Sweet Briar College Art Gallery, 2001. Cram worked with the College until 1928 (Cochran Library) and corresponded with President Meta Glass about various building schemes for a number of years. He died in 1942.
3 Minutes of the board of overseers, Sweet Briar Institute, 26 August 1901.
4 The fourth original 1906 building was Dormitory Number Two (Carson).
SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE FIRST BUILDINGS and QUADRANGLE

Architect’s Presentation Model  ca. 1901-1902
painted wood 53 x 36 x 11 inches
A.S.014

ACADEMIC (BENEDICT HALL)

“I remember especially my first sight of the inside of the academic building. There was nothing in it except piles of plaster on the unstained floors, not even a blackboard. The two dormitories looked bare also, but the refectory floor looked smooth and ready to be danced upon....The steam fitting had not been done, the electric light wiring had not been put in, and so we were concerned with getting ready our steam heat, hot water, electric light, steam laundry and cold storage, as well with staining floors, decorating, getting kitchen and dining room furniture, and academic furniture and equipment.”

President Mary Kendrick Benedict, recalling her first impressions upon arriving in the summer of 1906, in “Sweet Briar 1906-1916,” Alumnae News Sweet Briar College, December 1937, p. 5.

“The academic building contains large, well lighted class rooms, and art studio and laboratories for chemistry, physics, biology, and domestic science….In this building is a reading room in which are found current magazines and newspapers, and a library of a thousand volumes.”

from The First Year Book of Sweet Briar Institute 1906-1907, pp. 13-14

The building known as “Academic” was comprehensively renovated in 1976, on the occasion of the College’s 75th anniversary. The central wooden stairwells were replaced with fireproof exit stairs at the sides of the building, restrooms were relocated, the lobby as well as classrooms and faculty offices were reconfigured. It was at this juncture that the building was christened “Benedict Hall” in honor of the College’s first president.

East Elevation (main façade)  ca. 1901-1906
copy of a blueprint original 43 x 37 inches
A.A.002

East Elevation (main façade)  ca. 1901-1906
blueprint 23 ¾ x 42 inches
A.A.005

First Floor Plan  ca. 1901-1906
blueprint 23 ¼ x 41 ½ inches
A.A.004

Second Floor Plan  ca. 1901-1906
blueprint 23 ¼ x 42 inches
A.A.006

North Elevation
(side façade connected to Gray Hall by arcade)
ca. 1901-1906
blueprint 23 ¾ x 42 inches
A.A.008
DORMITORY ONE (GRAY HALL)

“The dormitories are furnished comfortably and attractively and have every modern convenience.”

from *The First Year Book of Sweet Briar Institute 1906-1907*, p. 13.

“None but you may know what it means for thirty-six girls, inexperienced in the ways of college life, to be gathered together in new buildings, appalling because of their very newness, with an unfamiliar faculty to begin not only their own careers but that of a great college as well—for ours will be a great college some day.”


Dormitory One was named for the Rev. Arthur Gray of Ascension Church, Amherst, who was pastor to Indiana Fletcher Williams and who served as one of the first trustees of the College. It, and Dormitory Two (Carson), welcomed the 36 boarding students who arrived in September 1906. It was converted to faculty offices and classrooms in the 1990s.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>East Elevation No. 1 Section West Elevation (short end façades)</th>
<th>Second Floor Plan No. 1</th>
<th>copy on Mylar of an ink on linen original</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>copy on Mylar of an ink on linen original</td>
<td>ca. 1901-1906</td>
<td>19 x 41 ½ inches</td>
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<td>19 x 41 ½ inches</td>
<td>copy on Mylar of an ink on linen original</td>
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<td>A.D1.011</td>
<td>19 x 41 ½ inches</td>
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<tr>
<th>North Elevation No. 1 (long facade connected to Refectory/Pannell by arcade)</th>
<th>Pavilion and Arcade to Dormitory No. 1 Sweetbriar Institute Amherst Virginia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>copy on Mylar of an ink on linen original</td>
<td>(bell tower connected to Dormitory One/Gray Hall)</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 x 41 inches</td>
<td>ca. 1901-1906</td>
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<td>A.D1.010</td>
<td>copy on Mylar of an ink on linen original</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 x 38 ½ inches</td>
<td>A.D1.003</td>
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THE REFECTORY (ANNE GARY PANNELL CENTER)

The Refectory was the College’s first dining room and until Cochran Library opened in 1929 it was the largest and most formal building on campus. It was supplemented by a modern kitchen and dining room in Glass Dormitory in the 1960s. In 1984-1985 it was renovated to house an art gallery and art history department classrooms and offices. At that time it was renamed the Anne Gary Pannell Center, in honor of the College’s fifth president.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>East Elevation—Refectory/Sweetbriar—Institute/Amherst—Virginia</th>
<th>East Elevation Refectory/Sweetbriar Institute/Amherst County Virginia</th>
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<th>South Elevation</th>
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