

# Gov. Oden Bowie's family treasures up for auction

By ZOË READ [zread@bladenews.com](mailto:zread@bladenews.com) | Posted: Wednesday, May 7, 2014 4:00 am

Ambler Bowie-Slabe grew up at the beautiful home of Gov. Oden Bowie, the man who created the Preakness Stakes, built Maryland's railroads and gave his name to not one, but two towns -- Bowie and Odenton.

Together with her sister, she enjoyed sliding down the banister in the big hall at the center of the house built in 1790, and got in trouble for throwing a baseball through the fan window doors. Bowie-Slabe farmed the land with her husband, Bill, and enjoyed the trees, lilacs and peonies.

Now, she's saying goodbye to historic Fairview, auctioning off its contents this weekend and putting the historic property on the market.

"Our yard is a terrace and we have peonies on the terrace, so I'm going to miss all that," Bowie-Slabe said.

Steve Dance Auctions will auction off the contents of the home at 10 a.m. Saturday outside the house where Maryland's 34th governor was born in 1826.

There will be close to 300 items for sale, many of them dating back to 1826. These items include the governor's carved cylinder desk, a large claw-foot wooden sideboard with a marble top, oriental rugs, railroad memorabilia and two Sheffield silver-plated wine chillers.

"To be practical it has to be done, but my sister and I grew up with these items, so it's a lot of memories living in this house and growing up on the land," Bowie-Slabe said.

Bowie was a veteran of the Mexican-American War who was a famed horse breeder and businessman who built the Pimlico racetrack in Baltimore. Although his farm was a slave plantation, 70 of his family's slaves enlisted in the Union Army during the Civil War.

Along with his father, he established the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad -- and the first two extensions were named in his honor, Odenton and Bowie. He was the first governor elected after the Civil War.

The Bowie family preserved many of the features of the family seat dating back to the 18th century, including the foundation of the stable where the governor and his father raised thoroughbreds, said Pam Williams, manager of historic properties and museums for the city of Bowie.

"It's an important 18th-century house and gives credence to 18th-century lifestyle in Prince George's County," she said.

"There were elegant homes in 18th-century Prince George's County and Fairview was one of them."

This is the first time that the general public will have the opportunity to see the contents of the house, and possibly take something home with them.

“This has been a private family home all these years, and it was open to friends and family and probably people of political importance, but it's an opportunity to view a very old historic home and its contents and see how someone lived back in the day,” said Steve Dance, president of Steve Dance Auctions.

Bowie-Slabe lived at the estate until she went away to college. She and her sister, Maude Bowie-Hays, were the sixth generation to live at the estate, the great-granddaughters of the governor.

In 1992, Bowie-Slabe and her husband moved to Fairview and began their second careers as farmers. But over the years, it became increasingly difficult to keep such a large house.

Today, the 10-acre property is no longer a working farm. Bowie-Slabe and her husband plan to put the house up for sale after the auction and move to Florida.

“It's too much house for my husband and I, and it's a bittersweet action that we have to take,” she said.

The items are of interest to collectors because they belonged to an important Maryland family, and because the furniture was locally built, Dance said. He said he believes that Bowie's desk may prove to be the highlight of the auction.

“The desk is very unusual. It has distinctly different carves, edges, ornamentation on it — and the fact that it was his desk,” Dance said. “That was somewhat typical of the time of the high-quality furniture and workmanship and craftsmanship that the cabinet makers put into these items.”

Bowie-Hays lives in Annapolis, and their first-cousins live in Baltimore, so the family still has a strong presence in Maryland. Bowie-Slabe said she's also done the best she could to turn over a lot of family documents and the governor's papers to the Maryland State Archives in Annapolis.

Williams said the history of the family will always be a large and important component of the city of Bowie.

“It's always poignant to see history change and the history of a place change. The fact that the Bowie family has lived in that house for over 200 years is very special,” she said.

“It will be poignant to know there are not Bowies there any more, and we will cross our fingers that the next folks that live there respect the house.”