

Stately it may be

Mrs. Hughes considers mansion just a big house

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Annapolis Bureau of The Sun

Annapolis—Call it what you like—the Governor's Mansion, the Executive Mansion, Government House. In one location or another at various points in history, the official residence of the Governor of Maryland has been called all these names and several more.

The wise course these days, if you care about staying on the good side of Patricia Donoho Hughes, the resilient first lady, would be to call it Government House. She thinks "mansion" is a little "lacky."

In fact, the Governor's wife, who moved into the imposing 34-room residence a couple of weeks ago, asks, "Why pretend that it's something that it isn't?"

In construction and in furnishings, Mrs. Hughes asserts that the house "is an inappropriate mish-mash. . . . It isn't even mentioned in the Historic Annapolis list of buildings. It really shouldn't be."

"There must have been some thought to make it conform more to what was in the rest of Annapolis," she says. "But, in a

sense, what you have is a bastardization."

The first lady acknowledges that she hasn't done much research, but she would seem to know whereof she speaks.

Government House, or whatever one wants to call it, may look to the untrained eye like one of Annapolis's more venerable historic structures. But it isn't.

The building is the descendant, once or twice removed, of several attempts to create a suitable official home for Maryland's governors in the last 230 years. At the current location across the street from the really historic State House, the Governor's house was erected in the 1860's as a three-story Victorian mansion.

But in 1935, Governor Harry W. Nice decided he wanted a house that would blend with the rest of the most important architecture in the state capital. So during the next several years, the Victorian building was surrounded by the shell of a five-point Georgian country home with

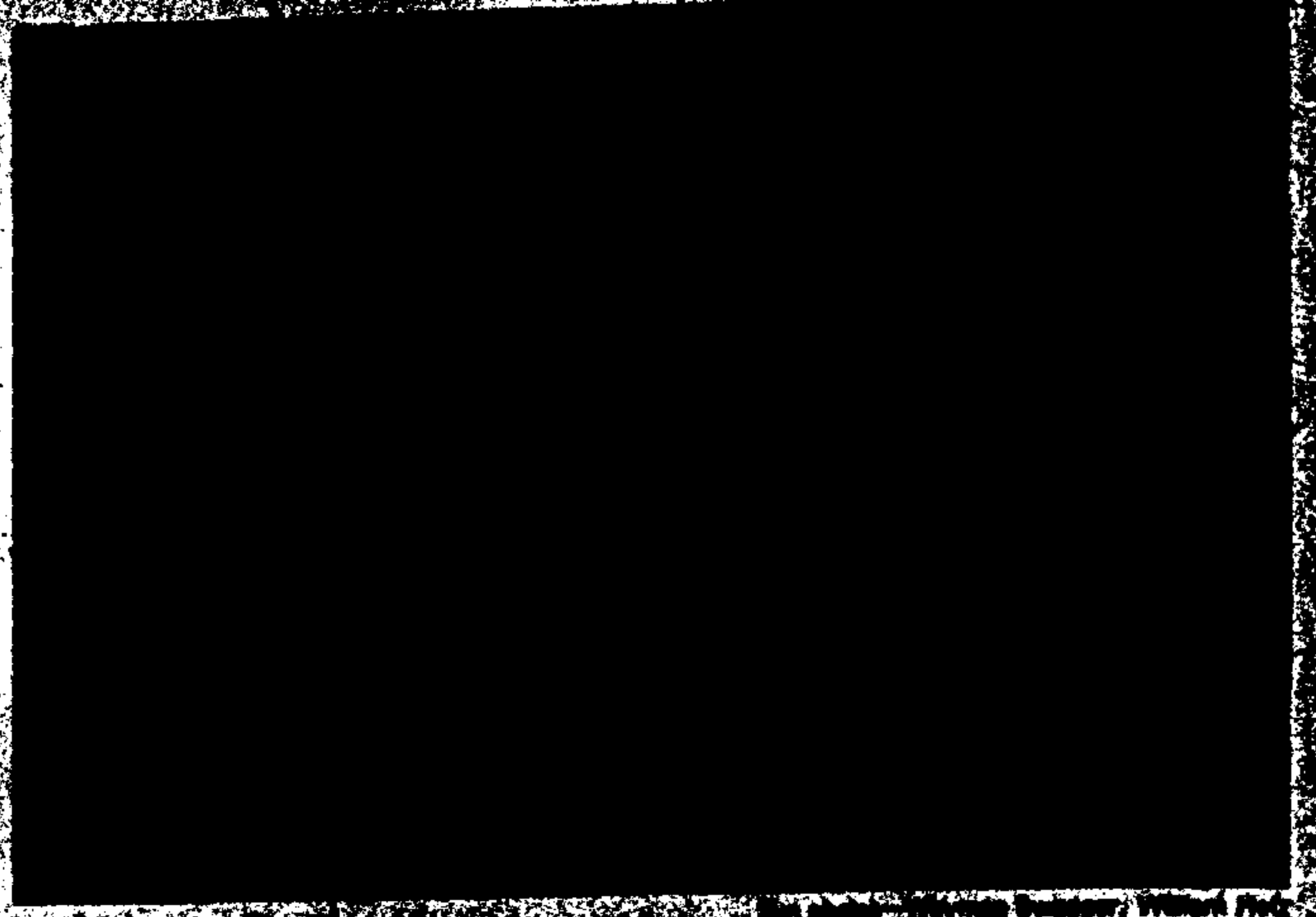
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Patricia Hughes considers Government House "an inappropriate mish-mash."



Sun photo—Weyman Swager
Elegantly carpeted staircase leads from main hall to second-floor rooms.



Sunlight bathes a modestly decorated parlor (left) in Government House, which seems to conform to surrounding architecture WDCI film from the State House (right).

