

ROME, ITALY

AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, VILLA TAVERNA

The fifteenth century Villa Taverna, built by Cardinal Consalvi, was first rented for use by the U.S. Ambassador in 1933. The Villa and its historical gardens are filled with museum-quality art from antiquity through the Renaissance, to the nineteenth century. Among the important objects in the collection are a Baroque fountain, a strigilated 3rd century A.D. Roman sarcophagus, a sixteenth century statue of Pope Gregory XIII, a nineteenth century statue of David, thirteenth century cosmatesque altar fragments, ancient Egyptian granite columns with white Luna marble capitals, 300-year-old busts of Roman emperors, and a group of oil paintings.

The property was first mentioned in the tenth century as being in the center of a large farm and vineyard estate owned by the St. Silvester Monastery. Portions of the Villa probably date to the sixteenth century, when Pope Gregory XIII gave the property to the Jesuit German-Hungarian College. St. Philip Neri worked here, "inspiring honest men with Christian wisdom," according to a plaque inside. When the Pope dispossessed the Jesuits of their properties in 1773, the papacy reclaimed ownership. Throughout the 1800s Roman nobility escaped the summer city heat here. In 1824 Pope Leo XII opened the Papal Seminary College, and for the next one hundred years, many illustrious scholars frequented the well-known center of learning. There are Latin inscriptions inside commemorating the visits of Pope Gregory XVI in 1831 and 1833, and of Pope Pius IX in 1863. In 1920 Milanese aristocrat Count Ludovico Taverna purchased the building and, with his architect Carlo Busin Vici, transformed the rustic country farmhouse into an urban villa.

During World War II the property was protected by the Knights of Malta and served as a convalescent home for the Italian military. Returned to the U.S. Government in 1944, the Villa and gardens were purchased thereafter on March 6, 1948 from Princess Ida Borromeo-Taverna. The Villa was last remodeled in 1970 by Leone Castelli, but there is a continuing program of art conservation.

The beautiful gardens, as well as the Villa, are protected by the Italian law for cultural heritage. To this day, the humanizing dignity of history and artennoble all who visit and stay at the Villa Taverna – the home of the U.S. Ambassador to Italy.

