



Facade of the gallery, ca. 1930.

Excavating the Anderson: The Early History of a Building and its Gallery

TRACI GARLAND

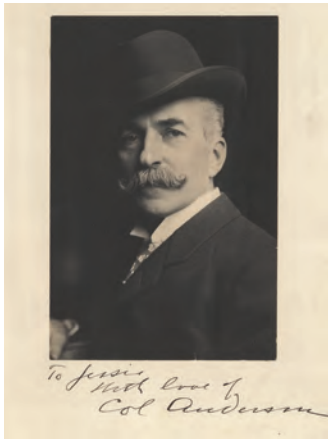
Discovery of the Anderson Gallery's "creepy" back stairwell has been a singular rite of passage for student workers in recent years. Flecked with chips of old paint and crumbling plaster, and definitely off limits to the public, this concrete passageway would make the perfect movie set, ripe for cheap thrills and spooky encounters. But from this nearly forgotten corner of the building, and others like it, a storied archaeology emerges. Subtle changes in the brick facade, hidden remnants of institutional green paint, false walls, and that abandoned stairwell are all evidence of an ever-changing structure—one shaped by convenience, opportunity, necessity, and progress. Like an archaeological site, this building, the A.A. Anderson Building, serves as physical evidence of human presence. Over time, layers of brick, plaster, and drywall have become interwoven with the stories of the many people who have occupied and used it in various ways.

Though it has since served more noble purposes for VCU and its institutional predecessor, the Richmond Professional Institute of the College of William and Mary (RPI), the Anderson Building had humble origins as a stable and carriage house. In an almost Duchampian twist of fate, the hayloft provided a readymade gallery to showcase the academic and creative rigor of a nascent institute of social work and its burgeoning art program. This transformation depended on the vision of two remarkable men—Dr. Henry H. Hibbs, the energetic founding director of RPI and a devoted art collector, and Colonel Archibald A. Anderson, a painter, outdoorsman, and philanthropist—as well as the convenient location of a striking home built by Major Lewis Ginter, one of 19th-century Richmond's most illustrious citizens.

Like many other prominent Richmonders of the time, Ginter, a self-made man who earned his fortune in the tobacco business and real-estate development, built an imposing mansion and a two-story carriage house on West Franklin Street. Construction was completed in 1890. After Ginter's death in 1897, his home became the main branch of the Richmond Public Library. As Dr. Hibbs recalled, RPI was founded in this particular part of Richmond because the "library was located directly across Shafer Street [from the site of RPI's future administration building], where the students could use it both as a source of books and as a place to study."¹ When the public library closed in 1929, RPI saw an opportunity to expand the campus and bought the Ginter mansion and its outbuildings, a purchase made possible in part by Colonel Anderson.

Though a New Yorker, Colonel Anderson's philanthropic interests were geographically widespread. His honorary military rank was bestowed by President Theodore Roosevelt after Anderson donated the land that would become Yellowstone National Park.² Anderson was also vested in the artistic life of Richmond. Strongly believing that the city would become an important hub of creative activity, he pronounced:

I vision a wonderful future for Richmond as an art center; the cities of the country will soon look to her with pride. If in my small way by word or work, I can help Richmond to achieve this noble result, I shall consider that I have not lived in vain.³



Photograph of Colonel Anderson with inscription to Jessie Hibbs, wife of founding RPI Director Dr. Henry Hibbs.

With a gift of \$10,000 from Anderson, along with additional funds provided by its citizen-funded foundation, RPI was able to buy and convert the Ginter carriage-house building and, within a year, opened the A. A. Anderson Gallery of Art. Its high-ceilinged gallery occupied the old second-floor hayloft and a two-thousand-volume library filled the downstairs stables.⁴ Many of

the first exhibitions showcased the work of the gallery's namesake.⁵

For over five years, the Anderson was Richmond's only gallery exhibiting the work of modern artists. Paintings by notable European and American figures, including Wassily Kandinsky, Ferdinand Léger, and Pablo Picasso,⁶ delighted and scandalized Richmond visitors.⁷ Regular exhibitions featuring work by Virginia artists highlighted some of Richmond's best artistic talents such as Theresa Pollak, the esteemed founder of RPI's art program. Once the Virginia Museum opened in 1936, RPI focused more on developing a fully

functional library, and over the next few years, exhibition programming in the building tapered off.

