

History of North Lodge on Oakland

The history of North Lodge on Oakland began in 1904 when Robert Garrett built it as a residence for himself and his wife, Adeline. The home was built after he sold the Smith-McDowell House (circa 1840), currently located around the corner on the campus of AB Tech and today is a museum.

Formerly known as the Garrett House, North Lodge on Oakland was one of 15 houses in the affluent small town of Victoria. Victoria was incorporated as a town in response to George W. Vanderbilt's attempt to buy the property called Fernihurst on Vernon Hill, about eight blocks from the Lodge. As we all know, Vanderbilt bought property across the river instead, where he built the famous Biltmore Estate – the largest home in America. Many believe Fernihurst provides a better view!

Vanderbilt did eventually acquire some land here in Victoria. He built several large villas as rental “cottages” on Vernon Hill. It was in these houses where the visiting elite stayed. The cottages were “completely furnished, except for silver, linen, and blankets” and rented for \$200-\$350 a month in 1900. Only one survives today, Sunnicrest, located about eight blocks from the Lodge on the A-B Tech campus. Adeline maintained her position as a social leader in the community despite the move from the Smith-McDowell House to what is now North Lodge. The local newspaper, *The Asheville Citizen*, reported on two classes held regularly at her home for “outdoor study”.

The North Lodge started its life as a shingle-style cottage with porches on both the first and second floors. Certainly, Adeline maintained her position as a social leader for the town of Victoria despite the move they made from the Smith-McDowell House. Because they eventually moved from the area, little is known about the Garrett's remaining years.



North Lodge as it looked in 1918

In 1918, G. P. Terrill occupied the home, which was now in the City of Asheville (annexed in 1905), and the little lane of Oakland Road became a city street. Five years later, M. J. Corcoran purchased it and turned it into a tuberculosis rest home, a common practice in the 1920s. Some of the best B and Bs in Asheville were once tuberculosis rest homes. All the porches were enclosed to provide bed space.

In 1936, Wallace B. Kelly, a Southern Railroad Pullman porter, purchased the home and lived here until he died in 1979. During the Kelly years, many changes took place. A rock exterior covered the original clapboard lower siding in 1949. A stone porte-cochere followed the next year. After Mr. Kelly's death, the house was used as rental property by members of his family, but by 1987, the house had deteriorated to the point where the city condemned it. The house stood empty and derelict until it was purchased by Herb and Lois Marsh in 1990.

For five years, they undertook a major refurbishing of the property, restoring it to the glamour it once had but with modern comfort and convenience. In 1998, another expansion created additional guest rooms and innkeepers' quarters, along with the gazebo and fountain in the garden.

The name North Lodge on Oakland comes from North Lodge in the Woods, their home in England. We honor Herb and Lois's tremendous effort and inspired work by naming the third-floor room The Marsh Retreat.

The Inn had four subsequent owners who all became excellent stewards of her legacy until December 2022, when Chris and Myra Vergani purchased the Lodge. The Verganis had recently sold their prior B&B, The Inn Around the Corner, in Black Mountain earlier that same year.

Chris and Myra warmly welcome you to North Lodge and hope you find everything you need to have a relaxing, enjoyable visit to Asheville, North Carolina.

Smith-McDowell House

In 1881, Alexander Garrett purchased the Smith-McDowell House from Major William Wallace and Sarah Lucinda Smith McDowell. The McDowells, leading socialites in this region, were forced to sell portions of their 650-acre plantation to pay debts that had been mounting since the end of the Civil War.

Garrett initiated changes to his new home, making the circa 1840 brick mansion a fitting showplace for his wealth and social position in 1880. The summer kitchen was modernized and connected to the main house, adding a butler's pantry and wine cellar. The pine shake roof was replaced with a metal roof. Stylish Italianate brackets were added beneath the extended eaves to hold a built-in gutter system that fed a cistern, providing water for the house. The windows were replaced with 2-over-2 glass panes that were the style of the times. Also, it is believed that the Garretts added gas lighting, bathrooms, and a solarium to the house.

While Mary Frances convalesced in this fabulous house, Robert Garrett hired a local girl, Adeline Gash, as the governess for their daughter Alexandra. Unfortunately, Mary Frances did not regain her health and died in 1884. Alexander's wife, Elizabeth (Robert's mother), died the same year.

