

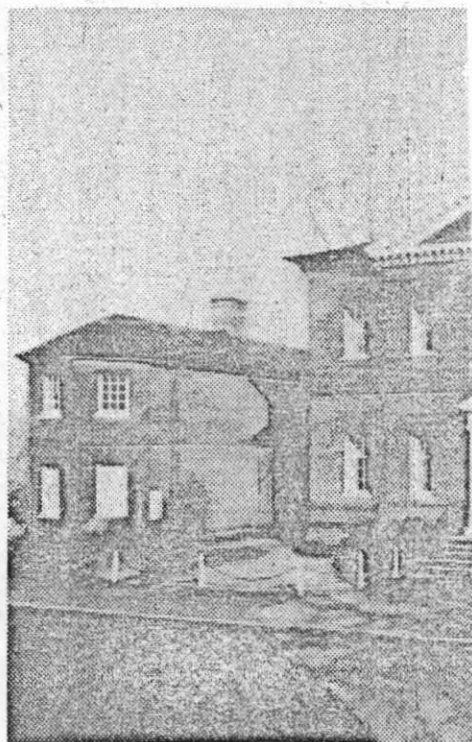
Va - Bruce Wm. Buckland

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THE SUN, BALTIMORE, SUNDAY

Annapolis House Was Colonial Architect's 'Masterpiece'

By JOHN DORSEY



Last Tuesday the Hammond-Harwood of a lecture by Robert Smith, right, on

It was William Buckland day at the Hammond-Harwood house in Annapolis last Tuesday. The occasion honored the designer of the house who is considered by some to be the foremost colonial architect and interior designer. The Hammond-Harwood House Association, which, with Gunston Hall in Virginia, is republishing the Rosamund Bierne-John Henry Scarff book "William Buckland," was to be addressed by Dr. Robert Smith, professor of art history at the University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Smith, who has made a study with slides, of Buckland's work in Maryland and Virginia, was met by the group, which included architect Bryden Hyde and Court of Appeals chief judge Hall Hammond.

A balding, middle-aged, smiling man, Dr. Smith was just beginning a day of meeting, talking, eating and hurrying, culminating in a second lecture in Baltimore that evening at Hampton House before the Society for the Preservation of Maryland Antiquities. Assured that all was in readiness, Dr. Smith began his lecture with a tour of the life and works of William Buckland.

Buckland was born in Oxford, England, in 1734, and at 14 was apprenticed to his uncle James, a "joiner" or carpenter who lived in London.

In 1755 he came to America as an indentured servant to make improvements to Gunston Hall, the Virginia home of George Mason. "He had three years in which to make these improvements and develop his talents," said Dr. Smith, "and in those years he proved himself a leader in taste as well as a craftsman. The two porches he added, one Doric and one with Gothic elements, show that he had an incomparable sense of proportion and an extraordinary feeling for line.

"The interior bears that out. The elliptical arches in the entrance hall, the screen at the head of the stairs with its three arches, and the buffets, cornice and other details show that he knew the current London fashion. He must have been able to introduce expensive innovations without giving the impression that he was doing so. He is responsible for the earliest known manifestations of rococo in America."

In Annapolis Buckland is known to have worked at the Chase-Lloyd house, the Upton Scott house, the John Ridout house, the Paca house, the Brice house as well as the Hammond-Harwood house, which Dr. Smith called "Buckland's masterpiece." He explained that the last was all Buckland's—the overall design, the interior layout and decoration, every-

thing. The entrance, according to Dr. Smith, is "among the finest, and perhaps the finest, in the country." There are intricate, delicate carvings on cornices, mantles and doors. Dr. Smith praised the proportions of the rooms and the subordination of the staircase, contending that "we don't live on the stairs."