By 1939, the former carriage house had a federally-funded third-story addition and a fulltime librarian, Rosamund McCaless, who had grand bibliophilic ambitions but little space for artwork. Now with more than 16,000 volumes, RPI again converted the space, transforming the upstairs galleries into reading rooms. Following a national trend prominent in other university libraries, selected prints by well-known artists—many provided by Dr. Hibbs—were displayed above the upstairs bookshelves.⁸

Throughout the 1940s and 50s, more alterations were made to the building. When the last of the major renovations was complete, the building had three full floors and a mezzanine in front, and a five-story addition in back that served as an extended book stack. This addition included new safety features such as two sets of fireproof stairs, one of which is now the aforementioned creepy passageway that thrilled curious student workers.

While necessary in many ways, these additions did not, as Dr. Hibbs observed, "improve the exterior appearance of the old Ginter stable, which had



The RPI Library, Anderson Building, second floor, 1964. All photographs courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, VCU Cabell Library.

EXHIBITION OF
PAINTINGS
 OF E
ECOLE de PARIS

Assembled by the
 COLLEGE ART ASSOCIATION



For gallery use. Please
 return to desk downstairs.

On view at the
A. A. ANDERSON GALLERY OF ART
 IN THE WILLIAM AND MARY MEWS
 901 West Franklin Street
 RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

EXHIBITION OF
PAINTINGS

OF THE
ECOLE de PARIS

ALBERT ANDRE
 1. *Still Life*
 Loaned by Durand-Ruel, Inc.

BENATOV
 2. *Accordion Player*

RUDOLPH THEOPHILE BOSSHARD
 4. *Nude*

MASSIME CAMPIGLI
 5. *Cafe*
 Loaned by Julien Levy

PAUL CHARLEMAGNE
 6. *Flowers*
 7. *Red House*

ROGER CHASTEL
 8. *The Little Magi*

P. E. CLAIRIN
 9. *Landscape*
 Loaned by M. Knoedler & Co.

ANDRE DERAINE
 10. *Nature Morte*
 Loaned by M. Knoedler & Co.

11. *Woman's Head*
 Loaned by Georgette Passedoit
 12. *Woman's Head*
 Loaned by Durand-Ruel, Inc.

CHARLES DUFRESNE
 13. *Vase de Chrysateme*
 Loaned by M. Knoedler & Co.

EDOUARD GOERG
 15. *Le Desir de Plaire*
 Loaned by M. Knoedler & Co.

JEAN HUGO
 16. *Gonache*
 Loaned by John Becker

BERNARD LEMOTTE
 17. *Eglise Saint-Sernin, Toulouse*

A. LEBOURG
 18. *Vase de Rouen*
 Loaned by M. Knoedler & Co.

FERDINAND LEGER
 19. *Woman with Vase*
 Loaned by Durand-Ruel, Inc.

EDY LEGRAND
 20. *Two Eastern Girls*
 Loaned by Marie Sterner

PHILIPPE LE MOLT
 21. *Fruit*
 Loaned by Georgette Passedoit

JEAN LURCAT
 22. *Small Oil, No. 4*
 23. *Small Oil, No. 5*
 24. *Gouache, No. 24*
 Loaned by John Becker

JEAN MARCHAND
 25. *Parisian Landscape*
 Loaned by Georgette Passedoit

ROLAND OUDOT
 26. *Le Repas*

PABLO PICASSO
 27. *Ex Cathedra*
 Loaned by John Becker

PEDRO PRUNA
 28. *Nude Reclining*
 Loaned by Georgette Passedoit

29. *Sereine*
 Loaned by Marie Sterner
 30. *Venus et l'Amour*
 Loaned by Marie Sterner

VALENTINE PRAX
 31. *Le Nid*
 Loaned by John Becker

A. D. de SEGONZAC
 32. *Payage*
 Loaned by M. Knoedler & Co.

JEAN SOUVERBIE
 33. *Les Moissonneurs au Repos*

M. UTRILLO
 34. *La rue Girardon a Montmartre*
 Loaned by M. Knoedler & Co.

MEDARD VERBURGH
 35. *Still Life*
 36. *Street in Uccle*
 Loaned by Marie Sterner

M. VLAMINCK
 38. *Still Life*
 Loaned by M. Knoedler & Co.

Gallery brochure, early 1930s.

been attractive and quite well designed... Nevertheless," he continues, "at the time... the school simply had to get the space despite inconvenience, hardship and much 'making do' with 'what you can get when you can't get what you want.'"⁹ This resourceful spirit, driven by necessity and creativity, would not be lost in the decades to come.

