

THE COLONIAL GOVERNMENT HOUSE
OF MARYLAND

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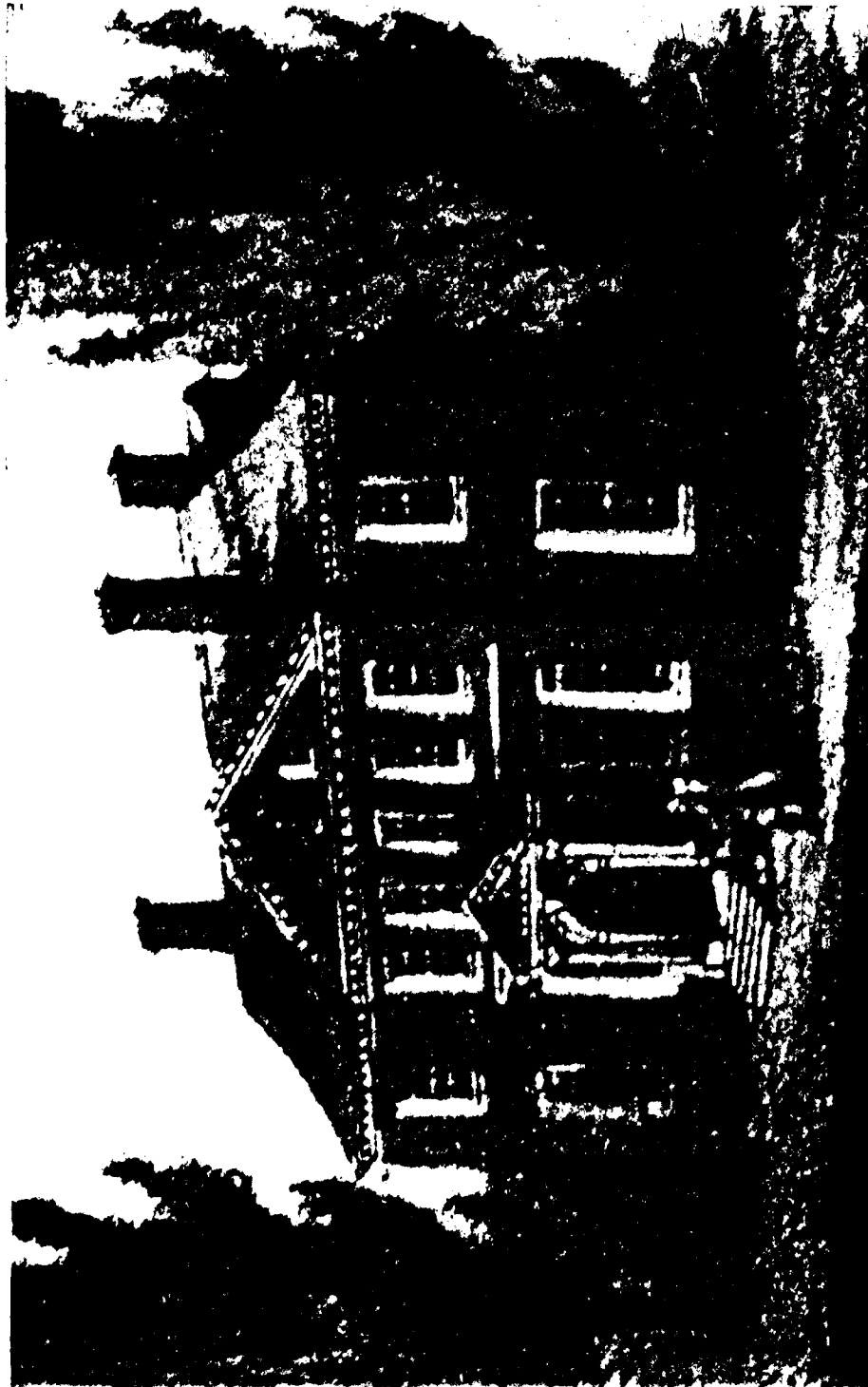
By

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"OLD GOVERNMENT HOUSE"
How the famous house appeared when occupied by the Colonial Governors and later the State Governors of Maryland.
This is the only early picture of this historic house.

