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BRICK ENTRANCE PILLARS flank the dirt roadway leading off Route One to Rippon Lodge. The white frame home was built in 1725 by Colonel Richard Blackburn of Ripon, in Yorkshire, England. A descendant of the original owner, Admiral Richard Blackburn Black now owns the property.



RIPPON LODGE—This frame structure was built by Colonel Richard Blackburn in 1725 and is said to be the oldest home of note in Prince William County. The veranda commands a sweeping view of Neabsco

Creek and the more distant Potomac River. Rippon Lodge is now owned by Admiral and Mrs. Richard Blackburn Black.

Rippon Is Steeped in History and Tradition

Rippon Lodge, steeped in history and tradition, typifies the charm and grace of early Prince William County.

Between brick entrance pillars, topped with the traditional pineapple finials denoting welcome, a winding dirt road leads through dense woods up to the home. The charming white frame house stands in the midst of a rolling lawn overlooking Neabsco Creek and the more distant Potomac River.

Rippon Lodge was designed and built in 1725 by Colonel Richard Blackburn of Ripon, in Yorkshire, England. The one and a half storied house is sheltered beneath a domered gable roof, clipped at the ends and bolstered between end chimneys of brick. Across the front runs a veranda with six slender white columns between low, flat-roofed additions, which extend on either side of the veranda. A balustrade around the parapet ties together the wings and veranda.

Blackburn's architectural skills are said, by some, to have extended beyond the designing and building of Rippon lodge. One source attributes the design of Mount Vernon to him: "He planned not only his own house but Mount Vernon." Another source calls him "architect or masterbuilder of the oldest part of Mount Vernon and of the first Falls Church."

Thomas Tileston Waterman, author of "Mansions of Virginia" says, however, that there is no recorded architect of Mount Vernon. He goes further:

"There is a tradition that Richard Blackburn of Rippon Lodge also built Mount Vernon, but in view of its simplicity it can hardly be said that he was in any sense an architect. If he had anything to do with the construction it was probably equivalent to the good offices of George William Fairfax in overseeing the alterations in 1758."

Whether or not Colonel Richard Blackburn was the architect of Mount Vernon, he was, however, prominent in his own right, having represented Prince William County in the House of Burgesses and having served as an original trustee of Dumfries.

The Blackburn connection with Mount Vernon is firmly established in that two daughters of Rippon Lodge became mistresses of Mount Vernon, Julia Anne Blackburn, who married Justice Bushrod Washington, and Jane Charlotte Blackburn, daughter of Richard Scott Blackburn and wife of John Augustine Washington.

The son of Richard Blackburn, Colonel Thomas Blackburn, was also a man of distinction. It was he who, with Henry Lee, represented Prince William County in the second Virginia Convention which convened on March 20, 1775 and heard Patrick Henry give his "Liberty or Death" speech.

Thomas Blackburn was also designated "chief mourner" and leader of George Washington's funeral procession.

The house itself is unexpectedly roomy inside. The lower floors heavy with age, slope toward the center of the building. High ceilings and period panelling mark the rooms. Upstairs in the airy attic is "Washington's Room" where it is said the first president often stayed on journeys to Fredericksburg and Richmond.

The home has experienced touches of tragedy in its years and is even said by some sources to have a resident ghost. One mistress of Rippon Lodge was the "Rattlesnake" Graham family, so known for their heated Irish tempers. It is said that she, in a fit of impatience one day, brushed aside a little slave child who fell to the floor hitting its head. The child died from its injuries and there are those who say the child's ghost haunts Rippon Lodge.

A duel which occurred in 1809 has been connected to Rippon Lodge. The duel was fought between William Kemp and Bernard Hooe and followed an altercation in which Hooe is said to have used "abusive language" to which Kemp retorted. Hooe struck his neighbor with a whip but Kemp got the better of Hooe in a struggle that followed. The ensuing duel was fought on the Maryland shore across the Potomac from Rippon and it was to this home that the wounded man was carried.

One writer describes the tragedy thusly: "The well-known duel between Bernard Hooe and William Kemp that once took place near Rippon Lodge, the fact that its floor was stained with the blood of the former, mortally wounded—all this gives a touch of tragic interest."

To the side of the house a path leads through formal gardens to the woods beyond. The twisted and brush-flanked path winds down a hill through

the woods to the family cemetery where the remains of Colonel Richard Blackburn are buried beneath a table-top grave stone whose markings have been blurred by the passing of time. More than ten other graves are located in the plot, most marked by field stone markers.

In more recent years Rippon Lodge fell into a state of neglect and disrepair until it was subsequently acquired, repaired and restored by Wade Ellis, a collateral descendant of the original Blackburns.

The current owners of Rippon Lodge are Admiral and Mrs. Richard Blackburn Black. Admiral Balck, as his

name would indicate, is a direct descendant of the original squire of Rippon.

The Blacks have tastefully decorated the home with period furniture which lends itself to the authentic atmosphere of the home. One can almost see the shadow of an early mistress of Rippon sitting at the harpsichord in the large central hall and with a bit of imagination can conjure up the tinkling sounds of a Bach minuet coming from the instrument.

Rippon Lodge stands today, a monument to man's determination and dedication to preserve his historic past and secure a heritage for those generations to come.