In February 1969, just as the venerable Ms. Pollak had retired from her teaching post, RPI was on the verge of both building a new library and merging with the Medical College of Virginia (MCV) to form Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Dr. Hibbs, now retired and living in his native Kentucky, received a letter from Maurice Bonds, head of the art history department.¹⁰ In the letter, Mr. Bonds informs Dr. Hibbs about plans to acquire the Anderson Building for the School of the Arts after VCU's new Cabell Library is opened.

By 1970, the Anderson Building was once again an art gallery, reviving Colonel Anderson's original vision. Bookshelves and study tables were moved out, while false walls that carved out exhibition spaces and covered large windows were built in. For the next 45 years, gallery staff, students, and faculty contended with the building's architectural idiosyncrasies through interior updates, ongoing repairs, and creative solutions. Each of these efforts added a new stratum, the next layer of human activity. Now every excavated detail—whether a nineteenth-century architectural element hidden in a closet, a Gothic arch peaking above a well-worn white gallery wall, or a creepy stairwell tagged with the names of past student workers—is evidence of the "making do" that has defined this site since the 1930s.

1. Henry Hibbs, *A History of The Richmond Professional Institute* (Richmond, VA: RPI Foundation/Whittet and Shepperson, 1973), 47.

2. "A Gift to the School," *The Atlas*, Volume 1, May 1930, 13.

3. "Col. Anderson Dies in N.Y.," *The Proscript*, May 8, 1940, 1.

4. Hibbs, *A History of The Richmond Professional Institute*, 70.

5. "Distinguished Artist Exhibits Paintings in Gallery Bearing Own Name," *The Atlas*, December 7, 1934, 1.

6. *Exhibition of Paintings of the Ecole de Paris*, exhibition brochure, 1931.

7. In her autobiography, Theresa Pollak recounts a story of a "pompously dressed woman...bristling with disapproval" at a Kandinsky

painting. Pollak reports the woman said, "I could dip my skirt in a bucket of paint and do something better than that and it is an insult to God and humanity for you to bring those innocent children to see these monstrosities." Theresa Pollak, *Art School: Some Reminiscences* (Richmond, VA: Virginia Commonwealth University, 1969), 21-22.

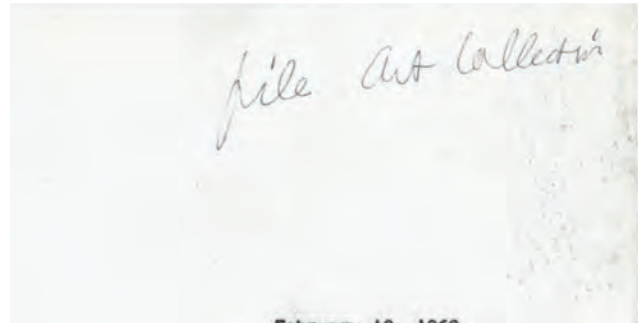
8. "Library To Have Opening; Laning Murals in Prominence," *The Proscript*, February 21, 1940, 1.

9. Hibbs, *A History of The Richmond Professional Institute*, 71. Hibbs notes that these alterations were made to satisfy the demands of the Southern Association of Colleges, RPI's accrediting body.

10. Reproduced on page 22.



Dr. Henry H. Hibbs, retired head of RPI, and his wife, Jessie R. Persinger Hibbs. 640 works of art on paper, officially donated by Dr. Hibbs in 1972, became the foundation of the Anderson Gallery Collection.