THE COLONIAL GOVERNMENT HOUSE OF MARYLAND

By P. H. MAGRUDER, *Former Secretary, U. S. Naval Academy*

PERHAPS THERE are relatively few of this generation who know that there was on the present grounds of the United States Naval Academy in other days a magnificent Colonial mansion with spacious wings and gardens of a type now not often seen. This structure was situated on a large plot of ground bounded on the north by old Governor Street (now Buchanan Road), Hanover Street, and old Scott Street (now obliterated) which ran straight from Maryland Avenue near the present band stand easterly through the west terrace of Bancroft Hall to the harbor front. The exact position of the mansion was directly across Buchanan Road opposite the present Superintendent's House just in front of the driveway entrance and about 20 feet back from the

street. The rear entrance faced the harbor and overlooked a fine old English garden which ran to the water front, with box-wood hedges and imported shrubs and bushes.

This mansion was probably one of the finest and most picturesque of the early Colonial type. It was successively used as the Government House or residence of the Colonial Governors of Maryland and of the Governors of Maryland State from after the Revolution until 1868, when it was purchased by the government for the Naval Academy and was afterwards used until 1901 as the Superintendent's offices and the library of the Academy, for which it was splendidly adapted with its spacious rooms and high ceilings. Part of the old English garden was used for many years as





OLD GOVERNOR STREET, NOW BUCHANAN ROAD

The Governor's House is shown on the left and the old Chapel on the right. The site of the latter is now occupied by the Superintendent's House. Professors Willcox and Kearney and Admiral Porter's children are shown in the foreground.



the Superintendent's garden and the remainder was used for "Old Porter Row," the site of which is now entirely covered by the present Armory. The east end of the Armory is on the site of the extreme end of the old garden, which was in its day the scene of many brilliant parties and around which clustered many traditions of old Annapolis and the old Naval School.

After this mansion was acquired for the Naval Academy in 1868, the rambling wings, stables, the garden, and the old Fort Wall running along old Scott Street were demolished and cleared for the new construction then contemplated, which obliterated all vestige of these historic scenes, except the main part of the old mansion. This remained intact until the building of Bancroft Hall when it too was demolished, and the last remains of the once famous property, with its traditions, sentiment, and historic associations were eliminated. The old Government House and grounds

were conveyed to the United States by deed of August 17, 1866. The Superintendent of the Naval Academy proceeded to build as soon as possible upon the land, but there was some delay about the cession of the house. It was finally given up in 1869, and the wings and outbuildings, which were very extensive, were removed. The library of the Naval Academy was moved into the first-floor rooms of the house. The second floor was fitted up for the offices of the Superintendent, secretary, and clerks, which had been previously in a small building near the wall, northeast of the old middle gate. This building seen on all the old plans of the Academy was immediately removed.

The exact date of the erection of the old Government House is not known, but it was undoubtedly some time before 1750. According to the *Annals of Annapolis* (p. 236), by Ridgely, there seems to be no question about the fact that the house was built by the Honorable Edmund Jen-





SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE AND LIBRARY

The first addition, erected about 1879 to the original old Government House, is shown at the left.

nings, of Lincoln's Inn, secretary of the Province of Matyland and judge of the land office. He conveyed it to Governor Robert Eden for £1,000 by a deed dated February 20, 1769, which read in part:

All that messuage or capital mansion-house, with the garden yards, coach-houses, stables, and out-houses thereunto belonging. . . . as the same now is or was late in the tenure or occupancy of his excellency Horatio Sharpe, as tennant of the said Edmund Jennings.

