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Colonel Thomas Blackburn Grave At Rippon Lodge Honored by DAR

There is in Woodbridge an old house, built in 1725 by Richard Blackburn, and inherited by his son Thomas who became a colonel and served the country in war and in peace. On Sunday the Army and Navy Chapter, District of Columbia Daughters of the American Revolution conducted a ceremony marking the grave of this revolutionary soldier. A biography of Colonel Blackburn and a history of the famous (infamous?) Rippon Lodge follows.

Colonel Thomas Blackburn A Revolutionary Soldier

Colonel Thomas Blackburn, the second and surviving son of Richard Blackburn and the inheritor of "Rippon Lodge," was born in 1742. He was seriously wounded in the Battle of Germantown in 1776 and carried a piece of British lead in his body until about a year before his death on October 27, 1897.

Colonel Blackburn was one of the Committee of Safety for Prince William County in pursuance of the eleventh Resolution of the Continental Congress, December 9, 1774. This committee resolved that "no person or persons whatever in this County ought to make use of East Indian Tea, until American grievances are

slip somewhat in their framing. An interesting added feature of the house, and one that has caused much romantic conjecture, is a stone and brick-lined tunnel leading out from the cellar into what used to be a deep ravine, but which is now filled to form a broad platform for a labyrinth of boxwoods. Some have thought that the tunnel was a means of escape in case of attack, but there is structural evidence that it was not built until the time of an early renovation near the end of the eighteenth century, and certainly there were no dangerous Indians in the vicinity by that time. Most probably the passage was an entrance through which food was carried from an outdoor kitchen.

"Tea" bushes still growing on the lawn are reminders of the non-importation agreements adopted by the colonists as a protest against taxes levied by Great Britain on East Indian tea just prior to the American Revolution. The plants were imported from Bermuda, have a red berry sometimes called "Tea Berry," and the leaves were probably dried and used as a substitute for tea.

Among the records collected through the years by Judge and Mrs. Wade Ellis is an account of a meeting of a Committee of



RIPPON LODGE—This house 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 Neab-

sco Creek and the more distant Potomac River. Rippon Lodge is now owned by Admiral and Mrs. Richard Blackburn Black, descendants of the original owner.

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Association of Prince William County the two stones marking the oldest grave in the county (and reputedly the second oldest in the United States) have been set up near the others. The headstone records

many candles and the dulcet sounds of a harpsichord playing a minuet will be wafted through the open windows, and — watching the festivities from the outside, hoping to be invited in, will be the poor sinner, Rose

VIRGINIANA FILE

Family files - Blackburn

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October 27, 1957.

Colonel Blackburn was one of the Committee of Safety for Prince William County in pursuance of the eleventh Resolution of the Continental Congress, December 9, 1774. This committee resolved that "no person or persons whatever in this County ought to make use of East Indian Tea, until American grievances are redressed, and that all public balls and entertainments be discontinued this county from this time as contrary to the sentiments of the Continental Congress."

During the Revolutionary War he quartered a Regiment of Continental troops on his place a whole winter, clothed and fed them, and in the spring sent them back to the Army free of cost.

Colonel Blackburn was an intimate friend and a comrade in arms of General George Washington and served as a member of his staff.

Rippon Lodge History Colorful

Rippon Lodge was built about 1725 by Richard Blackburn who came to America from Rippon (now spelled Ripon) in Yorkshire, northern England. It is known from his tombstone that Richard Blackburn was born in Rippon in either 1774 or 1775, because the inscription on the stone says that he died at Rippon Lodge in 1757 "in the 52nd year of his life." The stone is of the horizontal slab type and carries a very long text telling of his accomplishments as a planter and as a delegate to the House of Burgesses at Williamsburg.

At the time of his death he was operating from Rippon Lodge vast holdings of land in what are now Fairfax, Loudoun, Fauquier, and Stafford Counties with a total acreage of almost 21,000. As is well known, the above counties were originally a part of the early Prince William County. The grave stone, which is just 800

feet from the house, is a protest against taxes levied by Great Britain on East Indian tea just prior to the American Revolution. The plants were imported from Bermuda, have a red berry sometimes called "Tea Berry," and the leaves were probably dried and used as a substitute for tea.

Among the records collected through the years by Judge and Mrs. Wade Ellis is an account of a meeting of a Committee of Safety, chaired by Colonel Thomas Blackburn and probably at Rippon Lodge, which took several actions designed to prepare the area for possible war with Great Britain. An amusing item on the agenda is a discussion of the cut and colors of a uniform for the militia.

Two daughters of Rippon Lodge became mistresses of Mount Vernon. In 1785 Julia Anne Blackburn, daughter of Colonel Thomas, married the Honorable Bushrod Washington, an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, who was a nephew of George and the inheritor of a portion of Mount Vernon Plantation.

John Augustine Washington, a nephew to whom Bushrod bequeathed Mount Vernon, married Jane Charlotte Blackburn. These two women are buried with their husbands in the Washington tomb at Mount Vernon, and after the latter was buried in 1855 the tomb was sealed and no others have been placed there.

Many romantic legends cling to old Rippon Lodge. Two duelists have died in the drawing room. John Baylis, who married Richard Blackburn's eldest daughter, Jane, was mortally wounded in Quantico churchyard, Dumfries, in 1765 by Cuthbert Bullitt, second to John Scott, the original challenger. Friends on the scene had almost arranged

a reconciliation when an altercation with Bullitt resulted in an exchange of fire. Baylis was taken by carriage to Rippon Lodge where he expired in a few hours.

