

## **Louise Wells Cameron Art Museum** <sup>[1]</sup>

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by W. Lee Johnston Jr., 2006

See also: [Museums](#) <sup>[2]</sup>



Civil War at the Cameron Art Museum. Image courtesy of Flickr

The [Louise Wells Cameron Art Museum](#) <sup>[3]</sup> opened in 1962 in St. John's Masonicuser Suess.

<sup>[4]</sup>Lodge at 114 Orange Street in [Wilmington](#) <sup>[5]</sup> as the St. John's Museum of Art. The building had been designed to house St. John's Lodge No. 1 of Ancient York Masons and the Grand and Royal Chapter of Jerusalem, commonly called the Royal Arch. Between 1825 and 1943 the building-Georgian style with Federal modifications-was the private residence of Thomas W. Brown and his heirs. The most striking interior decoration was an allegorical overmantel of Masonic emblems. The restoration of this mural was carried out by [Claude Howell](#) <sup>[6]</sup>, a local artist and one of the founders of the museum. By the 1990s, the St. John's Museum complex actually included [St. John's Lodge](#) <sup>[7]</sup> (1804), the oldest lodge in North Carolina, which housed a permanent collection including 13 Mary Cassatt prints and a shop selling the works of 80 North Carolina artists; the Burch-Cowan House Studio (1830), formerly one of the state's oldest public schools, which featured educational programs and art classes; and [St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church](#) <sup>[8]</sup> (1943), named the Samuel H. Hughes Gallery, which housed changing exhibitions.

A drive for a new facility began in September 1997, when the [Bruce B. Cameron Foundation, Inc.](#) <sup>[9]</sup>, gave St. John's Museum of Art a \$4 million grant-the largest grant given to a cultural organization in Wilmington's history-toward a project expected to cost about \$11 million. The children of Bruce Cameron and the late Louise Wells Cameron at the same time donated land valued at more than \$2 million to the museum in memory of their mother, whose name the museum now bears. [Charles Gwathmey](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, of [Gwathmey Siegel & Associates Architects](#) <sup>[11]</sup> in New York and a [Charlotte](#) <sup>[12]</sup> native, was chosen as architect for the project. Gwathmey is perhaps most noted for his renovation and addition to the [Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum](#) <sup>[13]</sup> in New York, as well as three projects in North Carolina: the [Thomas I. Storrs College](#) <sup>[14]</sup> of [Architecture](#) <sup>[14]</sup> at UNC-Charlotte, the [Center for Jewish Life at Duke University](#) <sup>[15]</sup>, and the IBM Office Building and Distribution Center in Greensboro.

The Louise Wells Cameron Art Museum-which opened in new quarters at the intersection of Independence Boulevard and 17th Street in April 2002, two years after groundbreaking-is dedicated primarily to collecting, preserving, and exhibiting the art of North Carolina. The museum contains more than 700 works, representing a unique collection of work by the state's artists, from visionary painter Minnie Evans to Howell. The 42,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility features a permanent collection of North Carolina and American art from the eighteenth century to the present, color prints by [Mary Cassatt](#) <sup>[16]</sup>, and a sculpture garden. The museum offers temporary exhibitions, educational and outreach programs, and invitational exhibitions for the [Cape Fear](#) <sup>[17]</sup> region's artists. Its 9.6-acre campus also features recently restored [Confederate](#) <sup>[18]</sup> defensive mounds built by Clingman's Brigade during the Battle of Forks Road, which preceded the fall of Wilmington in the last days of the [Civil War](#) <sup>[19]</sup>.

#### **References:**

Victoria Cherrie, "New Museum to Be Named for Louise Wells Cameron," *Wilmington-Star News*, 11 May 1999.

Linda C. Grattifiori, "St. John's Museum of Art," *Our State* (January 1999).

Tony P. Wrenn, *Wilmington, North Carolina: An Architectural and Historical Portrait* (1984).

### Additional Resources:

Cameron Art Museum: <http://www.cameronartmuseum.com/> [3]

St. John's Lodge [7], NC Historical Marker D-107, NC Office of Archives & History.

### Image Credit:

Civil War at the Cameron Art Museum. Image courtesy of Flickr user Sues. Available from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/90124154@N00/3299096776/> [4] (accessed August 27, 2012).

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