

LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK PROGRAM

Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission

Graylyn

Local Historic Landmark #72

1900 Reynolda Rd., Winston-Salem

Construction Date: c. 1932

Renovation Date: 1984

Landmark Designation Date: 12/07/1987

Among the most significant residential properties of the early 20th century in North Carolina is Graylyn, an impressive Norman Revival style house. Graylyn is thought to be the largest and most expensive house constructed in the state after Biltmore. Graylyn is architecturally distinctive and important for its association with one of North Carolina's most prominent businessmen, Bowman Gray.



Bowman Gray was a Winston-Salem native. His first job following graduation from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was with Wachovia Bank and Trust, which had been founded by his father. Gray left his job at the bank to become a salesman with the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company in 1895. In 1912, Gray became Vice President at Reynolds, President in 1924, and in 1931, Chairman. Under Gray's leadership, the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company became the fourth largest tobacco company in the United States.

In 1925, Gray and his wife, Nathalie Lyons Gray, purchased approximately 87 acres from Reynolda, the country estate of R.J. Reynolds. Two years after acquiring the property, construction of the house began. During Mrs. Gray's numerous trips abroad, she had become interested in the Norman style of architecture found in northern France. She commissioned the well-established local firm of Northrup and O'Brien to design the country estate. Luther Lashmit, in association with the firm, became the principal architect for the Graylyn commission.

The main house was not completed until 1932, but the family moved into the estate in 1928, occupying the guesthouse, later known as Bernard Cottage, that was originally intended as a garage.

In addition to the estate's outstanding architectural design, the interiors of the property are of outstanding importance (designed largely by the Baltimore firm of J.G. Valiant

Company), as is the ironwork found throughout the property. Designed by Joseph Barton Benson, a Philadelphia ironsmith, the ironwork is a dominant element of the estate. Additionally, the fine tile work found in the pool room, dressing rooms, and many of the baths, was designed by the Enfield Pottery and Tile Works of Pennsylvania.

The Grays selected Thomas W. Sears to design Graylyn's grounds. Sears worked primarily in Philadelphia, but was well known in Winston-Salem. His first major local commission was at Reynolda. Sears was responsible for the site plan of Graylyn's house and grounds, as well as the design of the stone entry gates and bath house.

The extensive barn and stables (known as the Mews) were the work of Eccles Dewey Everhart of the firm Northrup and O'Brien.

Bowman Gray died while on vacation in the Northern Atlantic Ocean in 1935 and was buried at sea. Nathalie Gray lived in the house with her two sons until 1937. In 1938, she married Benjamin Bernard and moved to the guest cottage (Bernard Cottage), where she resided until her death in 1961.

Nathalie Gray and her sons eventually donated the Graylyn estate to the Bowman Gray School of Medicine of Wake Forest University. The property served as a psychiatric hospital from 1947 until 1959 and was then utilized for academic programs. Gordon Gray, Bowman and Nathalie

Gray's son bought Graylyn back from the medical school in 1972 and donated it to Wake Forest University.

On June 22, 1980, a fire destroyed the main house's third floor and roof system and extensively damaged the interior. The following day, Wake Forest University president James Ralph Scales announced that the house would be restored to its 1932 appearance and used as a conference center. Architect Edwin Bouldin, Jr. was commissioned to oversee the project, and Thomas A. Gray, Bowman Gray's great-nephew was the preservation consultant. Restoration of the 46,000-square-foot manor house and Bernard Cottage was completed in 1984 at a cost of \$6,000,000.

Graylyn is one of North Carolina most significant early 20th century residential landmarks and is a tribute to one of North Carolina's most prominent businessmen, Bowman Gray. It is a rare example of the opulent, elaborately-decorated country estates found more commonly in the northeastern United States.

Today Graylyn is owned by Wake Forest University; it is used as a conference center and as a venue for weddings and other events.



Aerial View of the Graylyn Estate, c. 1940s
Courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library
Photograph Collection via Digital Forsyth
(<http://www.digitalforsyth.org>)



The Graylyn Estate, located off Reynolda Road, c. 1940s
Courtesy of Forsyth County Public
Library Photograph Collection

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Graylyn National Register Nomination
<http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/nr/FY0006.pdf>

<http://www.graylyn.com/>



This information is also available
at the Forsyth County
Historic Resources Commission's web site:
<http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org>