



VILLA AURELIA

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HISTORICAL NEWS
HISTORY





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Villa Aurelia, owned by the American Academy in Rome, has gradually taken on various names since the time of its construction and precisely in order, that of Villa Farnese, Villa Borbone, Villa Giraud, Villa Savorelli, Villa Heyland, from the names of the different successive owners over time. The Villa was built by Cardinal Girolamo Farnese (1599/1668-69) at the top of the Gianicolo, along the Aurelian walls, near Porta S.Pancrazio and the Vigna Farnese where Paul III had in turn owned a house.

XVII century

The date of construction is not precisely known, but it can be placed between 1650 – when Girolamo Farnese assumed the office of governor of Rome – and 1667, the date of his appointment as cardinal in pectore. Cruyl's map of Rome, dated 1665, already documents the existence of a building in the area.

In 1668, when the cardinal dictated his will, the building was completed; the same year, or the following, the ownership of the villa passed to the Farnese family of Parma, on the basis of the Cardinal's will.

In 1670 the inventory of the Cardinal's assets took place: the papal inspector Carlo Cartari visited the villa and wrote an accurate description.

Cartari in his "L'Aggiato di Studio" reports that "the Palazzetto", originally conceived as a loggia, was built "above one of the old towers of the city (because there were the ancient walls)" and that only during the works took on the characteristics and dimensions of a villa, the cost of which was around forty thousand scudi.

A short distance from the main building Cartari detects the presence of the "mediocre house built there by the old Cardinal Farnese (Paul III), although it was decorated with paintings and restored by the last Cardinal Farnese himself".

The description of the villa by Carlo Cartari corresponds, in general lines, to the main body of the building as it has come down to us.

The ground floor consisted of three large rooms and other smaller rooms, the latter set on the Aurelian walls. A spiral staircase in peperino led to the upper floors: the mezzanine, accessible via a hanging loggia and consisting of three rooms and the noble floor, with two large rooms and a smaller, intermediate one, identified as the Cardinal's summer bedroom.

Of the large rooms on the noble floor, the one with "the elevation facing St. Peter and towards Rome", i.e. at the NE corner, had large windows and was rather configured as a loggia: adjacent to the rooms was the Gallery, facing the ascent of Porta S.Pancrazio, now Via Garibaldi, and located above the mezzanines.

Via two stairways one then reached "two isolated loggias, very high, from which one can see all of Rome, all its countryside, mountains and the sea: a beautiful view".

Cartari also enumerates the various and rich decorations of the building, which, although stripped of the furnishings, kept the painted panels of the vaults on the ground floor, the decorated ceilings of the mezzanine, the walls and vaults painted and decorated with stuccos and grotesques on the floor noble; he attributes its execution to some of the best known painters active at the time in the capital, such as Lauri and Schorr. The maps of Rome by Falda – 1667 – and by Tempesta – 1693 – depict various buildings in the area of the Vigna Farnese which are presumed to be the villa and the annexed houses.

XVIII century

The villa remained the property of the Farnese family until 1731 when, on the death of the last duke of Parma, the Farnese possessions passed to the Bourbons of Naples. Nolli's 1748 map of Rome shows the villa built along the Aurelian walls and another building which seems to correspond to the one indicated by Cartari as the home of Paul III and subsequently depicted by Vasi.

In 1761 Vasi, in his book "Of the magnificence of ancient and modern Rome" described the villa as "the most noble Farnese casino, today of my Most August Sovereign the King of the two Sicilies" (Ferdinand IV of Bourbon); plate 90 of the same book represents the NE side of the villa, inserted in the view of the city, while plate 198 represents the north elevation.

The one represented by Vasi is a two-storey building, divided into a double order and subdivided into seven bays: on the main floor the large arches of the hall to the NE, which Cartari describes as having large windows, appear walled up: the building is covered roof and is characterized by the presence, on the south side, of a high tower, probably one of the high loggias seen by Cartari. Perpendicular to the west side, the first order of pillars continues for a stretch forming a niche with a fountain.

