



Sunrise Mansion

Sunrise is a stately 36 room Georgian mansion built in 1905 by West Virginia's ninth governor, William A. MacCorkle 1857 1930 . Located on an expansive 16 acre woodland property on the brow of South Hills, it was considered to be the premier address in the Kanawha Valley in the early 1900s, and the governor intended it from the beginning to be an open and welcoming showplace.

Although the Virginia born MacCorkle was a Democrat who belonged to the Confederate tradition, he was not a bitter partisan. An avid promoter of the Kanawha Valley, MacCorkle amassed an impressive record of public service, participated in numerous business ventures, served a term in the State Senate and was governor from 1892 to 1896. He also authored several books on historical topics, including a 1928 autobiography.

Among notable visitors to Sunrise were former vice president Adlai Stevenson, attorney/politician William Jennings Bryan, boxer James Corbett, bandleader/composer John Philip Sousa, and evangelist Billy Sunday; to name a few. In 1961, Sunrise Foundation, Inc. purchased the mansion and grounds, and for over 40 years the nonprofit Sunrise Museums called it home. Construction of the Clay Center for the Arts and Sciences in downtown Charleston resulted in the museum's closure and sale of the mansion. The current owners undertook a meticulous restoration, and now maintain the mansion as private law offices. Under their stewardship, Sunrise remains an imposing city landmark perched high above the Kanawha River overlooking downtown Charleston.



The Sunrise Carriage Trail

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The Sunrise Carriage Trail is a forested haven within Charleston, a protective environment for plants and birds, a quiet place of beauty for walking and contemplation, where history is preserved and honored.

Friends of the Sunrise Carriage Trail

For information, send an e mail to:
carriagetrail@suddenlink.net

To report a problem, call Public Grounds at:
304 348 6458

Trail Hours: Dawn to Dusk

Brochure Design: Colleen Anderson
Mother Wit Writing and Design

Sunrise Carriage Trail

Located adjacent to the mansion and grounds is the Carriage Trail, a meandering 15 foot wide path that gently zigzags .65 miles and descends approximately 180 feet through a peaceful and varied landscape of towering trees, wildflowers, ornamental plantings, and historic masonry remains. Originally used by horse drawn conveyances traveling from Sunrise to downtown Charleston, the Carriage Trail is owned by the City of Charleston and maintained for public use as a natural haven. Users can approach the trail at its lower end from a small open glade just beyond the end of the South Side Bridge and below Bridge Road, or from the upper end on Myrtle Road just to the left of the entrance to Sunrise Mansion.

The Sunrise Carriage Trail dates to 1905, when workers began erecting the MacCorkle family's grand hilltop estate. Faced with the prospect of using the steep public route now Bridge Road to haul construction materials, William A. MacCorkle purchased additional acreage from a neighboring landowner in order to build a gently sloping private access road for teams of oxen to haul massive building stones up the hill. Through the years, the governor routinely traveled the peaceful Carriage Trail to and from downtown Charleston.

Current users may admire the abundant flora and lush woodland scenery as they traverse the trail. They may also see a variety of impressive man made stone and concrete artifacts, beginning with the matching gate posts that frame the upper and lower entrances. Other noticeable works include a grotto carved out of a native stone bank and three massive benches. Astute observers may also notice a culvert spanning Lower Ferguson Branch, as well as remnants of stone retaining walls original portions of which were dry laid without mortar on both sides.

Two especially noteworthy monuments are to be found along the route. The first, a large memorial stone, stands a short distance from the

trail's lower entrance. ❶ Its weathered inscription reads:

**IN THE SECOND YEAR OF THE CIVIL WAR
TWO WOMEN CONVICTED AS SPIES BY
DRUMHEAD COURT MARTIAL WERE
BROUGHT TO THIS SPOT, SHOT, AND
HERE BURIED. IN 1905 WHEN BUILDING
THIS ROAD TO SUNRISE, THEIR REMAINS
WERE DISINTERRED AND REBURIED OP-
POSITE THIS STONE.**

W.A.M.

In his autobiography MacCorkle revealed that, while excavating the carriage road, "I dug up the remains of two women, one a blonde and the other a brunette," which he reburied nearby. Unable to determine their identities, he consulted Captain John Slack, a former Union soldier and local historian who claimed that Confederate forces encamped along the Kanawha River in 1862 had captured two female camp followers suspected of being Union spies. After being convicted by a drumhead court martial, the unidentified women were marched up the hollow, shot, and buried. MacCorkle accepted this version of events and erected the existing stone.

A conflicting story later emerged from an ex Confederate soldier who claimed that Union troops had carried out the horrible deed. However, that was not the last word. In a deathbed confession, another former Union soldier told of being a member of the firing squad responsible for the executions. He had kept his haunting burden secret until his last days.

A final chapter to the story was written by area historian George Summers in 1934, who ascertained that "no living person knows who the women were, although Governor MacCorkle and John Slack are believed to have known and suppressed their names to keep from bringing sorrow to the women's families, who, it is understood, now live or did live, in Charleston." If this is correct, both men took the secret to the grave. To date, no additional information about these women has ever come to light, and their identities remain an enduring mystery.

The second significant monument on the Carriage Trail was also erected by Governor MacCorkle. It is a personal shrine to his beloved daughter, who died in an auto accident in 1926 at 35 years of age. ❷ The mishap occurred while the pair traveled home in their chauffeur-driven automobile following the governor's delivery of the Commencement Address at Virginia's Hampden Sydney College. Although the senior MacCorkle and his driver were only slightly hurt in the crash on Route 60 near Rainelle WV, Isabelle succumbed to her injuries a day later. The grieving father selected a peaceful, secluded bend near the upper end of the trail to erect an arched stone shrine containing a compassionate religious figure with outstretched arms (removed due to vandalism). A simple inscription at the base of the shrine reads: IN LOVING MEMORY OF ISABELLE MacCORKLE. Following his own death in 1930, the governor's ashes were interred in the memorial behind a stone that bears his name and relevant dates.

It has been many decades since horse hooves and carriage wheels traversed the Carriage Trail between Sunrise and downtown Charleston. They have been replaced by visitors on bicycles or on foot who freely use the trail to escape the surrounding urban environment, relax in a natural woodland setting, and experience a feeling of almost complete solitude only a few hundred yards from the busy City.

Those who seek it out for solitude or exercise should remember that the trail is in its second century of existence and is part of a fragile and protected environment. Sadly, decades of exposure have taken a toll on many of its significant natural and cultural treasures. Please respect it by following a few basic rules: Pack out what you pack in, refrain from leaving the marked trail, and do not remove, climb on, or otherwise disturb the precious natural and cultural resources that give the trail its unique character.

Text by Dr. Billy Joe Peyton, June 2005