It will be noted that the house was not the official property of the province, but was used by the governors as their residence. There was no such officially owned residence in the province as the present Executive Mansion. An attempt was made by Governor Bladen in 1744 to build an official government house. He employed as architect Simon Duff builder of the old Dulany House, afterwards the residence of the first of the superintendents of the Naval Academy and successive superintendents to 1883; but the plans were on too large and too grand a scale.

The house was partly built and then left to decay. After many years it became one of the halls (now McDowell Hall) of St. John's College. Governor Horatio Sharpe, the successor of Governor Bladen, rented the house owned by Jennings as a mansion worthy of the head of the province government and lived in it during his term of office from 1753 to 1769. The next year he was succeeded by Governor Eden who bought the house from Jennings and resided there for seven years. At the outbreak of the Revolution, Governor Eden took the Tory side and in 1776 sailed from Annapolis in the British frigate *Fowey* for England. This property was confiscated in consequence and thus came into possession of the State of Maryland. It was thereafter known as the "Government House" and was used as the official residence of all the state governors until the final clearing of the title in 1869 for the Naval Academy.

Letters of William Eddis, surveyor of the customs at Annapolis, from Annapolis

in 1769 describe the appearance of the house in October of that year:

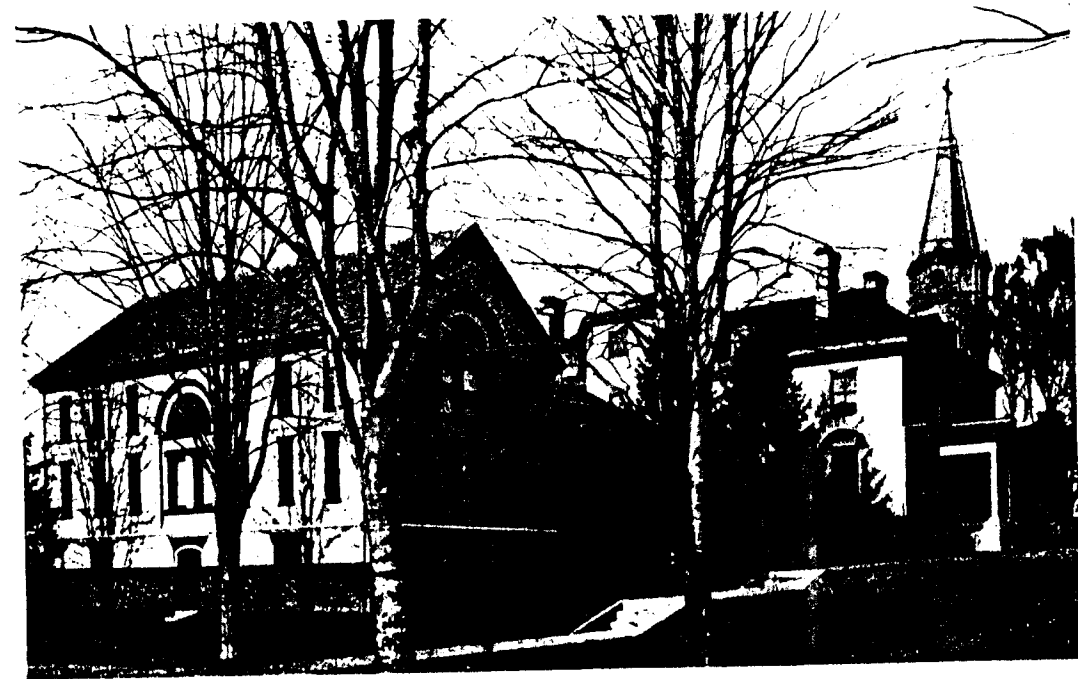
The governor's house is most beautifully situated, and when the necessary alterations are completed it will be a regular, convenient, and elegant building. The garden is not extensive, but it is disposed to the utmost advantage; the centre walk is terminated by a small green mount, close to which the Severn approaches. This elevation commands an extensive view of the bay and the adjacent country. The same objects appear to equal advantage from the saloon and many apartments in the house; and perhaps I may be justified in asserting that there are but few mansions in the most rich and cultivated parts of England which are adorned with such splendid and romantic scenery.

