

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF GREY TOWERS

CONSTRUCTION OF GREY TOWERS

The Client and the Architect

Following his retirement from business in 1875, James W. Pinchot was enabled to devote more time to pursuing his interests. An avid art collector, he was considered one of New York's foremost patrons of the fine arts and later became one of the first subscribers to the Metropolitan Museum of Art fund.¹ Although he remained a resident of New York City, he began to take an increasing interest in family affairs in Milford. His father, C.C.D. Pinchot, had died in 1873, leaving large land holdings, farming and lumbering to be managed by his three surviving sons. After having lived in Amos Richard Eno's household for about ten years, James Pinchot moved his family to two successive residences in the city, although they proved to be of short-term duration and therefore were not permanent homes.

In 1884, a financial scandal involving Amos' son, John C. Eno, then President of the Second National Bank, caused a great crisis that was to have its effect on all members of the family. Through John's misuse of funds for private speculation, the institution was in danger of bankruptcy. In the panic that ensued, Amos R. Eno lost three or four million dollars when he personally absorbed all demands on the bank.² As a consequence, family relations were strained; James Pinchot wrote to his wife that due to the "unfortunate . . . distressing influence" of the Eno house at Twenty-seventh Street and Fifth Avenue, he would never be willing to go back there to live.³ All of these circumstances together prompted Gifford's father to start planning for his own house in his old hometown. Grey Towers' construction proved to be one of his most devoted interests in the mid-1880s.

The man chosen to design Pinchot's new home was Richard Morris Hunt, one of America's foremost architects and a close family friend. Their personal relationship had apparently been established for many years before their client/architect relationship. They may have come to know one another through their wives or through mutual associates such as William T. Sherman or Frederick Law Olmsted. The Pinchots' daughter Nettie was best of friends with the Hunts' daughter Catherine (Kittie), and during the winter of 1884/1885, Nettie lived with the Hunts at their home in Newport and attended school there.⁴ In March 1885, Gifford Pinchot became engaged to Miss Hunt, and the Pinchot family was delighted with the prospects for marriage (which never materialized).⁵ When Mrs. Pinchot and Nettie traveled in Europe while the new house was under construction, they visited the Hunts in Paris in November 1885, and during the following spring. They also delayed their return home so that they could sail with the Hunts.⁶ All of these social contacts demonstrate the close, personal ties that existed between the two families during the mid-1880s. In addition, the two men had worked together pursuing their mutual interests in the New York art and architectural scene.

Pinchot and Hunt may have met one another for the first time at the famous West Tenth Street Studio Building, which Hunt had designed in 1856 as the first building built expressly for studio and art exhibition purposes. In addition to the architectural studio that Hunt maintained, there were many well-known artists whom James Pinchot is known to have patronized, including Sanford R. Gifford (the namesake of Pinchot's first-born son), E. L. Henry, Eastman Johnson, and Jervis McEntee. It was the center of New York's art world during the 1860s and 1870s and the unofficial headquarters of the National Academy of Design, of which Pinchot was a member.⁷ While it is not definitely known how the two men became ac-



Figure 10. Grey Towers from the south shortly after construction, circa 1886. Note the two original porches that were later removed by Gifford and Cornelia Pinchot.

quainted, it would have been natural for their common interest in art collecting and their frequenting of the same building to have brought them together.

In 1877, Pinchot, a member of the Century Club, was chosen to serve on the executive committee appointed to superintend the erection of "Liberty Enlightening the World", better known as the Statue of Liberty, by the French sculptor, Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi.⁸ He worked on procuring the legislation necessary for providing a site and maintaining the statue and was a part of the campaign to raise funds for the pedestal. For his efforts, he, along with the other seven members of the committee, was rewarded with an inscription on a bronze memorial tablet at the site. The architect chosen to design the pedestal for the colossal statue was Richard Morris Hunt. He and Pinchot may have formed their acquaintance with their joint work on this project. It is more probable that they were already well acquainted, in which case Pinchot may have been instrumental in Hunt's selection. In August 1886, after the completion of two years' work on the pedestal, the architect wrote to Pinchot and asked him, as a personal friend, to use his influence with the committee to resolve the thousand dollar unpaid balance due him.⁹ Based upon their family ties and working relationship, it would have been surprising if James Pinchot's first choice for the architect of his new home was anyone other than Hunt, who had already established an outstanding reputation in residential architecture.

