

History

The construction of the W.F. Patton House was completed in 1890. It was occupied by the Pattons for just four years before its sale to the Dudley family in 1894. The house remained in that family for 60 years, though later converted to apartments by the widow Dudley.

Following Mrs. Dudley's death in 1954, the house was maintained as apartments by a series of owners until 1965. At that time, an attempt was made to raze the house in favor of a modern apartment building to be placed on its deep lot.

This proposed demolition was not favored in the community. An organization known as the "Committee of 900" was successful in preserving the house, purchased by decorator Robert I. Harper for his shop and studio. Later, the first floor studio was occupied by musician Mary Brockwell. As a result, older Danvillians remember visiting the house for their music lessons.

In 1978, the house was purchased by Dr. and Mrs. Wilford Cocke. The Cockes adapted the first floor for use in his orthodontics practice, with the upstairs remaining as apartments. Again, many Danvillians remember the house as the source of their braces.

Paul and Marjory Liepe purchased this landmark to Danvillians in late 2003, and began its restoration as a single family residence. That work continues today.

The Pattons

William Fearn Patton was a third generation Danvillian who became immensely wealthy as a banker. After the Civil War, W.F. joined his father and brother (J. Allen Patton) in a local bank known as Wm. S. Patton, Sons, and Co.

W.F. married Sallie Ann Fuller in 1881, daughter of a prominent tobacconist. The couple lived at this house for only four years after its construction, she dying of typhoid fever in July 1894.

Upon his wife's death, W.F. removed himself and his two young sons to the home of his mother-in-law on South Main Street, never to return. He sold the property – including all of the furniture, tableware, and remaining personal property – for \$19,145.

The Dudleys

Second owner Oliver Witcher Dudley was a tobacco buyer for several Danville firms, including Pemberton and Penn. He became president of this firm on the death of the founder. Later, he organized O.W. Dudley Leaf Tobacco Buyers on Lynn Street.

Dudley married Lucie Howard Estes in the same year he acquired the house from Patton. He substantially enlarged and remodeled the house, adding eight rooms, inlaid hardwood flooring, central heating, and Renaissance Revival decoration.

After his death, Mrs. Dudley converted the house to apartments and extended the porch to include a sitting area.

Patton House c. 1907



1887 Dimmock Design



W.F. Patton House 926 Main Street Danville, VA



Paul and Marjory Liepe, Stewards

Architecture

No expense was spared in the construction of this Richardsonian Free Style mansion, with an appraised value of \$10,000 on completion.

Built of contrasting materials, textures, and shapes, the lower facade is of expensive rusticated greenstone – a rock which underlies granite in some quarries. The balance of the main floor and the upper floors are of smooth brickwork with the smallest possible amounts of mortar.

The rounded corners of two bay projections contrast with the rough cut stone. The ogee curve of the dome contrasts with the squareness of the entrance porch. The slate roof is topped by almost whimsical decoration reminiscent of a Viking ship.

The stone and terra cotta latticework of the porch roof balustrade continues a belt course around the facade. That course is interrupted by several panels of patterned terra cotta.

Twenty-two exterior windows on the main and second floors include original stained glass transoms repeating a Southern Magnolia theme.

At one time, the exterior also included an elaborate side porte-cochere and cresting above its side projections.

The architect is believed to be Marion J. Dimmock of Richmond. While the attribution to Dimmock is uncertain, he published a strikingly similar design for a row house in 1887, explaining the narrow “town house” compactness of the design. (Dimmock also designed Danville’s Opera House at about the same time.)

Following its many and varied uses as apartments and offices, the interior has been returned to twenty-four rooms with fourteen fireplaces on four levels. There are nearly 8,000 square feet in all.

The house underwent major renovations twice by the Dudleys – first in the 1910s to add central heating and Renaissance Revival elements, and again in the 1930s for a conversion to apartments.

Main Floor

Visitors enter through a traditional vestibule into a double-square entrance hall with side projection for the stairwell. Once divided into three, this long room and the views beyond contrast with the house’s small exterior appearance, emphasizing the massive size of this dwelling

The entrance hall boasts original converted gasoliers and sconces, fireplace tiles, and an overmantel once removed. The free standing staircase was completely hidden by the apartment conversion. The balustrade lost when replaced by a dividing wall awaits replacement.

Flooring once added overhead to expand the second floor landing has been removed, returning the stairwell to its original open configuration and providing space for a small elevator. While the mechanism is entirely new, the 1895 elevator car was rescued from a commercial building in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and reconfigured to fit here.

The hall provides immediate entry to the grand ballroom. Once carved into men’s and lady’s parlors (dividing the side bay), and then into offices, architectural evidence suggests the ballroom is now in its original con-

Interior Features, Renovations, and Restoration

figuration. That evidence also shows cut-pile carpeting as the original floor covering – likely by Wilton – replaced by a thin inlaid hardwood during the 1910s.

The pocket doors which presently grace the ballroom entrance were found in grave disrepair in a crawl space. They were restored by employees of their original maker – the Danville Lumber and Manufacturing Company, which also provided the mansion’s decorative mouldings.

The ballroom’s front overmantel is plaster on wood with the manufacturer’s mark of John A Moore Company, Baltimore, 1890. It was removed in the 1910s, stored on site until the 1970s, moved to Winston-Salem for possible use there by previous owner Robert Harper, and returned to its original place after 90-some years in 2006.

An elegant dining room includes a large interior stained glass window displaying an enchanting vineyard theme. The pocket door is a reproduction, modeled on the originals in the ballroom. The fireplace tiles of shepherds were designed by William Wood Gallimore for the Trent Tile Company of Trenton, NJ – one of the finest makers of the time. The overmantel is also believed to be original to the house, returned here in 2007 from the Forrest Hills area of the city.

Behind the dining room, the butler’s pantry and cook’s kitchen have been returned to an appropriate cabinetry, but with modern appliances. The kitchen, once a single story, was separated from the main house by a wall that is four bricks thick, reducing the risk of fire in the main house. The doorway to the kitchen is “new” – a pass through from the

kitchen to the butler’s pantry was used for food service while separating the classes of house servants.

An adjoining fully paneled morning room and an adjacent winter garden room, added by the Dudleys, are presently serving as work rooms in support of the overall restoration.

Second Floor

On the second floor, an owner’s suite now occupies space added or enclosed by the Dudleys’ renovations, and can also be reached via the rear staircase. This suite includes a sitting room, bedroom, dressing room, and marble bath.

Restoration of a family sitting area and three additional bedrooms, including the original Victorian guest room and original master bedroom, is nearing completion. These rooms carry the same fine mouldings and stained glass as those on the first floor, along with original 1890s hardwood flooring.

Third Floor

The third floor garret accommodates the owners’ home-based business. Its most interesting feature is a secret room approximately three feet by ten feet in dimension. The curious must crawl to enter, as the room is hidden behind the elaborate fire back of a non-working fireplace. Theories abound as to its cause or use – from hiding the family silver to hiding Mr. Dudley’s liquor during prohibition.

Ground Floor

The mansion also includes a ground-floor “English Garden” apartment once used as servants’ quarters. Two included fireplaces are of brick, demonstrating their original utilitarian purpose.