In 1809 Bernard Hooe and William Kemp fought on the Maryland shore and the wounded Hooe was taken by boat across the Potomac to Rippon Lodge to die. A century later an article in a weekly newspaper of the area, printed in 1911, sheds additional light on these events. Under a photograph of Rippon Lodge is this statement:

"Very old house, near Dumfries, this county, once home of the Blackburns, an old Prince William family connected with the Washingtons, the 'Rattlesnake Grahams', and other people of note. The fine paneled woodwork of its interior is unusual in this part of Virginia. Many tragic stories are told of Rippon Lodge. More than one murder is said to have been committed there. The victim of a fatal duel bled to death on its parlor floor. The house is said to be haunted in such a ghastly and sinister fashion that no one will occupy it, and the public road has changed its course to avoid the neighborhood."

It is not known whether this was a tongue-in-cheek statement by the editor or a revelation of belief in supernatural manifestations only sixty years ago. However, the present owners have had a little sport with some of the hired help as recently as seven or eight years ago.

After one young girl had worked for a few months it was thought safe to let her know that there were 15 graves, including those of Richard and Jane, Thomas and Christian and others of the Blackburns and Atkinsons, just 200 paces from the house. The girl's eyes widened, and the owner quickly stated that they were the graves of relatives and "friends of ours." With her eyes widening still more she said, "They ain't no friends of mine!" But she stayed for over a year.

Hanging in the entrance hall is an original oil painting of Colonel Daniel Boone, fifth great grandfather of Mrs. Aviza Black, co-owner of the Rippon Lodge property with her husband, Rear Admiral Richard Blackburn Black, fifth great grandson of the builder, Richard Blackburn. The painting is attributed to Jean Rancois Valle, an artist who had studios in New Orleans but who made his sketches up and down the Mississippi and the Missouri Rivers, and it was done from life in 1816 in Missouri.

Also hanging in parts of the house are many of Aviza's original oil paintings, done recently in hard-line acrylic. One striking subject is a family of Adelle penguins, done for her husband to honor his five expeditions to the Antarctic.

Each year on the 15th of July flowers are placed on the grave of Richard Blackburn who died on that date in 1757. Recently a new grave has been added to the other 15 in the plot. At the request of the Historical

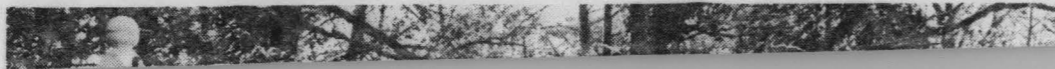
Association of Prince William County the two stones marking the oldest grave in the county (and reputedly the second oldest in the United States) have been set up near the others. The headstone records that Rose Peters departed this life in 16--, with the last two digits not easily decipherable, but they look like 49 or 79 and most probably the former.

The footstone can be read easily and says, "She is gone. O she's gone, to everlasting rest. O Christ our Blessed Savior, who lov'd sinners best." So now, along with the more respectable ghosts, there is the ghost of a "sinner."

Possibly, on nights of bright moonlight when no one of the modern inhabitants is at home, the rooms and halls of Rippon Lodge will glow with the light of

many candles and the dulcet sounds of a harpsichord playing a minuet will be wafted through the open windows, and — watching the festivities from the outside, hoping to be invited in, will be the poor sinner, Rose Peters.

During the dedication service of placing a DAR marker at the grave of Thomas Blackburn, Revolutionary War soldier, Miss Debra Black unveiled the marker. Mrs. Ernest Janes, chapter historian placed the United States flag; Rear Admiral Richard Blackburn Black (USNR, RET.) gave the historical tribute and Mrs. Martin Mason, state regent, D. C. DAR placed a wreath. The Mount Vernon Guards led the procession to the gravesite and played taps.



21,000. AS IS WELL KNOWN, THE above counties were originally a part of the early Prince William County. The grave stone, which is just 200 paces from the old house, may be visited on the tour. The original inscription is badly eroded, but in about 1924 Judge Wade Hampton Ellis of Washington had manufactured a large bronze plaque repeating the text. It was during that year that Judge Ellis purchased and started restoring the old dwelling and consolidating the property so that it contained about 1,000 acres.

Originally the house was a severe but beautiful story-and-a-half Georgian farmhouse, as shown in photographs taken before the restoration. Judge Ellis added wings at either end, a colonnaded verandah, dormer windows in the half story, and built a small brick building on the site of an earlier structure. He added also a modern kitchen, a screened porch, and a spare bedroom on the back of the house, and imported scores of English and American boxwood trees which now provide delightful accent to the house and garden.

The drawing room is paneled in ruby red pine, probably whip-sawed from the surrounding forest by Blackburn's retainers and carpenters, and matched so perfectly that the wide panels seem to be cut from a single log. The floors in this and other rooms are of random-width pine planking with the under sides scarfed to fit over the rough-hewn floor joists and the edges pinned together with oak tree-nails. As is common in old frame houses, the center of the structure has settled so that the floors slope enough to make new visitors experience a dizzy feeling, and this settling has also caused the wall panels to

the scene had almost arranged



BRICK PILLARS flank the entrance from the dirt roadway leading off Route 1 to Rippon Lodge. The white frame house was built in 1725 by Colonel Richard Blackburn.