Construction Chronology

In Mrs. Hunt's recollection of her husband's architectural practice in late 1884, she stated: "In addition to other work, he was building Dr. Paxton's house at Princeton, and it must have been at about this time that he was making plans for Mr. Pinchot's home, 'Grey Towers'."¹⁰ Although her memory of the dates of projects is not always the most reliable source—for example, she was off by two years in her estimate of Grey Towers' completion—Mrs. Hunt was probably correct about the start of the architect's plans for the house. In October 1884, Mr. and

Mrs. James Pinchot went to Milford for a six-day visit, and although no information was noted in Mrs. Pinchot's diary concerning plans for a new house, it is very likely that they chose an appropriate site at this time. The following spring, Gifford's father made several lengthy trips to his home town, undoubtedly to supervise the initiation of construction. By June 6, 1885, the date that Hunt and his family left for an extended trip to Europe, all plans and working drawings must have been completed and the house was probably well underway.¹¹

In mid-September, Gifford and his father were in Milford together for a few days. In referring to this visit in a letter written several months later, Gifford mentioned that, at that time, the walls of the house were completed up to the third floor level.¹² In October the entire family (excepting Gifford, who was at Yale), went to Milford, and Mrs. Pinchot made note in her diary of her first view of the new home. During their two week stay, the family enjoyed afternoon visits to the building site, supplemented by drives through the surrounding countryside and hikes to natural sites within the bounds of the estate. (Sawkill Falls and Picnic Rock, two favorite destinations for nearby excursions, remained important attractions for the Pinchots during their successive visits to Grey Towers.)

At the end of October 1885, Mrs. Pinchot and her daughter left for an eight-month sojourn in Europe. The letters exchanged between family members during this separation reveal a good deal of information about the house under construction. At the end of November, Mrs. Pinchot wrote from Paris that she supposed the house was by then ready to be plastered, thereby increasing its chances for occupancy the next summer. In December she expressed the hope that the staircases and railings had been installed, since she worried about her husband's safety.¹³ Mr. Pinchot was spending a great deal of his time during these months in Milford and wrote periodically that the house was progressing well. From the brief references to the house in all of the above-mentioned diary and letter extracts, it is clear that the majority of construction work was completed during the 1885 building season.

The most detailed letter describing the house's progress, excerpts of which follow, was written by James Pinchot at the end of February 1886.

The house at Milford is getting on very well. The past week I have had the estimates made for building the main stairs and putting on the front door. The first price asked was \$1,000. I have found a man now who will take the contract for \$500. Stair rail and balusters of mahogany—steps of oak: The hall is to be panelled in oak to the top—with oak cornice. Front door of oak—The plastering is all finished but the first floor—By the time you and Nettie are home in May or Early June the house will be nearly finished—except the last things—¹⁴

The person who undertook the contract for the front door and the main stairs was Henry Edwards-Ficken, an English architect who recently had established his own office in New York after several years work as a draftsman for other architectural firms in the city. (A brief discussion of Edwards-Ficken's life and work follows in a separate section.) With Richard Hunt then in Europe, James Pinchot needed the assistance of another professional architect for the completion of the interior. Although the room plan had been established in the drawings supplied by Hunt's office, questions as to the interior finish, such as the main floor paneling, had not been resolved before Hunt's departure.

Expense was obviously a consideration in Pinchot's choice of Edwards-Ficken, since his bid was half as much as the first estimate. In a letter to his wife in January, Pinchot had discussed the state of their separate finances and then concluded, "I will try and finish the hall in a quiet inexpensive way."¹⁵ Perhaps some more elaborate plans had been made originally, but financial limitations forced a compromise. The only surviving letter between Edwards-Ficken and his client reveals that the architect was involved with more work on the house than just the

front door and stair.¹⁶ Enclosed was a tracing of a design that Edwards-Ficken had executed for the columns of the second storey hall, and mention was made of other elements of the interior design, such as details of the first floor hall. The architect stated that "Those columns as I have designed them can be made cheaply," once again emphasizing Pinchot's concern over costs. Apparently Edwards-Ficken was not entirely reliable in his work for Pinchot. In the letter, he apologized for the delay in sending full-size drawings of hinges for the front door and alluded to the fact that there had been many similar delays.

In early July 1886, after Mrs. Pinchot and Nettie's return to the country, the whole family went to Milford.¹⁷ Because the new home was not yet complete, they stayed at Fauchères, their usual accommodations while in the village. Many days were spent at the house in preparation for the move; on August 3, for example, Mrs. Pinchot noted that she spent the day helping to paper. Gifford's birthday the following week marked their first meal at Grey Towers, and on August 21, "moved to house" was noted in Mrs. Pinchot's diary. Although many finishing details undoubtedly continued, moving day signalled the new residence's completion.