To Mrs. Hughes, the mansion is just a house

MANSION, from B1

two new side wings and adjoining corridors.

In its present form, as a matter of fact, Government House actually is younger than Mrs. Hughes, who is 48.

Maryland first got into the Governor's mansion building business back in 1733 when the colonial legislature decided to give Gov. Samuel Ogle 2,000 pounds to buy some land and build a house on it.

Somehow, Ogle managed to spend much of the appropriation by the time he completed his second term in 1742, but there was no land and no house to show for it.

What he was supposed to have been called "the Governor's Mansion," he never.

In 1744, Gov. Thomas Bladen was given some more money and he bought about 4 acres of land on what is now the property of St. John's College and started to build a mansion.

But work came to a halt while he bickered with the legislature over getting more money for construction—probably one of the first legislative debates over the cost overruns that still plague Maryland's construction programs.

About 1747, Thomas Jefferson was passing through Annapolis and noticed, "Governor's house, the hull of which after being nearly finished, have suffered to go to ruin."

Ultimately dubbed "Bladen's folly," the foundation and the land were transferred to St. John's College in 1784. On that site now stands McDowell Hall, which was for many years the main building of the college, but no governor of Maryland ever lived there.

In the meantime, however, Gov. Horatio Sharpe had leased a large house looking out on the Severn River. His successor, Robert Eden, the last colonial governor, bought the place, only to have it confiscated in the Revolution.

From then until 1846 this house, known as the Jennings House after its original owner, Edmund Jennings, was the official residence of the governors of Maryland.

In 1846 the state gave the Jennings house to the United States government to become part of the Naval Academy as an inducement to return the academy to Annapolis after the Civil War. The academy had been removed from Annapolis to Newport, R.I., during the war because the federal government didn't feel that the school was safe among Maryland's Southern sympathizers.

The site of the present Governor's residence was purchased in 1866, and the Victorian building was completed between 1868 and 1870. It remained in that form until 1935 when Governor Nice decided to

transform it into a Georgian spectacle.

One of the results of the transformation is that only one of the dozen fireplaces in the house can be used. For although great chimneys arise from the present house, there is no connection between them and any of the fireplaces in the old Victorian structure.

The only fireplace in the house that works is in the Governor's ground floor private office. But Mrs. Hughes already plans to move her husband out of there to the second floor and convert the downstairs room into a den.

Elsewhere in the house, huge rooms are furnished with valuable antiques standing next to relatively inexpensive reproduction pieces, valuable paintings next to practically worthless portraits of previous first ladies.

A portrait of Marvia Mandel's first wife, Barbara, hangs in a room off the entrance to the house. It is as if she had had the last word, for there is no portrait there of Jeanne Mandel, the former Governor's present wife, who shared the house with him in his last term.

In several bedrooms on the third floor of the house, there is a collection of undistinguished furniture. In one room, old drapes, broken chairs and tables are jammed into a corner facing some giant stuffed toy animals whose original ownership Mrs. Hughes says she has not determined.

"When I walked in here and looked at the mixture and saw some of the nice things and some of the not-so-nice things," Mrs. Hughes said, "I decided to do something about it."

So, one of her major tasks as first lady will be to work with the Maryland Historical Society in replacing some of the relatively worthless furnishings in the house with the old and new works of Maryland artists and craftsmen, making the residence more of a showcase of Maryland's culture.

"Annapolis has many fine antique period houses, but this is not one," she said. "So we'll use it in an appropriate way for Marylanders—whose house it is—to enjoy and learn about their culture and history and thus find an identification with it."

Frustrating as the place may be from the viewpoint of the connoisseur, the Governor's house is none the less a pleasant place to live in many ways. It has a full-time staff of about 11, including 3 Filipino cooks, so Mrs. Hughes doesn't have to worry about such mundane things as ordering groceries, replacing fuses, vacuuming the scores of huge oriental rugs, polishing the furniture or the silver.

When the delegation from the historical society made its initial tour of the house last week, they noticed a very valuable silver tea service and promptly urged the first lady to put it away and not use it.

She asked one of the servants in the house "what they did with the silver service."

"Mostly polish it, ma'am," came the response.

But there are disadvantages to living in the Governor's house as well, as Mrs. Hughes and her predecessors have learned. In order to get into the house, everyone has to pass through an office that is manned around the clock by the State Police bodyguards.

Security cameras peek out of the windows and to avoid setting off alarms the Hughes family must call down to the security detail before opening or closing windows in the house.

"That's just plain funny," she said, "to have to call down and say that I'm going to close a window."

Some of her predecessors were less amused.

Mr. Mandel continually complained that living in the mansion was "like living in a goldfish bowl."

Blair Lee 3d, who lived in the house for more than a year as acting governor while Mr. Mandel was suspended, recalled that it was "something like living in the Metropolitan Museum."

One of Mr. Lee's more memorable comments while he was living in the house had to do with the inordinate efficiency of the household staff.

"Now I don't know about you guys, but I'm accustomed to wearing the same pair of pajamas for four or five nights running," he once told reporters. "I don't think I'm any more slovenly than anybody else in the world, but over there, you don't take them off your back before somebody snatches them and throws them in the laundry."

"Each evening, when I've gone to bed, I've gone around looking for my pajamas on hooks and I can't even find the hooks."

"You're pampered and spoiled and treated very handsomely by the staff," Mr. Lee recalled last week. "But if you go out the side door just to look at the garden, it sets off a buzzer and some state trooper comes screaming around the corner."

Mr. Lee remembered that on his last day in the house he was clearing out his desk when a couple of troopers came running into the room breathlessly demanding to know what was wrong.

"My knee had brushed against a buzzer under the desk," he said. "They told me it was the panic button."

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