

The VanLandingham Estate Inn & Conference Center

HISTORY OF HARWOOD

Ralph and Susie Harwood-VanLandingham built the VanLandingham Estate in 1913. Ralph moved his wife, twin son and daughter to Charlotte from Georgia. His decision evolved when his father invited him to join his cotton brokerage firm in Charlotte. Though already quite wealthy, the move occurred at the time of the big textile boom, making the cotton brokerage industry and the VanLandingham's even more prosperous.

It was actually Susie that helped draw the plans for the house, which was designed for entertaining. They acquired the house and the five acres for \$6000. This area, now Plaza-Midwood was originally called Chatham Estates, an exclusive community of 5-acre lots. The median of what is now "The Plaza" was the old trolley line. When the depression hit, most landowners divided and sold their land, but The VanLandingham Estate remained intact.

The house is a California bungalow, a new style during the 1900's, complete with sleeping porches. Some of the original furnishings still remain including the hall mirror, the couch in the living room, the couch and matching chair in the upstairs foyer, as well as the dining room table, chairs, and built-in china cabinets. Most of these furnishings were brought from the Majestic Hotel on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, which was previously owned by Susie. The VanLandingham family owned a mountain home in Linville, NC, where they spent their summers in cooler climate. They re-created the mountain feeling here on the estate by covering the grounds with rhododendrons, cedars and cypress, including a picturesque garden amidst the acres. In fact, the VanLandingham family had stone delivered from Linville. This stone became incorporated in the structure of the home, as well as around the driveways and gardens.

The Estate was left to his son Ralph Jr., who never married. Upon his death in 1970, the house and the grounds were willed to The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, in the hopes that it would become the Chancellor's residence. Since UNCC already owned a home in Myers Park, they graciously held the VanLandingham Estate for seven years.

Before selling the Estate, The VanLandingham Glen was created on the UNCC campus using rhododendron transplants from the garden. In the first attempt to sell the home, the house was almost sold to a developer who wanted to destroy the house and build a high-rise. Thankfully, the house was saved when it was put on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. UNCC then sold it to the Cline family as a personal residence. The Cline's owned it for 10 years and in 1986 it became the Charlotte Symphony ASID Designer House. Jack Bowden then purchased the home in 1987. He accomplished major renovations by redoing bathrooms, updating the plumbing and heating systems, adding air conditioning, gas logs in the fireplaces and many other improvements. Mr. Bowden began to receive special requests from friends and neighbors to have weddings and small gatherings on his large property;

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HISTORY OF HARWOOD (CONTINUED)

thus he decided to open the Estate to special occasions to hold weddings, receptions and several other social gatherings.

After Mr. Bowden's death in January 1994, his daughter Margaret and her husband Mark Gilleskie took over the business. They presided over major landscaping improvements and complete renovation of the carriage house.

Today, this magnificent estate is owned and operated by a group of local businesspersons, known as Unique Southern Estates. They are also the proud owners of The Morehead Inn in Dilworth. Since the purchase, Unique Southern Estates has spent over one million dollars in renovations, going to great lengths to paint the entire house (inside and out) updating plumbing, and restoring original fixtures in the bathrooms. The grounds and gardens are always in bloom year round. The décor in each room has been carefully selected so that every room provides a unique experience. The Garden Room serves as a large conference center as well as an elegant addition to host Social events. The Estate has been approved to construct a large French Orangery (greenhouse) to be built in 2001. The VanLandingham Inn and Conference Center is a beautiful place to relax and rest your soul.