Ridgely's *Annals of Annapolis* (p. 236) says that Governor Eden "built the wings and the long room." This statement must, however, be taken with modifications. Eddis speaks of the saloon in 1769, and it is hardly likely that Governor Eden had already built it when he had been so short a time in possession. Moreover, this

long room or saloon was almost unmistakably an integral part of the house. It is quite possible that Governor Eden built the "tower" at the back of the house, which enlarged this room by adding to it a deep semi-circular recess.

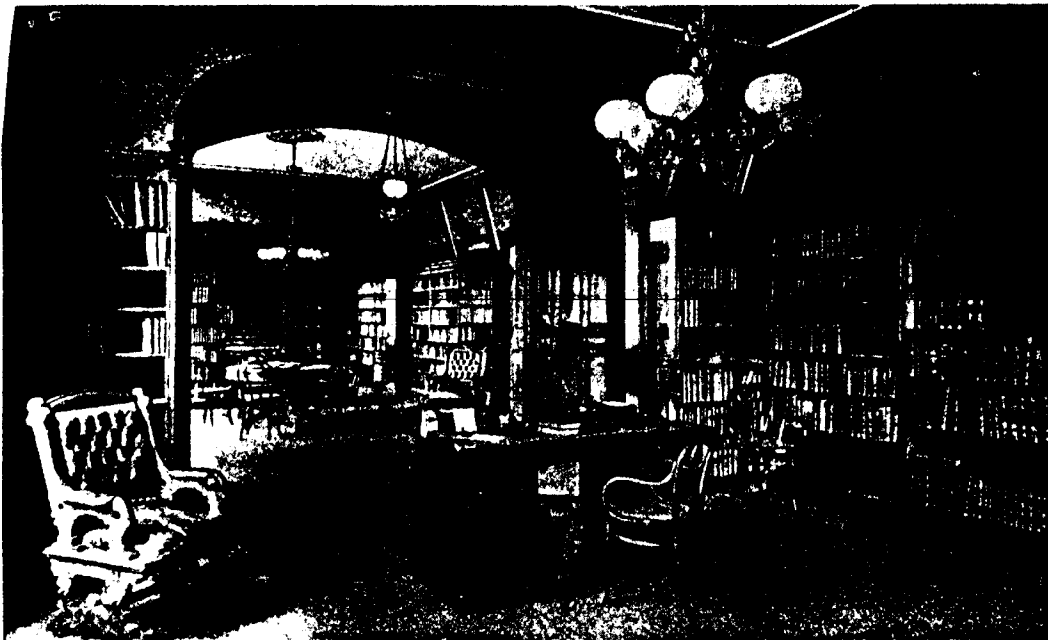
It is safe to assume that no house in America sheltered more prominent and distinguished men and women than this old mansion in its day, from early Colonial time down through the Revolution and the period of the Civil War until 1869. It was the Mecca for every distinguished visitor to Annapolis, both foreign and American, and history records the great popularity of its many entertainments and gay parties. General Washington frequently mentions in his diary visiting Governor Eden, spending the night and dining or having supper with the Governor. The following are quoted from his diary on his visits to Annapolis:

1772—September 6. Went to church with Govr. Eden in his Phaeton.



SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE AND LIBRARY

This view shows the 2-story addition erected about 1883. Both this addition and the first addition were demolished in 1901.



NAVAL ACADEMY LIBRARY IN OLD GOVERNMENT HOUSE

The room in the foreground was the drawing room of the old house and that across the hall was the reception room.