Opposite the main building, Vasi places another, of more modest dimensions, in which it is perhaps possible to identify "the mediocre home" formerly of Paul III.

Plate 90 by Vasi which represents the villa included in the general view of the Janiculum Hill, while not providing many details, documents the presence of two windows on the east side and a small tower on the SE corner.

An engraving by GB Piranesi from around 1750 depicts the villa against the background of the Paola Fountain and confirms the existence, on the east elevation, of two large arched windows that reproduce the motif on the left side of Vasi's north elevation and correspond to the same room, located at the NE corner of the building.

It is not certain that there were actually two windows, as the backbone wall of the villa would have intersected the one on the left, it is possible that one of the two openings was fake, as it is today.

At the SE corner also Piranesi represents a small tower, of more modest dimensions than that of the southern side which, in the distance, overlooks it; in the foreground is a bastion of the ancient walls, used as a terrace, as evidenced by the presence of a series of potted plants placed at the top of the wall.

In Piranesi's engraving, the southern side of the villa is foreshortened, but it is equally possible to identify the loggia described by Cartari at the mezzanine level, jutting out from the main body; even if, rather than hanging, this element is here erroneously set directly above the Aurelian walls.

The same view of Piranesi was taken up by Giovanni Acquaroni in 1816: of the two large arched windows on the east side, one is walled up, while the "loggetta" on the south side is suspended and the two towers are both brought back to the height of the lower one; a new roofed body was built on top of the bastion of the walls. The Bourbons never used the villa directly, but it was rented out to various ambassadors, dignitaries, cardinals and, in 1774, to Count Ferdinando Giraud.

19th century

When Ferdinando Giraud died, a long and complex dispute began between his heirs and the Bourbons over the payment of the rent and the state of conservation of the building.

In 1841 the dispute was resolved with the purchase of the villa by the Girauds, who, in consideration of the poor state of conservation, obtained it from the Bourbons at a negligible price: the same year the villa was sold to Count Alessandro Savorelli, of Forlì. Savorelli, heir to a large fortune, was the owner of a candle factory, which he moved to the villa: he undertook numerous extension and restoration works on the property, which had been neglected for many years, making use of the work of his father-in-law, the architect Virginio Vespignani. To serve the candle factory, two new buildings independent of the main building were built to the west of the central body; an entire body of the building was also added to the SE corner, built above the walls.

The print from the Savorelli archive represents a largely modified complex with respect to that reported by Piranesi and Acquaroni. The "loggia" along the south side was demolished; traces of the largest keep perhaps remain in the square terrace that rises to the SW corner above the roof covering. To the east, beyond the remaining tower, the low service buildings of the factory appear, while other service rooms are created under the main terrace built at ground floor level.

The niche with the fountain represented by Vasi in the western area of the building has been transformed into an access arch to the southern side of the garden (as can be seen from the views in attachments 11 and 12).

The modification of the central hall on the ground floor is also probably due to Vespignani, in which, following the demolition of the external loggia which gave access to the mezzanine, a new connecting staircase was built between the ground and mezzanine floors. The first floor was also affected by considerable works, it was repaved and repainted. In 1849, during the war of the French troops against the Roman Republic, the villa, due to its elevated position which allowed control of the battlefield, became the seat of the Garibaldi's headquarters. It was heavily damaged by bombing and reported the almost complete destruction of the roof and the southern facade. It is probable that the former house of Paul III was also destroyed during the war.

With the return of the Pope, Savorelli resumed his activity and probably managed to obtain compensation for the damages suffered and also to repair them, at least in part, by rebuilding the south facade and the circular staircase. However, his fortunes were declining and after his death in 1864, ownership of the villa passed to the Monte di Pietà.

In 1885 the villa was bought by Mrs. Clara Jessup Heyland: American, wife of an English officer who became invalid during the war in India, Mrs. Heyland settled with her husband in the villa which she renamed Aurelia, starting a vast renovation of the buildings and of the garden.