The following month, James Pinchot's mother died at her home in Milford and his wife became ill. Despite these unfortunate circumstances, moving activities continued: in September the curtains were hung and the candelabra was installed; in October, a piano was moved in and the numerous paintings of Mr. Pinchot's collection were hung; in November, the carpet was installed in the library. On November 13, invitations were sent for an event that would have served as a grand official housewarming for Grey Towers: a breakfast reception for the sculptor of the Statue of Liberty. Unfortunately, Monsieur Bartholdi had sailed for France that same day, due to the illness of his mother, and invitations had to be recalled.

The Pinchots returned to New York in mid-November, where they purchased their Gramercy Park residence the following month. Thus, their yearly pattern of spending only the milder part of the year at Grey Towers was established with the first winter. Although some work continued on the residence after 1886 (for example, as late as the spring of 1889, its cellar was still being excavated¹⁸), attention was focused on the construction of ancillary outbuildings in the years to follow.

Materials and Workmen

An important aspect of the architectural history of Grey Towers is the origin of its construction materials. An October 1924 interview with Henry McCarty, an employee of the Pinchots during the early 1900s whose lands bordered the estate, provides the bulk of information currently known about the provenance of certain materials. In the absence of a building account or a collection of letters and financial papers dealing with the house's construction, Mr. McCarty's recollections form the basis of this section.

The timbers used in the house were purchased by Arthur McCarty, Henry's father, from two rafts of hemlock that were being transported down the Delaware River.¹⁹ The roofing slate came from Lafayette, New Jersey, across the river, according to McCarty's memory, though it is possible that they were actually from the slate works at Newton, New Jersey, five miles from Lafayette. In the contractual agreement between James Pinchot and builder E. S. Wolfe for the construction of Forester's Hall in 1904, slate from Newton was specified for the roof.²⁰ Cole's lime kiln "just across the Jersey bridge" supplied the lime used in construction, and McCarty claimed that no cement was used in the mortar. However, a June 1886 letter to James Pinchot from Charles P. Stone, the Chief Engineer for the Statue of Liberty project, indicated that ten barrels of Portland cement were sent to Pinchot as ordered.²¹ Its intended use was not mentioned, and by this date, the exterior construction of the house was virtually finished. A large amount of the building stone was probably derived from the site. In Pinchot's instructions to his



Figure 11. Grey Towers from the southwest, circa 1963. The chateau-like quality of the house is evident in this photograph. From the collection of the Pinchot Institute.

workmen for the winter of 1888/1889, he directed them to haul stones from the fields for use in building projects he had planned, such as the stone wall along the driveway.²²

An important element of the interior decor of the house was its great variety of wallpapers. These undoubtedly were obtained from Warren, Fuller and Lange of New York (the successor firm to Pinchot and Warren's paper hangings), which advertised imported papers from France, England, Germany and Japan. A surviving bill from this firm indicates that nearly one hundred and fifty rolls of paper were sent to James Pinchot in May 1890.²³ It appears that the partnership of John Laun and Joseph Saile of New York was responsible for providing some of the decorative woodwork inside the house. The previously cited letter between the architect Ficken and James Pinchot referred to the fact that the design for the wreaths, which appear in the Hall's paneling, had been sent to Laun and Saile. These men were variously listed in the directories of the mid-1880s as cabinetmakers, furniture dealers, and decorators.²⁴

Labor for the house's construction was provided by local Milford residents, many of whom had probably worked for Pinchot in connection with the farming done on the family's lands. Andrew Armstrong was the contractor for the stone work and the plastering, and all the other laborers and craftsmen worked under his supervision. The Armstrong family had come to Milford from the north of Ireland in the early nineteenth century. Andrew's father and uncles had also been masons and contractors, and they had built many of the important buildings in the Milford/Port Jervis area, in addition to building projects in

New York City.²⁵ Alex Rivere, Jake Wacker, and Morris Steele assisted Armstrong with the masonry work. Cornelius Quick did all of the stone cutting for Grey Towers' buildings, and Gilly Williams, who lived on the adjoining farm, drew the stone to the construction site. Other teamsters were George Gregory and William Drake. Carpentry work was done by "old man Burse," with the assistance of another Milford resident, Frank P. Dewitt, who is known to have made the window frames.²⁶ Obviously many more men worked on the construction of Grey Towers than those above who were mentioned in McCarty's recollections; the house could not have been completed in such a short period of time without additional labor. It also must be assumed that James Pinchot, through his frequent trips to Milford, played a large role in the on-site supervision of the construction.