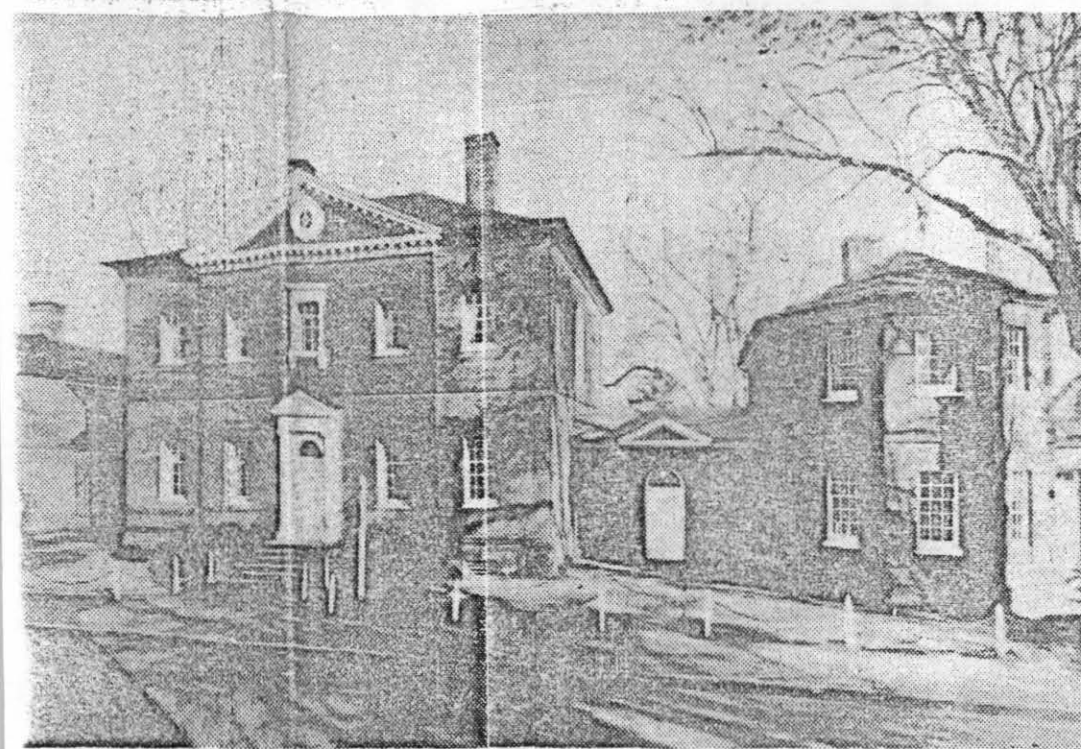
Foreshortened Career

Unfortunately, Buckland's masterpiece was his last accomplishment. At the height of his powers he died suddenly, probably on the Eastern Shore, late in 1774. He was only 40. "His achievement was that of the lifetimes of many men," Dr. Smith concluded, "and we can only speculate on what he might have done."

After the applause, the ladies fixed lunch while the few men headed for the improvised bar. After being photographed with Mrs. Hall Hammond, president of the association and with Mr. Hyde, and taking a few minutes for lunch, Dr. Smith was carried off by Mrs. A. C. J. Sabalot, executive secretary of the house, to go over some details of the structure. As the two wandered through the rooms their conversation was animated by occasional disagreements, but beneath lay a mutual love of the place.

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Dr. Smith described Buckland as the greatest architect and designer in the colonies, called the Hammond-Harwood house his masterpiece.

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the ladies fixed their eyes on the portrait of William Buckland, president of the Annapolis Historical Society, and with Mr. Sabalot, minutes for lunch, off by Mrs. A. C. secretary of the society. The details of the tour wandered through the mansion were animated by Mrs. Sabalot, pointing

ing to two bird figures carved in the mantel in the dining room, "you called these eagles when you showed the slide, but we have been calling them phoenixes. Look at that tuft on the head. They can't be eagles."

"Well, perhaps not," Dr. Smith replied. "I stand corrected. But no, look at the similar figures over the doors, how martial they look. They must be eagles, in spite of the tufts. Let us compromise and say it is a fusion of the Chinese phoenix and the Roman eagle. But the Roman eagle, not the federal eagle. It was too early for that."

Mrs. Sabalot seemed satisfied, and Mr. Smith chuckled as if to indicate that now that he had said it, it was law.

"Look at those birds on those wall brackets," noted the professor. "They look like ducks."

"And these in the inlay on this table," Mrs. Sabalot pointed out, "do you suppose they're doves, with the olive branch?"

"Why you have a whole aviary here," said Dr. Smith. "I'm delighted with this ornithological conversation. What are those chairs?"

"They're English." "Oh, I don't think so. Are you sure?" the professor asked.

"Well, according to the furnishings committee..."

"I'm not so sure." "In here," said Mrs. Sabalot, drawing Dr. Smith into the ladies' parlor, "you notice the restrained use of ornament, entirely appropriate to the purpose of the room."

Appropriately Sparse

"I am glad to see that you haven't cluttered the rooms with too much furniture. Eighteenth Century prints show that the rooms were sparsely furnished. You've done an excellent job. What a magnificent rococo teapot! That's what I want to steal."

They proceeded to the library, where Mrs. Sabalot pointed out a Philadelphia chair, a Baltimore chair and a New York chair. "The State Department is trying to get the Philadelphia chair, because it goes with a set that they have, but I don't know that we should let them have it."

"Oh, you mustn't. No one will ever see it at the State Department, and besides, here the three chairs offer a good comparison."

"Here is our Martha Washington mirror," Mrs. Sabalot said.

"Why do you call it Martha Washington?"

"Well, you notice the peanuts."

"Oh, I don't think they're peanuts. No, they look more like gourd shapes to me."

"I used to think," said Dr. Smith, now in the ballroom upstairs, "that the frieze in this room was Buckland anticipating the Adam style in this country by at least a decade. But I didn't mention that today, because it's just possible that the frieze was added later."

"Have you regarded," asked Mrs. Sabalot, heading for the front door, "the roses over the door. The design is not symmetrical, as you see."

Overwhelmed by the richness of the house, a bystander said it had always been his impression that colonial design was simpler than the English it copied, but that Buckland seemed to have elaborated on the designs he borrowed.

"No, not at all," countered Dr. Smith. "Buckland came closer than anyone else in America to the English, but even this is paltry compared to what was being done there. I like it better, though. It is not hard to be grandiose, if you have the money. But to create beauty out of comparative simplicity is a finer accomplishment. Yes, you have here one of the great national treasures."

Mrs. Sabalot beamed, and before the beam had faded Dr. Smith had kissed her hand and departed.