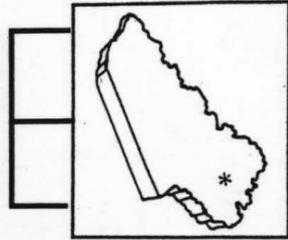


Rippon still attractive, even after 260 years

By DEBORAH HENLEY
of the Potomac News



Rippon
Population 1,100

The rustle of honey locust trees and the rhythmic lapping of Neabsco Creek have lured a goodly number of transplants to Rippon over the past 260 years.

The original Rippon transplant was a young Englishman by the name of Richard Blackburn.

Blackburn sailed from England to Virginia in 1725 and brought a little bit of home with him to the colonies, as his fifth great-grandson and namesake, Adm. Richard Blackburn Black, recounts.

Blackburn staked out a home place on a high knoll overlooking Neabsco Creek, the Potomac River and the meadows and woodland stretching between. There he built Rippon Lodge. He named his family's colonial home after the one he left behind — the cathedral town of Ripon in Yorkshire, England.

The date 1725 is inscribed in the oak timbers that have supported the lodge for more than two and a half centuries. Blackburn's home has been preserved through the years by descendants, and today the 260-year-old Rippon Lodge is listed on the National Register of Historic Properties.

Blackburn's descendant and namesake, Black, 83, is the current owner and a modern-day transplant of the lodge. Black is a retired rear admiral in the Naval Reserve.

He was living and working in Washington in the 1950s when he gave in to the temptation of living in his family's former home. He said he was lured by "just the homing instinct, I guess." That instinct must have had a strong grip to hold onto a former North Dakota native and Antarctic explorer. Black participated in five expeditions to Antarctica, including Adm. Richard Byrd's second expedition from 1933 to 1935.

Black enjoys imagining the beauty that drew his forefather to build a home and begin a new life where the Neabsco and Potomac meet.

In an article written for the Historical Society of Fairfax County in 1965, Black penned these thoughts:

"One can imagine Blackburn, the young colonist, arriving in the new land with his household goods and possibly some servants and livestock, quickly riding out to the beautiful site overlooking the mouth of Neabsco Creek, the Potomac, and the distant Maryland shore and exulting in the knowledge that this land, made available to him by payment of 'quit-rents' to Lord Fairfax, was to be his to

work and develop into the great plantation it would some day be."

Blackburn faithfully recounts the history he has inherited from family members and researched on his own in an effort to learn of the Blackburns' beginnings in America.

George Washington not only slept at Rippon Lodge, but two Blackburn girls married into his famous colonial family, Black said.

Julia Anne Blackburn married George Washington's nephew, Bushrod Washington, in 1785. Bushrod Washington's nephew, John Augustine Washington, married Jane Charlotte Blackburn.

"We have two framed newspaper clippings about how [John and Jane] courted one another in the garden of Rippon and eventually married there," Black said.

A prominent Washington attorney, Wade Hampton Ellis, owned the lodge before Black. Ellis also was a descendant of the Blackburns of Yorkshire, England. He and his wife lived in Washington, D.C., but kept the lodge as a summer and weekend home.

Ellis is responsible for bringing another Rippon Lodge namesake to the community.

Ellis Blackburn Hawkins, 56, is a native of Prince William County and a former School Board member. Hawkins grew up on the Rippon plantation during the 1940s and completes the story of the lodge's history following the turn of the century. He can recount Rippon Lodge's restoration by the Ellises and the eventual breakup of the original 1,000-acre plantation.

In 1929, his father, Edward F. Hawkins, was hired by Ellis as the "combination overseer, manager, sharecropper and farmer" of Rippon Lodge. "These were the Depression years, and my father was looking for some work," Hawkins said.

The Hawkins family received steady work and lived in the four-room, stone and clapboard tenant house near the lodge. To show their gratitude, the family adopted their employer's surname and the Blackburn name for their son.

Although much of the original 1,000 acres of the plantation had been divided and sold in the intervening years, Ellis was able to buy most of it back in the mid-1920s.

Tracing its original boundaries, the plantation stretched from the current boundaries of Rippon Elementary School to Neabsco Creek, around the Mooney Treatment Plant on across U.S. 1 to Smoketown Road and Potomac Hospital.

Up until 10 years ago, "there was no housing at all, strictly woodland on the Rippon Lodge site," Hawkins said.

"When Mr. Ellis purchased the place, his goal was to restore it as close as possible to what it had originally been," Hawkins said.

With the help of the Hawkins family and a Dumfries builder, he restored the 18th century lodge to its former prominence and beauty, Hawkins said.

Ellis largely remained true to

the lodge's historical architecture, Hawkins said. Three chimneys still framed the white, pine clapboard siding of the lodge. Ellis did make three departures from the original design: a colonnaded veranda, several dormer windows and two wings were added to the lodge.

