



Archlyn Villa



Archlyn Villa in 1990 (BNT Collection). The photo on the left shows the original house between the corner pilasters. The two-storey addition with butterfly was added after 1953. The enclosed porch and upper storey verandah were also added at that time.

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This is part of a series of architectural articles by the Bermuda National Trust that will highlight some of Bermuda's endangered historic buildings.

Hiding behind a high wall on St John's Road is a house with a lot of social history. Built in 1826 by mariner John Gibson, it was advertised for sale by public auction in 1833 to pay off his creditors. Described as "that handsome and well-built dwelling house with a good and large tank", the original section of the house has neo-classical symmetry and impressive corner pilasters. There were several interim owners until 1871 when the house on one acre appears in Benjamin William Watlington's estate. After a family dispute caused by the disappearance of his will, the house was transferred in 1917 to Benjamin's son, dentist Dr Francis William Watlington. It was then named Virginia Manor after Frank's American wife, Virginia Harrison. They lived in the Fairylands area and the house was often tenanted by officers for nearby Admiralty House, among them Commander Lyson of the Royal Navy who was secretary to Admiral Sir Michael Seymour. The close proximity to the Hamilton Golf Links on North Shore also added to its appeal. After Watlington's death in 1941 there were two subsequent owners until 1953 when the house was purchased by Archibald and Lillian Minors.

The Minors had married in 1934 and in 1944 they started the Archlyn Villa guest house out of their home in St George's catering to Black tourists, many of whom were friends from their time studying in the US, who wanted to visit Bermuda but were not welcome in the island's hotels in



the era of segregation. In 1953, desiring a more central location, the Minors bought Virginia Manor, added eight bedrooms with baths and opened the new Archlyn Villa.

Archie and Lillian Minors were gracious hosts and Archlyn Villa attracted a steady stream of visitors. In 1974, they were featured in *Who's Who* in America. Some of the guests were Langston Hughes, poet, playwright and a leader of the Harlem Renaissance; Jimmy Edwards, star of the 1949 film *Home of the Brave*; Jerry Majors, society editor for *Ebony* magazine; singers Patty LaBelle and Gladys Knight; and most of the Black entertainers performing at the Forty Thieves nightclub. Carl Murphy, owner of the



Lillian and Archibald Minors

Afro-American News paper gave them their first real publicity abroad with a centre page spread on Bermuda and Archlyn Villa. Mrs Minors persuaded her fellow Black guest house owners to form themselves into The Bermuda Resort Association.



Archlyn Villa in 1974

The Minors were also a community-minded couple. They formed the Socratic Literary Society and were credited as the first to start the Black tourist trade in Bermuda. Later Lillian founded the Sunshine Garden Club and was one of the original members of Keep Bermuda Beautiful committee; it was her idea to have a tag day. She was also a founder of the Business and Professional Women's Club.



The Minors sold Archlyn Villa in 1981 and moved to Shelly Bay and a well-deserved retirement. The house was sold to Bermuda Hospitals Board in 1990 who planned to use it as a hospice. When the neighbours complained, Agape House was moved to an old house called Montrose on the hospital property and Archlyn Villa began to be used as staff accommodation.

Today, Archlyn Villa appears abandoned and uninhabitable. The roof has been damaged and the whole place has a look of seediness caused by neglect and deterioration. Yes, it's an old house and yes, just like every other house in Bermuda, it requires maintenance. Come on BHB, surely this building can be put to better use?



The roof on the original section of Archlyn Villa appears to have had hurricane damage.



The side entrance to Archlyn Villa is not a pretty sight. Are the window bars really necessary?

Sources: Many thanks to Cecille Snaith-Simmons who took me to visit her godmother many years ago when the Minors were living at Shelly Bay. For more on Lillian and Archibald Minors see Mrs Snaith-Simmons' article in *The Royal Gazette*, 19 January 2022 as well as the article in *The Recorder*, 30 March 1974; there are also several undated articles on the couple to be found on the RG online version; for history of other owners see Bermuda's Architectural Series Pembroke. For information on Montrose see the BNT Paget volume.