This intervention involved the real redesign of the elevations: three full-height bay windows were added to the south façade; on the North one, in correspondence with the entrance door, a portico on columns was built; the tower at the SE corner was eliminated and the east façade was modified by the superimposition of various buildings jutting out from the building; the first floor of the East body was punctuated with arches supported by caryatids.

A crowning parapet was added to the entire body of the building, modifying the original roof covering.

A water reservoir was built in the garden in the form of a Romanesque bell tower. Even the interior was adapted to the changing needs of use by creating bathrooms, an elevator and fireplaces in every room. Glass decorated with heraldic motifs was installed in the windows of the entrance hall on the ground floor.

The plan of Rome of the Italian Cartographic Institute of 1891 shows the villa with the body perpendicular to the north facade, the buildings added by Savorelli, the so-called bell tower and the house of the porter, built near the entrance.

The photograph of the American Academy Archives from the beginning of the 20th century, taken before 1909, shows the SE corner of the villa and, foreshortened, the South facade, with the recent bay windows; the garden appears in the arrangement desired by Mrs. Heyland, which combines the rigor of the Italian garden with the natural and mysterious atmosphere of English gardens.

20th century

In 1909, as a bequest from Mrs. Heyland, the property of the villa passed to the American Academy in Rome, which in those years, through one of its founders, JP Morgan, had purchased a large area of land near the Porta S. Pancrazio to build your headquarters. Immediately after the second war, in 1946-47 the Academy began restoration work on the villa, which was carried out under the supervision of the director of the Academy, Laurenze Roberts and the architect Bruno Zevi.

The works carried out were aimed at removing, as far as possible, the additions made by the previous owner and at restoring the original layout of the building. The bay windows of the south façade were demolished, but the entrance porch remained. The superfetative bodies of the east facade were eliminated, on which new windows were made on the ground floor; the window frames were made by reproducing the original decorative motifs. The cadastral plans represent the situation of the villa in 1939, before the restoration works, while the drawings by architect Zevi document the interventions envisaged in 1946-47, which were only partially completed in the execution phase, to the advantage of greater conservation of the pre-existing.

However, it is evident from the attached documentation that, while the works carried out by Ms. Heyland altered the elevations of the building compromising the reading of the original layout of the facades, the works of 1946-47 aimed at restoring the state of the places, at least as it was configured after the interventions of Vespignani in the 19th century.

CURRENT STATE

The current state of the villa, after the works of 1946/47, corresponds to that of the first half of the last century, due to the Vespignani interventions and documented in Annex 10. The ground floor and the main floor are used for receptions, conferences, concerts . The intermediate floor, the east body and the one perpendicular to the north facade of the villa are used as guest residences. The services, storerooms, kitchen and laundry are located in the basement: the kitchen area, which is used only for receptions, is currently not compartmentalized with respect to the neighboring rooms. On the occasion of the cultural events promoted by the Academy, the access and outflow of guests directed to the first floor takes place only via the circular staircase located in the SW corner,

Villa Aurelia

A small Baroque masterpiece, Villa Aurelia occupies the highest point within the walls of Rome on what is now the property of the American Academy in Rome, one of the leading American overseas centers for independent study and advanced research in the arts and humanities. The Villa is used for formal presentations of music, art and scholarship as well as for receptions and dinners and the overnight lodging of special guests of the Academy. It is also available to member organizations for retreats, conferences, meetings, other special programs, gatherings and dinners.

