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## **VMFA kicks off Robinson House expansion, renovation** *Historic mansion to house museum offices, regional visitor center, exhibition*



A digital rendering of the west side of the Robinson House, featuring planned addition. *Image courtesy Glavé & Holmes.*

Construction to expand and reclaim interior spaces of the historic Robinson House on grounds of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts will begin in September 2017. When reopened in late 2018 after standing vacant for nearly 20 years, the building will house a regional tourism center and VMFA's Human Resources Division—providing a new front door both to Richmond visitors and prospective museum employees.

“In reimagining the future use of Robinson House, we are creating a vibrant new welcome area both to Richmond and VMFA,” from Alex Nyerges, VMFA Director. “Many visitors begin their time in

Richmond at our museum, and we're honored to collaborate on an initiative that will benefit the entire region as a tourist destination. We also are delighted to create an engaging new environment where people can begin their careers or continue their professional journeys at our museum.”

The 3,200-square-foot addition will introduce an accessible entrance, which visitors can approach by walkways from the VMFA parking deck. The expansion also will house an elevator, stairway, and three floors of glass-enclosed porches that connect to the original 7,600-square-foot structure. Easily accessed from both Interstate 95 and Interstate 64, the visitor center, with public restrooms, will occupy half of the first floor, while VMFA's Human Resources team will move into office and training space on the second and third floors.

Robinson House will also offer a first-floor gallery featuring an exhibition about the complex story of the site from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present. The multilayered history includes native peoples and English colonists; an antebellum family and the enslaved people who labored for them; the nation's best-known Confederate veterans' home; a scientific research institute; and a center for art programs and studio classes. In 2013, the house was named to the National Register of Historic Places.

“In addition to our core mission to create exceptional experiences of art and culture, we have a deep respect for the history of the land and the building that VMFA is charged to protect and preserve,” Nyerges added.

### **About the restoration project**

VMFA worked in partnership with the Art and Architectural Review Board to ensure the addition complements the former home's style, which included Italianate design embellished with Victorian details. Richmond-based Glavé & Holmes, with a team led by Steven Blashfield, AIA, is the project architect; Jaclyn Miller, architectural designer, is the project manager.

Howard Shockey & Sons Inc., based in Winchester, Va., with an office in Richmond, has been awarded the construction contract.

To protect the design integrity of the original house, sections of which date from the late 1820s and the 1850s, the addition will be built on the rear, or north side, of the structure. Interior work on the period structure will include restoring the space to reflect historical accuracies, such as showcasing the grand central staircase. New mechanical and electrical systems are among other building updates.

A long-time VMFA goal, the restoration of Robinson House has been listed as the top priority on the Commonwealth's six-year Capital Outlay Plan. Funding for the overall \$5.2 million project is included in a bond package issued through the Virginia Public Building Authority, subject to the provisions in Chapter 806 of the 2013 Acts of Assembly. Additional support for the restoration has been provided by the Thomas F. Jeffress Memorial Trust.

VMFA will partner with Richmond Region Tourism to develop the visitor center.

### **About Robinson House**

Once part of a 190-acre estate belonging to prominent Richmond banker Anthony Robinson Jr., the mansion and 36 acres were sold in 1884 to the R. E. Lee Camp, No. 1, Confederate Veterans, to become a residential complex for indigent and disabled veterans. The building, which gained a third floor and belvedere two years later, served as the facility's administration building and war museum. In 1892, Lee Camp sought ongoing and increasing subsidies from the Commonwealth of Virginia to operate the Soldiers' Home. In turn, it promised to relinquish the deed to the grounds once the need to house veterans ended. When the last resident died in 1941 and the property reverted to the state, about 3,000 veterans had resided there over time.

During the subsequent seven decades, Robinson House served various functions, including offices and laboratories for the Virginia Institute for Scientific Research (1949-63); VMFA's art annex housing offices, art studios, and galleries (1964-93); and offices for the Virginia Association of Museums (1995-96).

The Robinson House exhibition is supported by The Council of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Hill, and The Roller-Bottimore Foundation.

### **About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts**

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. VMFA, which opened in 1936, is a state agency and privately endowed educational institution. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, exhibit, and interpret art, and to encourage the study of the arts. Through the Office of Statewide Partnerships program, the museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences, and workshops by visual and performing artists. In addition to presenting a wide array of special exhibitions, the museum provides visitors with the opportunity to experience a global collection of art that spans more than 6,000 years. VMFA's permanent holdings encompass nearly 40,000 artworks, including the largest public collection of Fabergé outside of Russia, the finest collection of Art Nouveau outside of Paris, and one of the nation's finest collections of American art. VMFA is also home to important collections of Chinese art, English silver and French Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British sporting, and modern and contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan, and African art. In May 2010, VMFA opened its doors to the public after a transformative expansion, the largest in its 80-year history. The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission. For additional information, telephone 804-340-1400 or visit [www.vmfa.museum](http://www.vmfa.museum).

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