February 10, 1969

Dr. Henry H. Hibbs
111 Rebel Ridge
Lexington, Virginia 24450

Dear Dr. Hibbs:

I can't bear the idea of your taking Rubens and Whistler out of your bedroom. I feel that I should send them back to you. Thank you very much, and you may be sure that they will be all properly catalogued and put in the college collection.

I would like to tell you at this time that we have extensive plans all worked out for acquiring the old Anderson Gallery for an art gallery-museum when the new library is built. We have completely planned this with work rooms, storage rooms, and so forth. We do not know whether we will get it or not, but we certainly should as it is disgraceful for a university with an art school like this one not to have such facilities; and it is a shame that the art collection has to be stored in a vault where it benefits nobody. We have some very grand plans, and I do hope they will go through.

You will be hearing from us later this spring, as Miss Pollak will be retiring and we are planning several events to honor her; one of which will be a large retrospective of her work in Rhoads Hall, and another, a dinner somewhat similar to the one we had for Ruth. She is also publishing her memoirs, which she wrote partially for you many years ago. She has added to these, and I think they are an interesting, as well as rich, account of the development of an art school.

Please give my regards to Mrs. Hibbs, and I do hope we will see you both at the several things we are planning for Miss Pollak.

Yours very truly,

Maurice Bonds, Head
Art History Department

pj

cc Dr. Burgart
Mr. Lumpkin

A Somewhat Vague Rememberance

It was 1970, just a year or so after the summer of love. A loud murmuring about the Anderson Building was heard coming from the student body. The Anderson, no longer used as the library, was slated by the university to become faculty offices. Sharp kids that they were, the students quickly discovered that the Anderson Building was originally given to the School of the Arts as gallery space, and there developed a consensus of opinion among them and the faculty that it should once again become a gallery for the school. They also knew that every Thursday morning President Brandt had an open-office policy, for anyone who wanted to confer with him.

One Thursday morning, a large, rather loose and disorganized crowd of students and faculty gathered in front of President Brandt's office, spilling over into Franklin Street. Since there were enough students to occupy the entire ground floor of the President's house, a delegation was selected to enter his office and announce the intentions of the assembled group. Quickly word issued forth that this student delegation and several faculty members would be allowed in to present their concerns. I don't remember who all went into the conference room, but we outnumbered the President's team about two to one.

The students started by explaining who they were, why they were there, and what they wanted. The Administration countered by explaining its charge and grave responsibilities, its research and the need for faculty offices. The students were being pounded with numbers and percentages, the onus of school spirit and obligation to the greater good when sculpture professor José Puig broke into the dialogue. In his polite Spanish-spiced English, he eloquently explained the need for and the educational benefits of the facility, saying among other things that an art school without a gallery was like a chemistry program without a lab.

During José's wonderful argument for the art gallery, I noticed the wandering attention of the execs and thought they were beginning to underestimate him. Suddenly José concluded by saying, "So you must understand how important and vital this gallery is to the students and faculty in

the School of the Arts." One of the administrators said, "We do understand, sir." "You understand?" asked José. "Yes, we do," he responded. "Great," said José. Then standing and turning to the students, he said, "He understands, then we get the gallery."

Pandemonium broke out in the room, which soon spread to the sidewalk, where there was yelling and cheering. "Not so fast," said President Brandt, a bit red in the face, "we have great need for faculty offices and can't shirk our responsibilities to other faculty." José said, "We will find for you office spaces. How many do you need?" Colleague Chuck Henry and I quickly said that we would sacrifice our offices to the cause. (At the time, our offices were two school desks with under-the-seat storage, and José's office was a picnic table in the courtyard!) José speculated that the School of the Arts faculty would gladly give up many offices for the gallery.

The meeting ended with no immediate resolution; time was up. Students and faculty left feeling that ground had been gained, pressure applied, and the battle opened. Their seriousness of resolve and depth of concern, and the just nature of their expectations were left dangling, looming over whatever path would be taken to resolve the fate of the Anderson Building. The students had glimpsed a future in which their education as artists would be greatly enhanced by a public exhibition space. And the administration realized the nature of the corner they occupied. The launch of the Anderson Gallery in November 1970 owes a debt of gratitude to José Puig's championing of the cause.

Lester Van Winkle
Artist & Professor Emeritus of Sculpture
VCU School of the Arts