Sources for Grey Towers' Design

James Pinchot's French heritage is clearly expressed in the choice of a design for his new home. A second generation American (his father had immigrated at age nineteen), Pinchot had traveled extensively in France, spoke the language fluently, and was a decided Francophile in his cultural interests. An obituary later written by the Century Club, which Pinchot belonged to for forty-five years, began with the statement that he "signally exhibited the finest qualities of the Gallic American."²⁷ As a demonstration of his admiration for French culture, Pinchot chose to turn to examples of French architecture for Grey Towers' inspiration.

In a letter from Gifford to his mother in Europe in December, 1885, he described the Christmas activities at home and wrote:

"To Papa we gave a home made chateau with three towers & a draw-bridge & a french flag on top."²⁸

This gift, which must have greatly pleased Gifford's father, underscores its owner's conception of the new house as a representation of a medieval chateau. Although Grey Towers has frequently been called an example of sixteenth century French Renaissance architecture, its stylistic origins do not belong to this period but rather an earlier one. In its form, exterior appearance, and massing, the building is more reminiscent of feudal tradition. Although it is highly unlikely that any single French chateau served as a model for Grey Towers' exterior design, James Pinchot may have been familiar with certain historic sites which contributed to his conception of what a "modern" chateau should look like. Breteuil-sur-Noye, the small town of the Pinchot family's origin, had a chateau that was an important fortification and royal retreat during the Middle Ages. It was unsuccessfully besieged a number of times by the English during the Hundred Years War, notably in 1356 and 1386, but was demolished in the 1430s and finally abandoned as a fortification.²⁹ Perhaps James Pinchot had heard family stories or traditions about Chateau de Breteuil which added to his romantic notions about Old World history. His exposure to the historic monuments of France through his travels would have been a more probable source of inspiration; however, little is currently known about the places he visited in the 1870s and 1880s.

Pinchot's choice of an architect was based primarily on a familiar relationship gained through social and business contacts; however, Richard Morris Hunt's French training and associations must have further endeared the architect in the client's eye. Hunt was responsible for translating Pinchot's ideas into an architectural expression, and he therefore contributed the largest share to the building's design. As the first American architect to have received an education at the renowned Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Hunt had had ten years experience working in Parisian studios and had received a most thorough professional preparation. His wide travels, his extensive library of French architectural books, and his interest in various historical styles all made him one of the country's most knowledgeable experts on French architecture. At the time of Grey Towers' construction, Hunt was an honorary and corresponding member of the Academie des Beaux-Arts, a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, and a member of the Société Centrale des Architectes Français.³⁰

It is important to understand that Grey Towers is a late nineteenth century version of chateau and as such is a pastiche. Hunt was remarkably adept in his eclecticism and at times combined styles with liberty. The stylistic choices in his design for Grey Towers appears to correspond most closely with those chateaux of the late fifteenth century that represented a transition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance of Francois I. The house's squat, round towers with conical roofs and its compact plan are characteristic of the late medieval trend, as exemplified by the Chateau de Sully, built in the fourteenth century.³¹ The end of the Hundred Years War had marked a new era in France, and the introduction of the cannon had outmoded many structures' defenses. During the fifteenth century, an evolution from military fortress to residence took place. Although greater comfort in the interior was expressed on the exterior by such elements as dormers and larger windows, certain elements of fortification carried over as an expression of prestige. For example, the Chateau de Chaumont, reconstructed from a tenth century chateau during the later part of the fifteenth century, retains the allure of a military fortress although it was built as a residence. Its round, corner towers served no defensive purpose and its machicolations were merely decorative—the exterior tradition survived while the interior function changed. At Chaumont, the main, arched entranceway

was defensively framed by the two massive, flanking towers. The late fifteenth century Chateau d'Ussé is reminiscent of the military architecture of the reign of Louis XI; its exterior facade and design present a feudal aspect, although its interior, with its comfortable apartments, exhibits the transition to the Renaissance. Plessis-Bourée, built between 1468 and 1473, is another example of the chateau in transition between medieval fortress and residence. Grey Towers bears some resemblance to, or shares common elements with, all of the above-named French chateaux of the Loire region. While the Pinchot home was not intended to be a replica of any one of them, it appears that its predominant stylistic characteristics were borrowed from a generalized concept of the fifteenth century French chateau.

