

HISTORIC SITE FILE: RIPPON LODGE
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THE STROLLER

A few weeks ago, the **Stroller** told readers how they could vote for Pickle Packers International's annual Glass Pickle Award.

Well, the results are in and PPI has been kind enough to tell us who the winner is.

Readers will remember that PPI gives the Glass Pickle to the person who wound up in the stickiest predicament of the year.

This year the overwhelming winner was Woody Allen, who is embroiled in a nasty battle with Mia Farrow over their failed relationship and their children. Voters chose him by a margin of 2 to 1.

"Woody Allen and Mia Farrow are up to their necks in pickle brine. Both have had a bitter dill—uh, pill—to swallow," PPI said.

Music star Sinéad O'Connor barely beat out Vice President Dan Quayle for second place. O'Connor gained notoriety for tearing up a picture of the pope, while Quayle tacked an e on the end of potato and picked a fight with someone who does not even exist—television character Murphy Brown.

The **Stroller** wonders what the results would be if the Pickle Packers ran a similar contest in the Prince William and Stafford areas. Any nominations?

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 The **Stroller** is curious about what may be a strictly American phenomena. How is it that the Christmas season that begins so far in advance

Rippon Lodge has roots back to 1725

From staff reports

The lure of the land around Neabsco Creek over the years has drawn many to a part of eastern Prince William known as Rippon.

Area historians and naturalists said that Indians who settled the lands centuries ago considered this patch of land sacred. History books, available in the Prince William library, tell of the first white man to settle in the area, a young Englishman named Richard Blackburn.

Blackburn sailed from England in 1725 and staked out a site for his home on a knoll overlooking Neabsco Creek, the Potomac River and the adjoining meadowlands.

He built Rippon Lodge there, which he named after his English home, the cathedral town of Rippon in Yorkshire.

The date 1725 is carved into the oak beams that have supported the house for more than 250 years. The lodge, listed on the National Register of Historical Properties, has been the home of generations of Blackburn's descendants and was until this past year, the home of his fifth great-grandson, the late retired Navy Rear Admiral Richard Blackburn Black.

Admiral Black died Aug. 12, 1992, one day after his 90th birthday.

In a recent article, Black's daughter Debra Black said "Rippon Lodge was his great passion when he retired."

Admiral Black wrote in a 1965 article for the Historical Society of Fairfax County:

"One can imagine Blackburn, the young colonist, arriving in the new land with his house

Legend has it that the ghost of John Baylis still wanders the halls of Rippon Lodge and the grounds of the old plantation.

Places

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

Early newspaper accounts tell of how Julia Anne Blackburn courted and eventually married George Washington's nephew, Bushrod Washington, at Rippon Lodge in 1785.

Historical documents trace the Rippon Lodge plantation's boundaries from a point near the present site of Rippon Elementary School to Neabsco Creek and beyond U.S. 1 to Opitz Boulevard and Potomac Hospital.

Before Black lived there, a prominent Washington, D.C., lawyer, also a descendant of the Blackburns, made the lodge his part-time home.

Wade Hampton Ellis, a lawyer in the Herbert Hoover administration, kept Rippon Lodge as a summer and weekend home, according to newspaper accounts of the period.

Over the years, a lot of the plantation's original 1,000 acres



Potomac News file photo

Rippon Lodge has a colorful history dating back to 1725 when it was built by Richard Blackburn.

had been divided and sold to land speculators. During the 1920s, Ellis was able to buy back much of it and, in the process, restore the aging house to its original splendor.

In newspaper reports of the 1920s and early 1930s, the Ellis home was the site of many lawn parties where Washington dignitaries gathered to rub shoulders.

The predominantly Republican parties became less frequent with the advent of Franklin D. Roosevelt's rise to the presidency.

In restoring the lodge, Ellis

tried to remain true to its original architecture, but made a few changes along the way. He added to the house a colonnaded veranda, several dormer windows and two wings.

Still intact is the 18th century English-style A-frame roof that drops from a 45-degree angle as if approaches the house's three chimneys.

The floors of the house are the original pine taken from the woods that surrounded the plantation. They are notched on the underside to fit over the ancient oak timbers and fastened into place with wooden pegs.

The house comes complete with its own ghost.

Richard Blackburn's son-in-law, John Baylis, was mortally wounded in the nearby Quantico Churchyard during a duel in 1765.

It was reported in newspapers of the time that friends took Baylis by carriage back to Rippon Lodge where he died a few hours later.

Legend has it that the ghost of John Baylis still wanders the halls of Rippon Lodge and the grounds of the old plantation.