

(Rippon Lodge)

Wall-to-wall with plantations

Potomac News May 26, 1978 A-4

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It is hard to imagine today that the Potomac River shoreline of Prince William County was ever wall-to-wall with plantations, but such was the case in colonial times. The first land patent in the territory that is now Prince William was established in 1653. That particular tract included the neck of land formed between the Occoquan River and Neabsco Creek. In just five short years following that original patent all of the water front property bordering the Potomac between the Occoquan River and Chopawamsic Creek was patented in huge tracts.

An excellent example of the magnificent plantation homes built in those ancient times is "Rippon Lodge." The present day house was built by Colonel Richard Blackburn in 1725. An even earlier building existed on the site, and was thought to have been built by Martin Scarlet, a member of the House

Historical highlights

By Don Curtis



of Burgesses. He was buried nearby on the original patent in 1695.

Rippon Lodge, a private property, is situated on a beautiful knoll overlooking Neabsco Bay, the Potomac River, and the Maryland shoreline. The plantation took its name from the

cathedral town of Rippon in Yorkshire, northern England. What was originally the seat for managing over 21,000 acres of plantation lands has now shrunk to a 40-acre parcel.

To this day "tea" bushes grow at Rippon Lodge as a reminder of the hard times experienced prior to the Revolutionary War. In protest of the taxes levied by Great Britain on East India tea, the Colony of Virginia adopted a rather severe nonimportation posture. The original "tea berry" plants now growing at Rippon were imported from Bermuda to produce a product used as a poor substitute for the more delectable tea leaves.

Also located on the original plantation is a quite discernible stretch of the original Potomac Path or King's Highway. This roadway is the oldest such route used by white men in the Northern Virginia area. The Daughters of the American Revolution plaqued this historical trail in 1933. The marker was disrupted by vandals, but will be reinstalled after road construction is finished in the vicinity. Rippon Lodge was not too far by water from Mount Vernon, Gunston Hall, Belvoir, Springfield, Belmont, Leesylvania, Dipple, and other sizeable plantations. One can imagine the socializing that went on up and down the Potomac River. Two daughters of Rippon Lodge did, as a matter of fact, become mistresses of old Mount Vernon. In 1785 Julia Anne Blackburn married Bushrod Washington, an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. Later Jane Charlotte Blackburn married John Augustine Washington, nephew of Bushrod. Their son was the last private owner of Mount Vernon before it was purchased by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association in 1860.

Today, Rippon Lodge is owned by Admiral Richard Blackburn Black, fifth great grandson of the original builder. He is a proud member of the Society of the Cincinnati, a hereditary

HISTORY

organization made up of the descendants of American and French officers who served in the American Revolution.

Admiral Black's direct line qualification for the Society of the Cincinnati comes through a Prince William County officer of the American Revolution, Captain William Baylis. Captain Baylis was born near Dumfries in 1758 and served with the 8th Regiment Virginia Continental Line. He later acquired acreage in Ohio as a result of his service during the

—Continued from page A-4

Revolution.

For you local history enthusiasts, the Department of History, George Mason University, is launching a new thrice yearly publication. The journal will be known as "Northern Virginia Heritage" and is scheduled to appear in early 1979. Prince William County will, of course, be included in the basic geographical area of coverage. The prepublication subscription rate is \$4. If interested, the mailing address is Box NVH, Fairfax, Virginia 22030. The editor is Peter R. Henriques.