

FACT SHEET

The Library in Biltmore House Fact Sheet

Out of all 250 rooms in Biltmore House, George Vanderbilt's library, an inviting two-story room filled floor to ceiling with his books, often ranks as the guest favorite. It may be difficult to hone in on exactly why, but a few facts may offer clues.

- Large and stately, the library contains beautifully carved walnut bookcases and furniture, with dark red damask drapery and upholstery. It measures approximately 53 feet wide, 72 feet long and 27 feet high.
- Vanderbilt's book collection consists of approximately 24,000 volumes. The library contains approximately 10,000 volumes. The remaining books are located in the den, smoking room, hallways, and in storage at Biltmore House.
- The library's ceiling is embellished with an 18th century ceiling painting by Pelligrini. Titled "The Chariot of Aurora," it was originally located in the Palazzo Pisani, now the Conservatorio di Musica B. Marcello in Venice. The painting is one of the few works by Pelligrini in existence today. The painting, 64 feet long by 32 feet wide, consists of 13 separate canvases, the central scene surrounded by 12 smaller paintings that form an architectural framework.
- Prominently displayed for guests to see is a 19th century chess set once owned by Napoleon. Napoleon used it during his exile on the island of St. Helena after his defeat at Waterloo in 1815. The set was a gift to George Vanderbilt.
- The black marble fireplace and walnut overmantle were carved by Austrian artist Karl Bitter, whose work is seen throughout Biltmore House. The figures in the overmantle are representations of undetermined classical figures and flank a 17th century French tapestry.
- Furniture of importance in the library includes a slant front bookcase and three sets of library steps. These pieces were designed by Richard Morris Hunt, architect of Biltmore House. The drawings for this furniture are at the American Institute of Architects, Washington, D.C., and are included in their collection of Hunt papers.
- The strengths of the Vanderbilt collection are 19th century English and American fiction, including many first editions; art and architecture, history, travel, philosophy and religion. Many works were in foreign languages, as Vanderbilt was fluent in French, German, and Italian, and had a reading knowledge of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Sanskrit.
- Once termed "one of the best read men in the country" by New York media, George Vanderbilt was a reader from an early age. At age 12, he began keeping a record of the books he had read, including the title and author of each work.
- The last entry before Vanderbilt's death in 1914 was No. 3159, the third volume of Henry Adam's History of the United States.
- Between 1875 and 1914 George Vanderbilt read an average of 81 books a year.

