



# History of the Residence of the Ambassador of Colombia to the United States

---



CANCILLERÍA



Embajada de Colombia en Estados Unidos

## The History

---

The Residence of the Embassy of Colombia was built in 1906 for Mr. Thomas T. Gaff, the original owner of the house. Gaff was a successful businessman in distilleries and heavy machinery, who came from Cincinnati and commissioned architect Jules Henri de Sibour to design this beautiful house.

Gaff studied at Harvard, Leipzig and Gottingen Universities and had an active role in the construction of the House. He must be credited for the unusual facilities he designed, such as the laundry's drying system, the ice house with a trap door providing direct delivery from the street, and the cork-insulated wine cellar.

After occupying the house for a brief period of time, the Gaff family leased it to several prominent Washingtonians, including President Calvin Coolidge's Secretary of War, Dwight F. Davis, and to the governments of Greece and Colombia.

In 1938, the Colombia government leased Gaff's house, and in 1944, purchased the house from Thomas Gaff's daughter, Mrs. Carey D. Langhorne. Since then, it has served as the official residence of the Colombian Ambassador to the United States and has been restored to its original splendor. Nowadays, it is one of the highlights of Dupont Circle's historical circuit.

Fresh roses and flowers that arrive every week from the country's field adorn this gorgeous mansion, where several cultural and social events take place every month.

The house is also the perfect setting to showcase the diversity and richness of Colombian art. Ambassadors host several exhibitions every year with renowned artists, such as Ana Mercedes Hoyos, Carlos Jacanmijoy, Luis Luna, Olga de Amaral, Juan Bernal, Fanny Sanín, Juan Cárdenas and recently Félix Ángel, who demonstrate the talent of the Colombian people and provide a broader knowledge of the country.



## The Architecture

---

It is said that Mr. Gaff distrusted American workmanship, which is why the red bricks of the façade were brought from England and two Italian artisans came all the way from Europe to craft the wood paneling of the staircase and the halls. In deference to his native land, perhaps Mr. Gaff chose American chestnut paneling to cover the enormous entrance hall. Today the wood is virtually unattainable because of the chestnut blight.



The interior of the house is an example of the late 18th and early 19th century eclecticism. Each room of the mansion has a distinct style provoking different impressions when one walks from one room to the other. Most of Mr. Gaff's Library and the original furnishings were included in the sale and are still in the house.

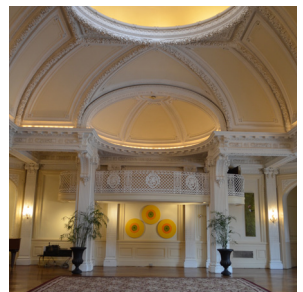


The Louis XVI living room has two Louis XVI chairs, said to have belonged to Victor Hugo.

The beamed dining room, inspired by Italian renaissance, with a table that extends to seat 24 people, is the same size as the drawing room. Dominating the room is the very large built-in sideboard that used to be an altar at an Italian monastery. It is a mixture of Italian 16th and 17th century elements carved with the scenes from the Old Testament.



The piece de resistance of the house is the Edwardian style great white ballroom. Its large elliptical skylight, vaulted ceiling, rich plaster detailing, herringbone floor and musicians gallery all lend a grandeur rarely found in private residences even then, much less today. The glass doors that surround it used to open onto an opulent garden.



The second floor is reserved for the presidential suite and that of the Ambassador's family. On the third floor, there is a wing of guest rooms and the servants' quarters.

## Jules Henri de Sibour

---

The house was designed and built by the renowned architect Jules Henri de Sibour, a descendant of Louis XVI and son of a Viscount, who studied at Yale and at L'École des Beaux Arts in Paris.

At that time, Jules Henri de Sibour, was a prolific architect and built various mansions that later would become Embassies, such as the Embassy of France, Peru, Canada and Luxemburg, all of them characterized by magnificent staircases, impressive reception halls and grand chimneys.

---



---

1520 20th Street, NW  
Washington, DC

*Get to know Colombia.  
Learn more at [www.colombiaemb.org](http://www.colombiaemb.org).*