

Will It Be "Nice's Folly"? Ghosts Of Bladen's Wonder

Spirits Of 1744 Cast Speculative Eye On Executive Mansion As They Recall Their Governor Started One He Couldn't Finish

Ghosts that walked the unfinished floors of "Bladen's Folly" for forty years, waiting for a recalcitrant Legislature to furnish funds for its completion, woke from two centuries' sleep last night to cast a speculative eye upon the present Governor's Mansion at Annapolis.

But Thomas Bladen didn't have to live in what an old historian terms his "melancholy and mouldering monument to political dissension." That was in Colonial days, and the Legislature finally solved the problem by presenting the mansion, ghosts and all, to St. John's College.

Residence Mandatory

The Maryland Constitution, long since adopted, provides, however, that "the Governor shall reside at the seat of Government"—and the present Executive will have to defy that provision if he closes what may become known as "Nice's Folly" and does not move to other quarters in Annapolis.

The possibility that the history of Bladen's mansion may repeat itself is based on Governor Nice's decision yesterday to stop work on the reconstruction of the present building the moment available funds are exhausted. He says that only about \$108,000 is

"available" and two weeks ago the outlay already had reached \$97,597.53.

"The building will then be left as it stands for the inspection of the Legislature," he explained. "It can then be determined what appropriation will be needed to complete it."

Just What Bladen Did

That, according to the historians, is just about what Governor Bladen did.

Until Bladen took office the proprietary Governors had lived more or less where they pleased, the only house built in Annapolis expressly for the residence of a Governor having been what is now the Marchand house, on Prince George street. It was occupied by Gov. Francis Nicholson, executive of the province from 1694 to 1709.

In 1744 a four-acre tract called the "College Green" was bought by Governor Bladen, according to the records, as a site for "a desirable home and a princely public residence."

Disagreement Arose

"Mr. Duff, the architect, came from Scotland to superintend the construction of the building," says Elihu S. Riley's "The Ancient City," a history

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"BLADEN'S FOLLY" GHOSTS WONDERING

Speculate On History's Repeating Itself As They Eye Work On Mansion

Recall That Their Governor Started To Build House He Couldn't Finish

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of Annapolis published in 1887. "Materials of every kind were provided in a most liberal spirit, and the edifice was nearly finished in a style magnificence suitable to the prosperity and enterprise of the province, when a disagreement took place between the Governor and the Legislature that reached such a fervor that at a period when a nominal sum would have made it a fitting mansion for the executives of Maryland, all work was stopped. . . ."

The dispute with the Legislature involved, among other things, the matter of supplying funds and rations to British troops operating in the colonies.

Building Given Away

Thus, with all "available" money exhausted, Governor Bladen left the building as it stood for the inspection of the Legislature—and in 1784 the Legislature gave it to St. John's. Subsequently it was completed and it now is known as McDowell Hall, serving as an administration building for the college.

A third mansion was established by Gov. Robert Eden, executive of Maryland from 1769 to 1776, by enlarging a house purchased from Edmund Jennings. It was described by David Ridgely in 1840 as follows:

"This edifice has a handsome court and garden, extending, with the exception of an intervening lot, to water's edge. From the portico looking to the garden a fine prospect regales the vision. The building consists of two stories and presents an extensive front; there are on the lower floor a large room on each side of the hall as you enter, and several smaller ones; the saloon, on the same floor, is nearly the length of the house.

Edifice Delightful

"On each side of the edifice are commodious kitchens, carriage house and stables, with spacious lots. Toward the water the building rises in the middle in a turreted shape. It stands detached from other structures and is altogether a delightful and suitable mansion for the Chief Magistrate of our State."

This house was purchased by the United States Naval Academy for use as a library in 1866. The act authorizing the sale also appropriated to Gov.

Thomas Swann and his Comptroller and Treasurer \$100,000 with which to erect a new mansion—the one Governor Nice is now undertaking to remodel.

It appears to have inherited part of the financial jinx of "Bladen's Folly" from the start, for Mr. Riley concludes:

"The lot and building of the new Executive Mansion cost \$69,296.28 over the appropriation which the Legislature was called upon to meet. The Legislature investigated the matter and made a detailed report of the expense, but a wise and friendly State printer neglected to bind the report among public documents of the session and this interesting statement is therefore lost to history and posterity."