Grayton:

The Vandeveer and Vollintine Families and their Magnificent Estate

A presentation by Thomas J Wood, UIS Archivist
Grayton was an imposing mansion with extensive grounds, located on the north side of Taylorville, Illinois.

It was built in 1910-11 and demolished in 1962. It was owned by members of the Vandeveer and Vollintine families.

While the mansion is gone, a collection of historic photographs documenting the house, its furnishings and grounds was donated to Brookens Library’s Archives/ Special Collections in 2017.

The donor was Roger Hickman, co-trustee of the Leona Stanford Vollintine Charitable Trust.
The family fortune was founded by Horatio Vandeveer, one of the first settlers of Christian County.

Vandeveer built the first house in Taylorville, and was elected to numerous positions in town, county, and state government.

He raised a regiment for the Mexican-American War.

He studied law with John T. Stuart and was a colleague and friend of Abraham Lincoln. He became a noted attorney and judge.

He was a popular, well-respected, and generous man. His friends called him “Rash.”

Horatio M. Vandeveer (1816-1894)
The Vandeveer family fortune was established by their ownership of a bank and extensive investments in farmland.

The bank, Vandeveer & Co., became one of the largest private banks in downstate Illinois.

In 1875 Horatio turned the banking business over to his sons, William and Eugene.

Taylorville’s Carnegie Library and Vandeveer High School were built with gifts from the Vandeveer brothers.
Eugene A. was the second son of Horatio Vandeveer.

Eugene worked in the Vandeveer Bank for many years, but he later moved on to acquiring farmland and engaging in agriculture.

In 1879, Eugene departed for an extended tour of Europe. There he met Eudora Atwood of Akron, Ohio. They were married in Berlin in 1883.

Eugene and Eudora had three daughters: Yolande, Vida, and Eugenia.

Eugene A. Vandeveer (1853-1915)
In 1910, Eugene Vandeveer commissioned the noted Chicago architect Frederick Wainwright Perkins (1866-1929) to design a grand house for him and his family. This is Perkins's original plan for the south façade of the house.

In 1911, Perkins married Eugene's daughter Yolande.
Even before it was built, the plans for Vandeveer’s grand new house attracted notice in the newspapers.

This 1910 article from the Decatur Daily Review estimated that the mansion and its grounds cost as much as $150,000 to build.

The 20-acre grounds were to include gardens designed by Jens Jensen, extensive plantings of vegetables, berries, and native fruit trees, and an outdoor swimming pool.
Floor plan of Grayton, 1910.
By the beginning of 1911, the exterior of the house was nearly complete. The family moved in later that year, but work on interior details and furnishing continued for many months.

Sadly, Eugene Vandeveer had only a short time to enjoy his new mansion: he died in 1915, four years after it was completed.
Grayton: View from southeast, ca. 1920.
Southeast corner, showing kitchen entrance.
West entrance.
View from west.
Stables and garages. This building included a six-room apartment on the second floor.
The courtyard of the stables and garages featured a fountain.
The swimming pool, said to be the first in the Taylorville area.
View from the northeast, 1932.
East patio and porches, ca. 1920.
East patio, 1932.

A walkthrough of the interior of Grayton
East Entrance Loggia.
Main Hall.
Living Room looking south.
Living Room looking north.
Music Room looking west.
Music Room looking east.
Dining Room, looking north.
One of six second floor bedrooms, ca. 1915-20.
Bedroom – Another view.
One of the smaller bedrooms.
One of the two sleeping porches.
“Gina” was the youngest daughter of Eugene and Eudora Vandeveer.

She was an artistic dancer, gifted pianist, and opera singer.

Gina spent much of her time in Europe, but Grayton was her “home base.”

She married Harold Strotz of Chicago in 1920. They divorced in 1928.
Gina spent most of the 1930s on concert tours around Europe, and at her home in Munich and an apartment in Vienna.

Her mother Eudora often travelled with her, and died in Vienna in 1936.

In 1938, at the time of the Anschluss, her Vienna apartment was occupied by the Nazis. Her house in Munich was also seized by the German government.

In 1939 she returned to Taylorville and performed at the Christian County Centennial celebration.
Gina at the Christian County Centennial, 1939 (above).

After her return to America, she also spent time at her apartment in New York City.

There, at one of her “Taylorville Parties,” she renewed her acquaintance with Eddie Vollintine. At the end of 1939 they were engaged.
Eddie Vollintine was born and raised in Taylorville. His family, like the Vandeveers, were early settlers and prosperous landowners in Christian Co.

He received a B. S. in Architecture at the University of Illinois in 1927.

He spent much of his professional life designing parks and gardens for the City of New York.

He and Gina were married in NYC on Valentine’s Day, 1940.

Edward Witmer Vollintine (1903-1997)
The Living Room, 1960. The Vollintines worked to make the furnishings in Grayton more modern and comfortable. They continued to travel extensively, but Grayton served as their “home base.”
They furnished a fireplace “Inglenook” as a comfortable space to play cards.
They redecorated one of the bedrooms to be a study.
Eddie and Gina also worked on further developing the gardens around Grayton. Here Eddie asks if the photo is reversed -- yes, it is.
Gina died in 1958 of viral encephalitis. In 1961 Eddie remarried Leona Williams (née Stanford). The wedding reception was held at Grayton.
Soon after their marriage, Eddie and Leona lived in the apartment over Grayton’s garage/stable. Then they moved to a townhouse in downtown Taylorville (above). They also spent time at Leona’s house in Boulder, Colorado.

They moved some of Grayton’s furniture and art works to the townhouse. They also relocated Grayton’s south gate to the alley behind the townhouse.

Due to the cost of maintenance and high property taxes, Eddie Vollintine had Grayton demolished in 1962. The garage/stable was demolished in 1981.
The site of Grayton in 2013. This was the location of Taylorville's first Wal-Mart in the early 1980s.
The Vollintines made generous gifts to many institutions, including Eastern Illinois University, the University of Illinois School of Architecture, and to hospitals in St. Louis, Memphis, and Boulder, Colorado.


Their philanthropy continues through the Leona Stanford Vollintine Charitable Trust.
Although Grayton has vanished “like the snows of yesteryear,” images of it will be preserved in Archives/ Special Collections in Brookens Library.
The End.