Francois I (1515-1547) is usually credited with introducing the classical forms of the Italian Renaissance to France. The first half of the sixteenth century, one of the most active periods of French architecture, produced such well-known, grand chateaux of the Loire Valley as Blois, Chambord, Amboise, Azay-le-Rideau and Chenonceau. Because of stylistic carry-overs from the fifteenth century (round towers with conical roofs being the major one), Grey Towers bears some relation to the buildings of this era. However, many hallmarks of French Renaissance style (sometimes labeled "Chateausque") are missing in Hunt's design of the Milford residence. Sixteenth century chateaux exhibited a varied composition of many steeply pitched, high roofs; tall chimneys elaborately detailed; turrets, or tourelles, that corbel out from the structure from above the ground storey; and a picturesque mixture of Gothic and Renaissance decorative forms such as the arc-en-panier, the sprocket, stone tracery and so on. In 1879, Hunt had demonstrated his knowledge of the style with his design for the William K. Vanderbilt residence on Fifth Avenue in New York. This house, which has been considered one of his most successful residences, established Hunt as the leader of the revival of the French Renaissance style, of which Biltmore House (1890-1895) represented the culmination. The year that Grey Towers' plans were being drawn, Hunt had built the Borden House on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago, which was another demonstration of the style. Ochre Court (1885-1889), the Newport residence of Ogden Goelet, is also a contemporary example of French Renaissance design. Therefore, although the architect was in the midst of his development of the sixteenth century chateau, Grey Towers, with its medieval associations, stood apart from it.

It is interesting that Pinchot's house was not given a name that reflected its French inspiration. A February, 1886 letter from Mrs. Pinchot in Florence to her husband reveals some deliberation over the proper appellation for the new home.

We don't seem to find an appropriate name for our house. "The Towers" or "Saw-kill Towers" seem the best we think of so far—I am going to see if I can find any trace of the name Pincio in Italy when Mr. B. G. comes & perhaps a suggestion may come then—³²

If Mrs. Pinchot had discovered that one of the seven hills of Rome was called "Pincio," there's a possibility that the house would have taken on an Italian name. She may have referred back to her diary of October 1885, when, during her visit to the site, she repeatedly noted the "exquisite view under soft grey light." The name "Grey Towers" probably was chosen for its reference to the predominant, architectural characteristic of the building. It has the decided connotation of an English manor. The architect Edwards-Ficken tried to please his client with two designs for columns of the second floor hallway. He noted his preference, because of its "being quainter and having more of an old country-house air."³³ The English architect was clearly striving for a picturesque interior that resembled those of the estate houses of his own country. The combined romantic notions of Mr. and Mrs. Pinchot and their two architects produced rather heterogeneous results, all of which, however, were in the mainstream of the late nineteenth century.

ALTERATION TO THE HOUSE

Initial Modifications to the Architect's Plans

The original elevations and floor plans that were prepared for Grey Towers, which bear the seal of "Richard M. Hunt, Architect, Tribune Building, New York," survive to the present as a rare record of the pre-construction plans.⁵⁰ By comparing these drawings with photographs taken of the building soon after its completion, it is possible to determine James Pinchot's personal modifications to the architect's design. Because Hunt was in Europe during most of the period of the house's construction, the owner was responsible for many of the decisions regarding changes. The photographs also document many of the original features of the house that have been assumed erroneously to be later alterations.

For the most part, Pinchot's changes to Hunt's plans were minor and involved decorative preferences; few alterations were made to the overall design, floor plan, scale, massing, or choice of building material. A few of the changes, most notably those regarding the porches, may have been caused by financial limitations during the late stages of construction. Other changes, such as the simplification of the intended, corbelled chimneys, may reflect the limited experience of the local building craftsmen. One basic change was brought about by the natural limitations imposed by the building site. Because of the bedrock exposed shortly under the grade level, the intention to raise the building on its foundation had to be abandoned. The plans called for flights of six stairs leading to the porches of the south and east elevations; instead, the porches rested on grade, creating the illusion that the building was implanted into the hill rather than set upon it.