In 1887, Robert married the former governess, Adeline, the daughter of Senator Leander Sam Gash of Brevard, North Carolina. Adeline was the first hostess at the North Lodge.

The Town of Victoria

In 1887, Alexander Garrett founded the Town of Victoria and became its first mayor. The Garrett family tradition maintains that he named the town after Queen Victoria because he was still loyal to his native Ireland. Victoria was adjacent to today's Victoria Road and encompassed the properties surrounding the mansions of both Garrett and Colonel John Kerr Connelly. Tradition maintains that Victoria's incorporation was in response to George W. Vanderbilt's attempt to buy Connelly's property (Fernihurst) before settling land across the river (Biltmore Estate).

In any event, Vanderbilt acquired several tracks of land in Victoria. He hired a supervising architect for Biltmore, Richard Sharp Smith, to design several "villas" as rental properties on Vernon Hill, as Vanderbilt called it. When combined with the Garrett and Connelly mansions, the five Tudor-style villas helped provide context for Biltmore and provided a place for Vanderbilt's social peers to stay.

Doug Swain writes, "The visiting elite knew where to stay—the old Battery Park Hotel...if not one of Vanderbilt's sumptuous rental villas in Victoria." The cottages were "completely furnished, except . . . silver, linen and blankets" and rented for a whopping \$200 to \$350 a month, depending on size. A 1900 advertising piece describes the properties:

Vanderbilt eventually sold these villas with a view to individuals for private residences. Vanderbilt's cousin also had a home on Vernon Hill, making the town of Victoria one of the wealthiest and most elite communities in Asheville. Victoria was incorporated into the City of Asheville in 1905. Out of the five Vanderbilt villas, only Sunnicrest survives today, as part of the campus of Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College.

The Victoria Inn

Hoping to capitalize on the times and fashionable Victoria, Alexander built the Victoria Inn in 1889 for over \$100,000. Located at the entrance to both Victoria and his Oakland Land Company development, the Victoria Inn was a three-story frame building with eighty rooms. The Inn had a long and interesting history. According to a newspaper article, Alexander and Robert operated the hotel with "indifferent success."

Alexander deeded the property to Robert in 1891. Robert transferred the property to the board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church. Later, a company headed by former Governor Charles Steadman purchased it and operated a hotel called Oakland Heights. Next, it became a sanatorium and, then, a boarding school for girls. In 1909 (twenty years after its construction) it was re-opened as a hotel named the Victoria Inn!

The Inn became St. Genevieve of the Pines, an elementary school operated by the Catholic Church, before being demolished. The remnants of St. Genevieve's are now called The Pines and are part of the A-B Technical Community College campus. A new historical marker is located on Victoria Road.

End of an Era and Beginning of North Lodge

Alexander continued to live in the Smith-McDowell House, where he died in 1895 after suffering from pneumonia. His obituary states, "Mr. Garrett was of Scotch-Irish descent and a whole-souled, hearty old man. His good deeds were many, and he was a devout Christian." His son Robert and granddaughter Alexandra survived him but had no additional land holdings in his estate.

Robert continued to be a leader in the town of Victoria. He acquired additional acres in 1896 at a public auction for \$25,000. The 1898 wedding of daughter Alexandra to Robert Johnston was portrayed in the local newspaper as a social event.

However, there were signs that not all was well with the Garretts. That same year, 1898, Robert sold Smith-McDowell House and approximately 6 acres to Dr. Charles Van Bergen for \$10,000 (Note that William Wallace McDowell had purchased the house and some 350 acres for \$10,000 in 1859). It appears that Robert lacked the funds to maintain the old-fashioned brick mansion. According to the deed, the new owner had the right to one-half of the highway in front of the property and a right to the sewer pipe and the water main running from a spring and pump house west of the property. Robert also reserved a right of way that connected his other properties.

After selling the Smith-McDowell House, Robert and his wife Adeline moved to a smaller house they built on Oakland Road in the remnants of the Oakland Land Company's holdings. Newspaper articles from the turn of the century give us a small glimpse into their life there. The Asheville Citizen reported on two meetings or classes for outdoor study to be held at the Garretts' home in Victoria. Certainly, Adeline maintained her position as a social leader for the women of Victoria despite the move around the block. Because they eventually moved from the area, little is known about the Garrett's remaining years. Their Oakland Road home survives today as the North Lodge Bed and Breakfast. The Town of Victoria, the Victoria Inn, and the Oakland Land Company survive only through road names.

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