- 1773—April 13. Got to Annapolis. Dined and Lodged at the Governor's where I also Supped.
 April 15. Dined at Colo. Sharpe's and Returned to Annapolis. Supd and lodged at the Governor's.
 May 11. Breakfasted at Mr. Ings. Digge's. Dined at the Coffee Ho. in Annapolis and lodged at the Govr's.
 May 12. Dined, supped and lodged at the Govr's.
 September 26. I set out for Annapolis Races. Dined at Rollin's and got to Annapolis between five and six O'clock. Spent the Evening and lodged at the Governor's.
 September 27. Dined at the Govr's. and went to Play in the Evening.
 September 28. Again Dined at the Govr's. and went to the Play and Ball in the Evening.

After the surrender at Yorktown in 1781, Washington again visited Annapolis en route to Philadelphia. The *Maryland Gazette* gives the following account:

The General's arrival [at Annapolis] was announced by the discharge of cannon and he was accompanied to his Excellency the Governor [Thomas Sim Lee]. . . .

The evening was spent at the Governor's elegant and hospitable board with festive joy enlivened by good humor, wit, and beauty.

In 1784 General Washington again visited Annapolis accompanied by General Lafayette prior to the latter's departure for France. Both of these distinguished Generals were entertained by the Governor in this famous mansion. On the occasion of Washington's last visit to Annapolis in March, 1791, his diary records: "Saturday 26. Dined at the Governor's and went to the Assembly in Evening where I stayed till half past ten o'clock."

On his recorded eighteen visits to Annapolis, Washington on nearly every occasion speaks of being entertained by the Governor. When General Lafayette visited Annapolis again in 1824 with his son,

George Washington Lafayette, this house entertained these distinguished visitors.

In November, 1852, just prior to the sailing direct from Annapolis of Commodore Perry's celebrated expedition to Japan, President Fillmore, the Secretary of the Navy, Commodore Perry, and his officers were entertained there by the Governor. The eminent English diplomat, Lord Francis Napier, while Ambassador from Great Britain to Washington, 1857-59, visited Annapolis and the Naval Academy in 1858 and was entertained by the then Governor, Thomas H. Hicks.

The above are only a few of the many distinguished visitors this famous old Government House shared in entertaining. Francis Scott Key frequently visited and was entertained in this famous house, which was only a short distance from the home of his brother-in-law, Judge Nicholson, who fitted the inspiring words of the "Star Spangled Banner" to a popular tune of the day, and which house sheltered the original manuscript of the final and complete draft of this anthem in the handwriting of Key, from 1817 to 1845. An appropriate marker of granite and bronze on the grounds of the Naval Academy, near the band stand, marks the spot where this old house formerly stood. By some strange coincidence of fate this National Anthem is played each morning on the same historic location close to the Stars and Stripes waving from the masthead only a few feet away. These facts are presented here to show the historic associations which surrounded the old Govern-

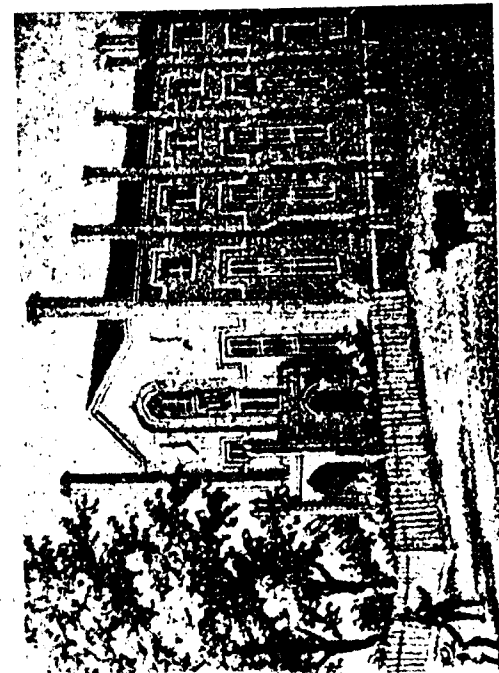
ment House and its intimate relations and contact with the present site of the Naval Academy.