The single feature that differed most from Hunt's drawings was the fenestration. The second storey windows were intended to have segmental arches; as built, they were rectangular. The semi-circular arches of the first storey's windows were supposed to be glazed with three rows of small, square panes; as executed, mullions radiated from the center and were divided by a concentric circle. To accent the windows, Hunt had called for a dressed stone surround of the window arches. This detailing was then further elaborated by the addition of a special, staggered quoin, in which large and small rectangular dressed stones alternate down both sides of the windows. This decorative motif appears to have been a hallmark of Pinchot's personal style, since it is repeated on many of the buildings that he was later responsible for erecting, both on the estate and in the village of Milford. The addition of a niche into the second storey central bay of the east elevation is another example of an architectural detail that Pinchot liked and later re-used. The choices as to the color scheme used and the window shutters installed (two original features now missing) undoubtedly were also made by the owner. The first storey's paneled shutters, with their quarter moon detailing, and the second storey's louvered ones were painted a light color, while the windows and dormer faces were painted white.

The most significant changes to Hunt's design of Grey Towers occurred on the south and east elevations, where the architect had intended a porch treatment completely different from that actually executed. To shade the first floor terrace areas between the massive towers, Pinchot attached two simple shed roofs (at the level of the second storey's floor), which were supported by trellis-like decorative iron standards. On the south side, Hunt had designed a two storey porch whose roof was a continuation of the main hipped roof; the second storey portion was partially enclosed in a half-timbered effect, with slate or shingles specified between the vertical and diagonal "timbers," while the three bays of the first floor of the porch were open. The porch that Hunt had designed for the east side, which was planned to take advantage of the views toward the town and the valley, was only a single storey in height. Like the main entrance porch, it shared the same carved, wooden supports and

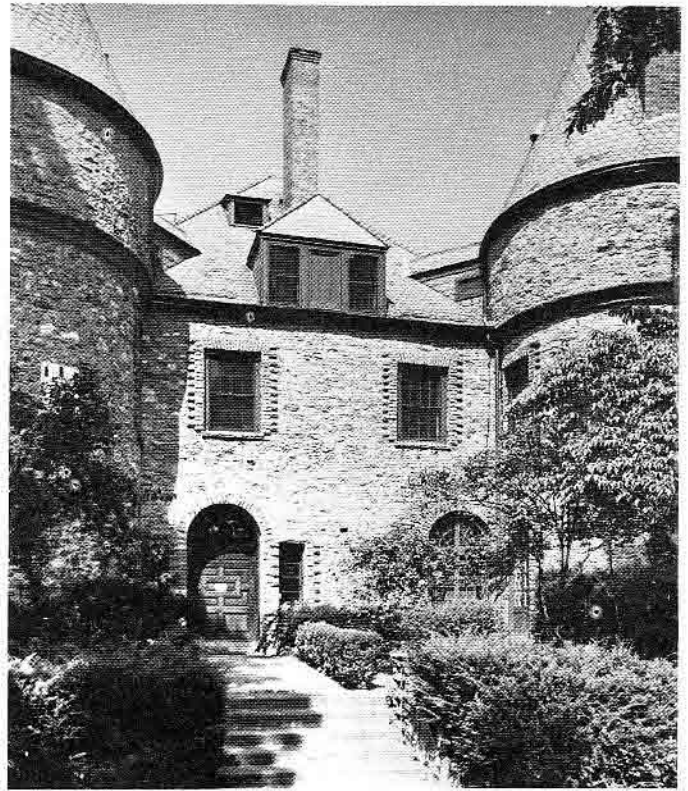


Figure 20. (Above) The main entrance of Grey Towers, circa 1963. From the collection of the Pinchot Institute.

central, splayed stairway. While Pinchot retained the same number of porch supports and the same spacing as called for on the drawings, his substitution effected a rather make-shift appearance on such a substantial stone structure. One other change, which skewed the symmetry of the south elevation, involved the main entrance. The door that appeared in the drawing was a double-leaf one with a vertical inset of six lights to each side. Pinchot chose to install a solid, elaborately paneled door, and the interior of the hall was illuminated instead by flanking sidelights.

Unfortunately, no photographs of the interior of Grey Towers during its early occupancy have been found.⁵¹ As has been explained in an earlier section, Henry Edwards-Ficken had a great deal to do with the completion of the interior, since Hunt was then abroad. It must be assumed, however, that Hunt's floor plans were followed in the organization of the rooms and spaces. From references in Mrs. Pinchot's 1880s diaries and letters to rooms such as the library, the billiards room and the hall, it seems logical to conclude that the first floor's internal arrangement, as well as the specific use of the rooms, followed that called for in the original plan.

