



This exhibition provides a closer look at the fascinating technology that eased life for the Vanderbilts, their guests, and servants, and is based upon this letter written by Pauline Dresser Merrill, youngest sister of Edith Vanderbilt.

Mrs. T. S. Viele
200 Porter Avenue
Buffalo, New York

My Dear Mrs. Viele,

Many thanks for your nice letter which I have been unexpectedly long in answering. Grenville has I am sure given you accounts of our visit to Washington & probably told you all I wrote him about the inauguration which was really quite the biggest thing imaginable, so I feel that the past week is about all I have to report. We have been leading a rural existence, with Mr. Moody, the Attorney General, as the only other guest in the house until yesterday when an old friend from New York changed places with him. Mrs. Wharton and her husband were to have arrived today but, owing to illness, have given up coming so the party remains small. I breakfast in my room which is oval shape with the square corners chopped off in bathroom, dress closet, etc., the walls hung in old crimson brocade & all the furniture & decorations Louis XVI. It is over the front door & the view stretches over the Esplanade to the hills indefinitely. When 1030 or 11 comes, I go out, either driving, or walking, or sauntering down with the children to feed the swans, or settle on the library terrace with lots of books, & read & read & read. The air is soft & warm, the hills change colour continually, there is no noise, no friction, no jar. It is all really quite too Easy. Luncheon at 130 in the "breakfast room", a huge Dinning [sic] room in one of the towers facing west, with every window framing a picture of river & mountains & budding trees & bushes.—Then an hour to read or embroider and at three another outing, driving on the macadaming [sic] roads of which there are 16 miles on the Estate, or along the soft dirt roads, red with the native clay, & stretching on for 600 miles on the Estate. The farm [sic] are scattered about at distances of two or three miles from the house, the poultry farm in one direction, the pig farm in another, the dairy farm in another. The village of Biltmore with its houses, Church, railway station, shops, & industry-schools, is three miles away, by the Entrance lodge. The centre of it all is this wonderful house, which goes on indefinitely for the length of two New York [sic] blocks, over three hundred feet long, the stone mellowing in colour to a rich cream tint & surrounded by every form of the beautiful.—At five we meet for [tea] in the tapestry galery [sic], a curious room 90 feet long, with two huge chimneys, on either side of which hang huge tapestries which completely cover the walls. The general colour scheme is a warm grey, made up of greens & reds that blend into neutral tints, from the beamed ceiling, & hangings, & stone work, & all about are huge upholstered absolutely comfortable sofas & arm chairs, & a wonderful-toned concert piano which Mr. Webb, the other guest, plays at any hour, on request or with out it!—The children come down to tea, friends drop in, etc. & I generally escape & get in a good hours' reading before it is time

to dress for dinner, which is always very ceremonious: full dress at eight o'clock. The banqueting Hall, where they always dine, is 72 feet long, two stories high, & hung with the tapestries which are supposed to be [the] original ones used at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. The flags of the 13 original states hang way up by the va[ul]ting, heads of moose & big game of all sorts, live up there too, & at one end, over the huge sideboard filled with old coppers of every sort, is an enormous organ, the loft of which is railed by a long oaken bas-relief [sic] by Karl Bitter, stretching the length of the room. The other End is nearly filled by an enormous carved stone chimney, also by Karl Bitter, & having three huge fireplaces, in all of which great logs are blazing. The dinner table, in the centre of the room, being too large for common use, a small cosy [sic] round table is drawn up before the central fire, & there we dine each night, with 2 footmen in knee breeches, gold garters, etc. to serve & look de style! At a given moment they draw the red portieres [sic] which belonged to Richelieu & we pass out thro [sic] the circular cloister-like hallway which surrounds the palm room & thro [sic] the tapestry gallery, to the big red library at the End of the house. Books everywhere, up to the 16th Century ceiling which is 26 feet above the floor, on the right hand & left, every sort of books, first Editions & Current litterature [sic], books, books, books, and comfortable chair in which to read them, & the terrace beyond to go to, for dewuzzing purposes. At about ten, we wander off to the billiard room for a lemon squash or any sort of liquid, then to bed, for this time we are an early party, not like my last visit when nobody went to bed till 12.—So the days pass, & life does not seem much of a problem, for the guests at all events. There is the bowling alley & swimming pool downstairs to look forward to, in case of bad weather, & absolutely Everything unpleasant is eliminated, all of which is exceedingly bad for ones mental make-up & ones inborn sense of responsibility! However apart from the purely material Comfort, which I don't believe any of us are perfect enough to honestly despise, it is a Keen pleasure to me to be with my two Sisters & their children & feel again that goodfellowship [sic] which we have not been able to realize for eight years. So you see the influence is not wholly detrimental!—You can't begin to Know how much I am looking forward to the end of the week & my homegoing [sic], & seeing Grenville & my familiar haunts & playmates again. I can really hardly wait & I only wish I could take a great slice of this heavenly Spring home with me & pass it along Porter Avenue.—Give my love to the family & forgive this purely Egotistical letter which is a poor return to your nice chatty one. I wrote Mrs. Cary explaining about the Valentine I received an amusing answer

The mail is leaving so I Can't Continue.

Always Affectionately

Pauline Merrill

any date, as it covers several days!—March 1905



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