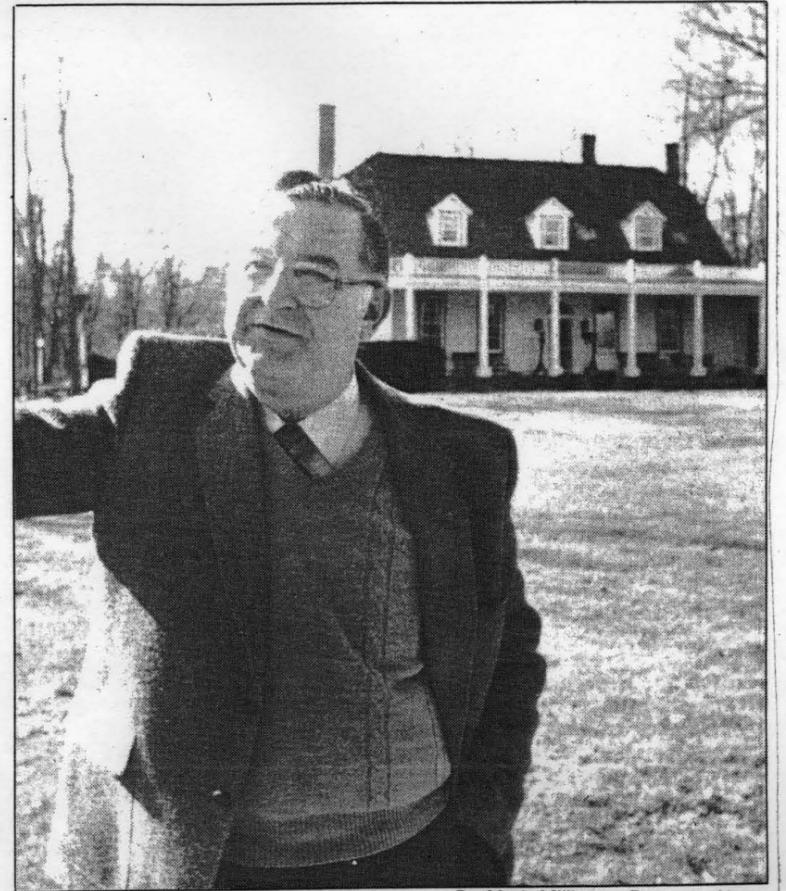
Rippon Lodge includes one decidedly English detail. The A-frame roof drops in a 45-degree angle as the roofline approaches the chimneys. This style is found in many 18th century English homes.

Inside, Ellis refinished all seven rooms which had become "somewhat dilapidated" through the years, Hawkins said. The floors are the original, random-width pine planks downed and sawn from the surrounding woods. They are notched on the underside to fit over the oak timbers and fastened into place with wooden pegs.

A lawyer for President Hoover's attorney general, Ellis hosted grand lawn parties for Washington society at the restored lodge, Hawkins remembers. As a young boy, Hawkins marveled at all the chrome-lined limousines parked on the lawn. His family still traveled by horse and buggy.

The lodge had electricity about 10 years before any neighboring

— See RIPPON, Page A9



By Mark Milligan—Potomac News
Ellis Hawkins remembers many an enjoyable moment during his youth living in the Rippon Lodge, background.



This former adventurer apparently has his feet planted solidly on the ground though. Black will admit that strange creaks and groans in the old lodge are heard with some frequency, but "since I don't believe in ghosts, it's hard to convince me."

If one believes in such things, Black says as a preamble, two fellows who may have something to do with ghostly manifestations were duellists who bled to death on the drawing room floor.

Richard Blackburn's son-in-law, John Bayliss, was mortally wounded in the Quantico Churchyard in a 1785 duel, Black said. Friends took Bayliss, Black's third great-grandfather, by carriage to Rippon Lodge where he died after a few hours.

"Story goes, his ghost remained there at the old house," Hawkins recounted. Agreeing in principle with Black, however, Hawkins said: "I can't say that I've ever heard it."

A second duel took place 40 years later, across the Potomac on the Maryland shore. Bernard Hoon

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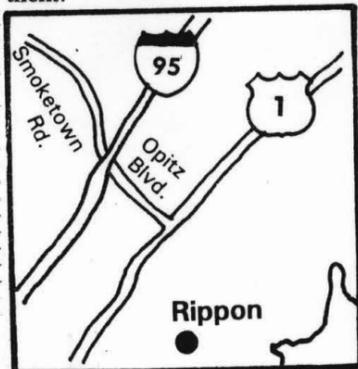
homes, thanks to Ellis' stature in the Washington area and a relative who worked for a fledgling, local power company, Hawkins said.

The lawn parties were held less frequently after Franklin Roosevelt took office. "Mr. Ellis, he being a Republican and the Democrats being in power, was in the Washington background where society was concerned," Hawkins said.

Ellis and Rippon Lodge are remembered fondly by old-timers in the community for helping neighbors through those Depression years, Hawkins said. Edward Hawkins was responsible for the grounds at Rippon, and he gave as much work as possible to unemployed men in the community.

"There were a number of needy families in the area and my father and his men also would cut wood [on the grounds] and give it to them in the winters," he said.

Both Black and Hawkins have heard about the ghosts said to reside at Rippon Lodge. Black is fond of telling people: "We don't have a ghost, we have thousands of them."



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A second duel took place 44 years later, across the Potomac on the Maryland shore. Bernard Hooe

and William Kemp exchanged fire, Hooe was wounded and taken by boat to Rippon Lodge, Black said.

The stately home today forms a hub for Prince William County's fifth residential planned community — Rippon Landing. The development, built along Neabsco Creek, takes its name from the famous lodge and plantation.

About 500 townhouses and condominiums have been built at Rippon Landing since 1975 and, eventually, the project is expected to close with about 2,200 of these homes.

Through Rippon Lodge, these new transplants to the community keep a tie to a grand Rippon history.

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