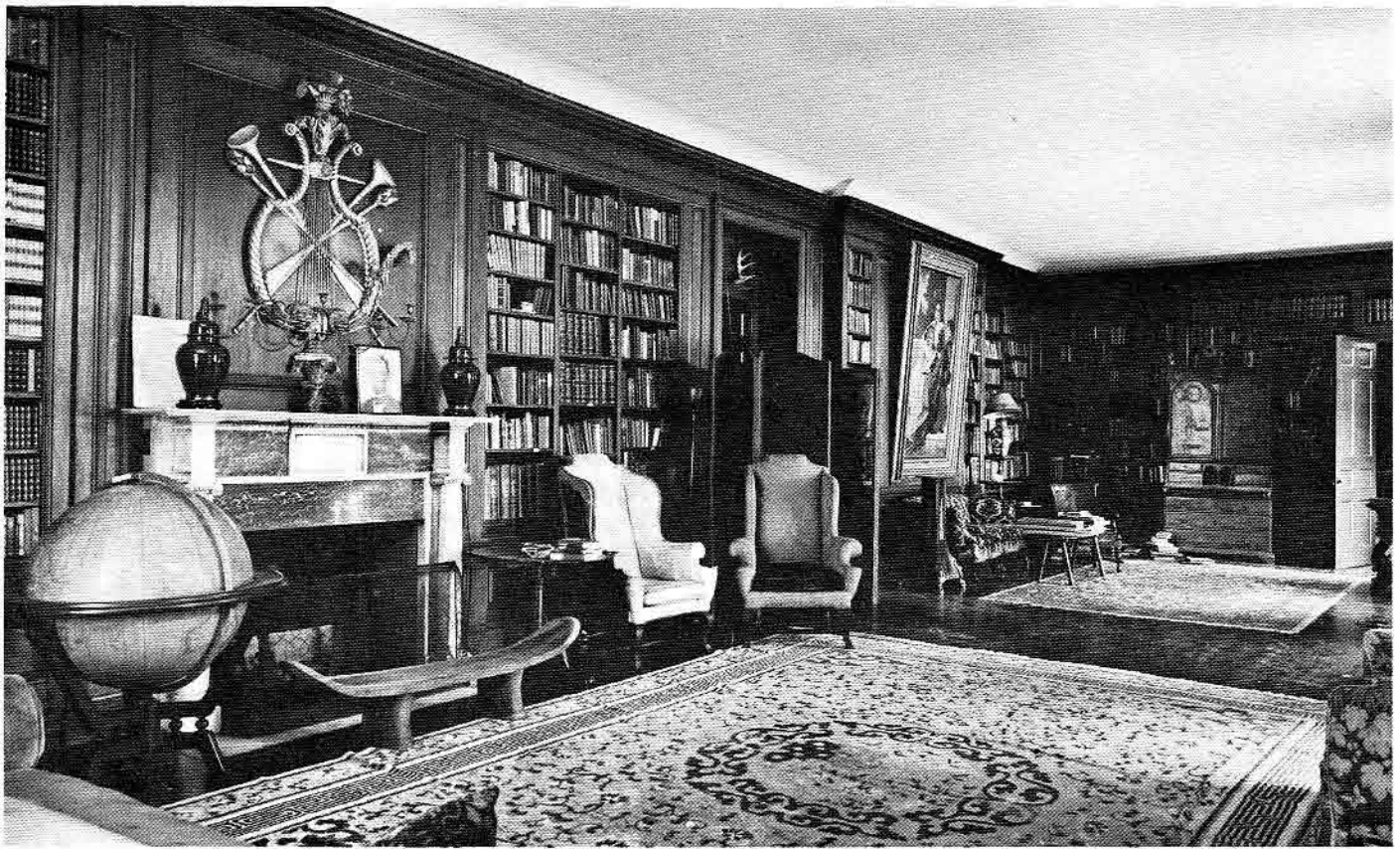


Figure 28. Room 105 (the Library), circa 1963. The room appears as it did during the Pinchot occupancy. Some of the objects shown in the photograph are still in the collection at Grey Towers. From the collection of the Pinchot Institute.

Cornelia Bryce Pinchot's Renovations

In August, 1914, Gifford Pinchot and Cornelia Bryce were married. Although the couple maintained a home in Washington and, for certain years, an apartment in Philadelphia, Grey Towers was their regular summer residence. As Mr. Pinchot became increasingly involved in Pennsylvania politics, Mrs. Pinchot took a more active interest in transforming the 1880s house that the couple had inherited into a "modern" home, well-suited to their active life style and prodigious entertaining.