After the government finally acquired for \$25,000 this property of five acres, more or less, from the State of Maryland in 1869, the only change that was made in the building was the removal of the wings. The main building was permitted to remain intact, with only minor improvements to both the exterior and interior, and remained as originally designed until 1880 when a one-story wing was added to the central rear for the enlargement of the library. A few years later a two-story addition was added to the extreme end of this wing in the shape of a T. In this form the entire building remained until 1901, when all the new constructions were demolished. The additions were first removed, but the main house remained for a year or so in its partly original form as of Colonial days, the intention being to restore it in keeping with its original design. In the early days of the construction of the new Naval Academy, it was planned to preserve this fine old house for its architectural value and Colonial associations for the future Superintendent's House. Plans and specifications were prepared with this in view and the work was actually started. The architect discouraged it as it interfered with his general plan; and this fine old mansion was finally condemned. The preservation of this grand structure would have been a historical connecting link between the Colonial period and the present day and generations yet to come.

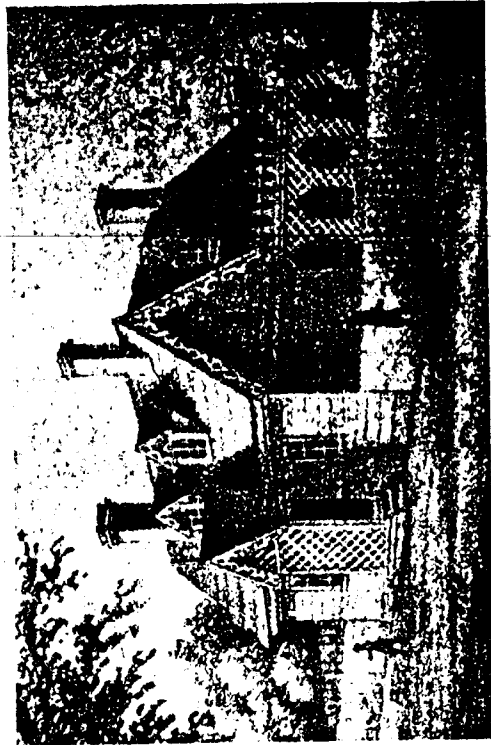




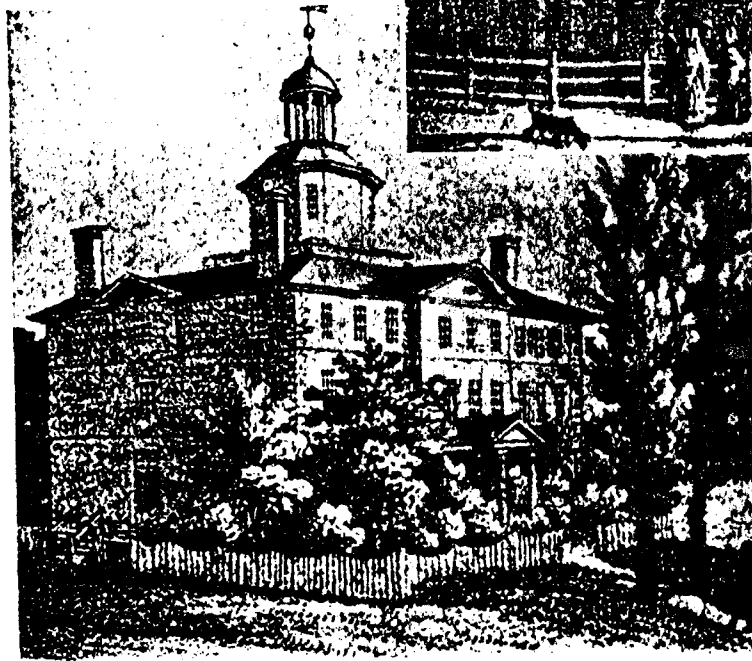
ANNAPOLIS, 1845



HUMPHREY HALL, ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, 1845



OLD SHAKESPEARE HOUSE, 1845
(Demolished about 1850)



MCDOWELL HALL,
ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, 1845



OLD ST. ANNE'S CHURCH
1845



OLD CITY HOTEL, 1845