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Oden Bowie, Senate secretary

Tobacco farmer and horse breeder was long-serving Maryland secretary of the Senate

By [Jacques Kelly](#), The Baltimore Sun

3:13 PM EDT, October 27, 2012

Oden Bowie, the former secretary of the Maryland Senate and grandson of Maryland Gov. Oden Bowie, died Oct. 23 at the Arbor at Baywoods in Annapolis of complications from a fall he suffered at his home last month. He was 97.

His daughter, Ambler Bowie Slabe, said he had spent his entire life at Fairview, the Bowie home in Prince George's County. She said he was the sixth generation of his family to reside there.

"He was respected and admired by everyone," said Maryland Senate President Mike Miller. "Oden grew up on a tobacco farm and kept his agrarian roots. He loved thoroughbred racing and the racetracks. He was a grand man who though born so long ago could and did adjust with the times."

Mr. Bowie began raising tobacco, beef cattle and crops and later opened his fields to the Fairwood Turf Farm.

"Daddy was actually a modern progressive and when he saw that turf and sod would make a profit, he converted his farm," said his daughter. "He also kept horses, and I think if you inspected that sod carefully, you'd find horseshoe prints."

In 1953, he joined the Maryland Senate's staff as an assistant journal clerk and rose to become secretary of the Senate in 1969. He served through the 1997 session and retired in 1998.

"Primarily we have to know where all the bills are located physically and what is their stage of passage," he said in a 1974 Sun story. "We have to keep this up to date and make sure the bills meet all constitutional requirements."

Barry Rascovar, a communications consultant and former Sun reporter, said that Mr. Bowie ran the clerical side of the Senate. There were often 2,000 bills filed and 1,000 got to the floor with amendments added, he said.

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"Toward the end of the session, there was a blizzard of activity," Mr. Rascovar said. "Oden Bowie had an important, complicated position. In it, he was almost invisible and meticulous. He was in constant communication with the Senate president."

Former state Sen. Frank Kelly, who represented Baltimore County from 1978 to 1990, said, "He reminded me of what old Maryland is all about. He was a decent, classy human being. He was fun to be around and stayed totally out of politics. He treated every member of the Senate with respect and affection. And he never injected his feelings into a debate."

Oden Bowie was the grandson of Gov. Oden Bowie, for whom both Bowie and Odenton are named. Governor Bowie was also among those who revived Maryland thoroughbred racing, built Pimlico and promoted the Preakness as president of the Maryland Jockey Club.

Mr. Bowie was a 1933 graduate of the old Donaldson School in Ilchester. Family members said that as a student there, he took over the wheel of the Donaldson school athletic team bus when the driver failed to show up and crashed the vehicle on the way to an important lacrosse game.

He earned a degree at the University of Maryland's School of Agriculture and belonged to the Sigma Nu fraternity. A lacrosse player, he played on national championship teams of 1936 and 1937.

His daughter said that he was honored last year as the school's oldest surviving varsity lacrosse player.

Mr. Bowie also worked as part of the office staff at Edelen Brothers Tobacco Warehouse in Upper Marlboro.

"He was a man of few words," said his nephew, O. Bowie Arnot of Stevenson. "When he did speak and act, he was focused and clever. He had a farmer's temperament and was careful how he invested his resources."

The Bowie family belonged to Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Bowie from the days when the area was known as Collington.

"As a young boy in the 1920s, he rode by horse to church," said his daughter. "The horses were tied in the old horse barn. Dressed in his Sunday best, he and the rest of the Bowie family would go into the church and sit in the pew where his grandfather sat years before."

Mr. Bowie served on the church vestry and was senior warden for 20 years. He also oversaw the cemetery.

He was a charter member of the board of directors of Collington Episcopal Life Care Community in Bowie. He was also a founder of the Prince George's Historical Society.

"Well into his 80s, he could be found on his tractor, growing, cutting and baling hay for his horses," his daughter said.

He was a member and past president of The Southern Maryland Society and the Vansville Farmers Club. He was a member of the South River Club.

His wife of 42 years, the former Laura Brainard, died in 1988.

Services will be at 10 a.m. Nov. 23 at Holy Trinity Church, 13106 Annapolis Road, Bowie.

In addition to his daughter, who lives at the Bowie home, survivors include another daughter, Maude Bowie Hays of Annapolis; and two grandsons.

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