A reporter for the *Saturday Evening Post*, who was preparing an article on Mrs. Pinchot during Gifford's first campaign for the governorship, observed the domestic scene at Grey Towers during a two day visit in August, 1922. She summed up the hectic activity, the many guests, and the entertaining at every meal by declaring: "It was a sort of political boarding house." This same reporter encouraged Gifford Pinchot to discuss his wife's alterations to the house, and the following excerpt then published was in response to the reporter's compliments regarding the dining room in which they were then seated.

"It was all her idea," said Mr. Pinchot, nodding down at his wife. "Originally this house was composed of many little cramped rooms, and the first thing my wife did was to break down the partition walls and let in light and air. In this particular room—originally two—the architects said she couldn't do it, for it involved removing partitions, beams and a central fireplace. But she did. And, of course, it's a vast improvement. She's revised and edited and altered this house practically beyond recognition."

"She didn't touch the big outer stone walls?" I queried, wondering if he saw the political symbolism in this small domestic episode.

"No," he shook his head humorously, "she has permitted them to stand. But she will never have done. As soon as one thing is finished, and I think we'll have peace, she breaks out in a fresh spot, and the hammering and revising begin anew."⁵²

From the above, it appears that the majority of changes to the house itself occurred during the first ten years of the couple's residency at Grey Towers. The most significant alterations were made to the first floor plan. The original dining room and library indicated in Hunt's plan were combined to form an enlarged dining room, while the former billiard room and salon were joined to create the large library. The extension of the dining room necessitated the destruction of a central fireplace wall that had served to separate the two small rooms. The subsequent removal of the fireplace to the north wall was probably accompanied by the change in the fenestration of that wall. The enlargement of the library brought about the removal of the wall with sliding doors between the two original small rooms, the removal of the salon's fireplace, the covering of two doors to the hall, and the eastward shift of the window in the south wall. Mrs. Pinchot's desire to "let in light and air" and eliminate "many little cramped rooms" greatly altered the late nineteenth century character of the first floor interior. Many small modernizations were effected throughout the house, such as the addition of closets, the insertion and closing off of doors to improve patterns of circulation, and the installation of many conveniences, such as additional bathrooms. However, the major structural changes were made in conjunction with the creation of the large spaces on the first floor.

Cornelia Pinchot's interest in interior decoration found an outlet in her renovation of Grey Towers. The enlarged dining room was one example of the direction of her design talents. Coincident with the change in plan, the newly created room was totally redecorated in a very personal style. The following



Figure 29. Room 107, looking west, circa 1963. Note the paintings on canvas applied to the walls. The painting in the far corner, hidden by the lampshade, is apparently still on the wall but covered by paint applied during the remodeling in 1964. From the collection of the Pinchot Institute.

complimentary remarks were printed in the *Post* reporter's article on Mrs. Pinchot.

I admired the noble proportions of the room in which we were dining, a fine spacious apartment paneled with huge old Dutch pictures, chiefly marines yellowed with age, the walls further embellished by various stuffed finny denizens of the deep very cunningly mounted on plaques painted to represent translucent sea waves, so that the fish, though dead as Pharaoh, seemed alive and floating in their own native element in a kind of dreamy immortality.⁵³

The mural-like painting of a naval battle along the south wall of the room was supposedly brought from Holland by Mrs. Pinchot, who personally transported it in her shipboard stateroom on a voyage home from Europe. She also was said to be responsible for the design and execution of the marbelized, walnut woodwork and the scrolled overmantel in that room. All of this redecoration was completed before 1922, however, and not

following the Pinchot's South Seas journey in 1929.⁵⁴

Many of the doors of Grey Towers' first floor rooms date to around 1830 and are typical of the Greek Revival style of architecture. This interesting fact has led to speculation as to whether or not Mrs. Pinchot installed the doors as a reflection of her taste in early Americana. In 1937, a fire destroyed the old carriage house, which was then being used as a garage and storage area, with a caretaker's apartment above. An inventory of the articles consumed in the blaze included "one door from Old House in New York bought a few years ago by Mrs. Pinchot" and "doors, stairs, rails and banisters stored in the back room."⁵⁵ It is possible that Mrs. Pinchot collected old architectural elements, in the same manner as she collected antiques, with a view of reusing them at Grey Towers. However, it is also possible that James Pinchot was responsible for reusing the 1830s doors from an earlier house, at the time the house was originally constructed.