History

The Villa Aurelia was originally built for Cardinal Girolamo Farnese around 1650. Following the death of Cardinal Farnese in 1668, the property was bought by Count Alessandro Savorelli, who undertook an extensive program of restoration and new construction. Much of the decorative work visible today dates from this time. In 1849 Giuseppe Garibaldi selected the Villa Aurelia as his headquarters for the defense of the Roman Republic against the French Army. As Christopher Hibbert writes in Garibaldi and His Enemies (Little, Brown & Co., 1966; p.83) "Every morning at dawn he would go up to the watch-tower on the roof of the villa where he 'was immediately greeted by the French sharpshooters who gave him their particular attention all day long', one of his staff recorded. But Garibaldi, after throwing a glance at the enemy used to light his cigar di lui, which was never extinguished till evening.' He seemed, in fact, almost to enjoy being under fire, even to be amused by his extraordinary escape from serious injury. 'The mania on the part of the French for riddling my poor headquarters with bullets, shells and cannon balls sometimes led to amusing scenes,' he wrote in the *Memoirs* which Alexandre Dumas so jauntily edited from his manuscripts." Consequently, there was extensive damage to the villa. Count Savorelli was able to restore the Villa before his death, and it was then sold to the Monte di Pietà, from which it was bought in 1885 by Mrs. Clara Jessup Heyland, an American heiress from Philadelphia. In 1909 upon her death, Mrs. Heyland bequeathed the Villa and its grounds to the American Academy in Rome.

The Villa served the Academy – and the city of Rome – well throughout the 20th century. During the First World War it was home to the American Red Cross in Italy. After the war it became home to the Academy Director and his wife as well as the female Rome Prize winners. The rooms on the *main floor* were reserved for official Academy entertaining, and the ground floor rooms for offices and subsequently studios. A music studio was created in 1925; important concerts were regularly given at Villa Aurelia to capacity crowds well into the 1930s. Closed during the Second World War, the Academy and Villa Aurelia reopened in 1945 offering educational programs for American officers and enlisted men. By 1947 the Academy was back in full operation with Villa Aurelia once again the residence of the director and site of official entertaining and presentation of concerts, art and scholarship.

Restoration

In restoring the facade of the villa, the Academy reintroduced 17th century craftsmanship techniques and materials. For the exterior wall treatment the Academy used the traditional *pozzolan* (hydraulic lime) and marble dust colored with lime washes and natural pigments in ocher and reds. All materials – paint and plaster – were mixed on site by local artisans to avoid the modern additives present in commercially available paint. The result is that the walls reflect light as they would have originally and the colors will age as have Roman buildings of this period.

Interior restoration and renovation revealed decorative work dating from the early 19th century. These include a newly discovered Savorelli family coat of arms in the main entry, extensive gilding and painted plaster work showing colored garlands and musical instruments in the Music Room on the *main floor*, and a painted and plastered ceiling with a fresco frieze of putti and garlands in the dining room, also on the *main floor*. At 19th century elevator cab has been restored and installed in a new glass and metal core; light from previously blocked windows now penetrates the interior of the Villa. Nineteenth-century hardware has also been restored.

Throughout the Villa special attention has been given to the floors. On the ground floor terracotta floors were laid, replacing 1950s cement floors with the material that would have been in the building originally. The terracotta tiles were designed and fabricated of local clays and pigments specifically for the Academy, and in keeping with c. 1650 design and material practices. On the upper floors original 19th century parquet floors were lifted and

restored by local artisans. Where the wood floors had to be replaced, appropriate parquet flooring was fabricated from the wood of old beams and rafters.

Work to renovate the property to meet European Union building codes and to house programs that would further the Academy's mission accompanied this restoration. All systems have been upgraded throughout the building and Sala Aurelia, a new multipurpose conference hall, was created.

Facilities

Villa Aurelia is a three-level structure plus a ground floor. This ground floor level, which opens at grade on the south side of the building, offers a catering kitchen, restrooms, storage area and a studio/office. The ground floor includes an atrium, loggia and salon for use as reception, dining and/or meeting areas. Here also is located the apartment of the resident staff members. The mezzanine level is used for overnight accommodations. It consists of one suite and four guest rooms that can be occupied individually or as two additional suites. The *main floor* has a suite of rooms for meetings, concerts, dinners and receptions. They are a Gallery, Music Room and Dining Room, as well as a "green room" to support these functions. A final room at this level is the "Room with the View," which is dedicated to Mark Hampton. This sitting room/reading room with a terrace overlooks all of Rome. Its principal purpose is to provide common space for the guest rooms on the mezzanine level, but it will be used from time to time for meetings and receptions.

The Chapel and Greenhouse were built in the 19th century as a candle factory. The Cappella is now the office for Villa Aurelia, and the two-story Greenhouse has a two-bedroom apartment on the lower level and a one-bedroom apartment on the upper level. The Villino, built on the foundations of a gatehouse in the Aurelian wall, has a two-story, two-bedroom apartment with private terrace, and above it a one-bedroom apartment with windows on all four sides.

Occupying a wing of the historic Villa Aurelia, the multipurpose Sala Aurelia is designed for educational programs with a seating capacity of 220, and has an enclosed and ventilated projection and translation booth. Sala Aurelia provides an exceptional opportunity for conferences, lectures, readings, concerts, exhibitions, and other kinds of presentations and gatherings. Climate controlled and with a flat floor, Sala Aurelia can be used auditorium style, classroom style, or as a banquet room.

gardens

The bombardment by French artillery in 1849 devastated the original garden. When Mrs. Heyland took possession of the site, she restored the grounds to create a typical Victorian garden, mixing garden features of different traditions. Today the gardens are comprised of the Main Garden, the Secret Garden, and the South Terrace Garden. The overall structure of today's garden is provided by the traditional Italian villa trees (pines, *Pinus pinea*, holm oaks, *Quercus ilex*, magnolias and *Magnolia grandiflora*) originally planted by Mrs. Heyland. The main features of the Villa Aurelia gardens are the giant topiaries of *Quercus ilex* clipped in the dome shape characteristic of Rome and the aerial hedges of the same plants. A bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*) gallery crosses the length of the main garden. A giant wisteria about 100 years old covers the wall at the entrance gate with a cascade of purple flowers in the spring, followed by the pale blue flowers of the *Plumbago capensis* in the summer and fall months. Borders planted with lavender, rosemary, lantana, herbs, and many other Mediterranean plants, with flowers in shades of white, blue and mauve, continue the same color scheme along the main drive. The garden is traditionally decorated with ornaments such as huge terracotta urns, ancient fragments of statues, sarcophagi and columns. A romantic folly called *The bell tower* (The Belltower) features a roofed area flanked by a little tower – believed to have been built to cover a well – that re-uses parts of an original medieval building.

The Fountains

The fountains are a special feature of the Villa Aurelia gardens. The small Pigna Fountain marks the entrance to the bay laurel gallery. The Water-Lily Fountain stands in the middle of a pattern of orthogonal paths edged with classical boxwood hedges. The Bee's Fountain is located in a niche at the end of the path that leads from the Villa Aurelia to the Secret Garden and is draped with Rosa Paul's himalayan climber, a giant rose with pale pink flowers. Locally found fragments of Roman pottery (amphoras, jars, cups, roof tiles) cemented in a rustic *you dowall* form the water spouts of the Millicent Fountain in the Secret Garden.

Context

The restoration and renovation of Villa Aurelia is the final phase of the American Academy in Rome's renovation of all its buildings and grounds. This comprehensive project took 10 years and cost more than \$20,000,000. The purpose of the Academy-wide undertaking was to take care of all deferred maintenance, restore architectural integrity wherever possible and update the systems to meet European Union building codes. This carefully planned campaign has provided the Academy with: housing (including kitchen and dining facilities) for a residential community that numbers over 100 individuals at any given time; improved library facilities including a separate Rare Book Room and Photographic Archive, both developed to meet the particular needs of these special collections; dark room; computer room; archaeological room; gallery space for the exhibition of art; meeting and conference spaces (including but not limited to those in Villa Aurelia) for the presentation of music, art and scholarship; as well as administrative offices and work areas for a staff of 55.

Ownership

The American Academy in Rome is one of the leading American overseas centers for independent study and advanced research in the arts and humanities. For more than one hundred years, the Academy has offered support, time and an inspiring environment to some of America's most gifted artists and scholars. Founded in 1894, the Academy was chartered as a private institution by an act of Congress in 1905. It remains today a private institution supported by gifts and grants from individuals, foundations, corporations and colleges and universities.



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