

Rockledge, Echo of the Past

Rockledge, which stands like a silent sentinel over Occoquan, exemplified the history of that colonial town. Its stone walls and those of the old grist mill office are all that remain of the dreams and labors of the early pioneers.

John Ballendine, a shipmaster on the Potomac, was the industrial founder of early manufacturing at the town of Occoquan. In 1758 he had

Giles Brent Was Original Settler

Giles Brent, who came from England to live in the King's colony in the New World, was the first white man to live in Old Prince William and some call him the first real citizen of Prince William.

He left the shores of Maryland, crossed the Potomac River, and guided his canoe up the waters of what we call Aquia Creek and settled on the shores of the Potomac in the wilderness.

Rockledge built under the supervision of William Buckland, whose immediate previous commitment had been the construction of Gunston Hall for George Mason. Buckland, trained and educated in England, was the foremost colonial architect of his time in the Maryland-Virginia area.

Rockledge, a three-story house, was built of native stone laid up with clay and lime mortar and had the usual necessary dependencies. It consisted of a main building of nine rooms with a large brick wing that housed the kitchen, butler's pantry and sleeping quarters above.

Interior woodwork, paneling, mantels, main stair and exterior cornice, were typical of Buckland's artistry which appeared in many of his later houses in Virginia and Maryland.

Ballendine is credited with establishing industries on the Occoquan, consisting of grist and flour mills, a forge or iron foundry which turned out armament materiel used in the Revolutionary War, a stove or barrel mill, a bolting mill where flour was

screened, necessary auxiliary activities and wharves from which products were shipped by sailing vessels, principally to England. He became overextended financially and in 1765 transferred his home and other interests to John Semple of Maryland.

After the Revolution, Rockledge was acquired by Nathaniel Ellicott, brother of Andrew Ellicott, sometime surveyor-general of the United States, who is credited with laying out the City of Washington under L'Enfant.

The Ellicotts were sons and nephews of the family of that name who founded Ellicott City, Maryland. After continuing operation of Occoquan Mills for a number of years, early in the 19th century Ellicott transferred Rockledge and its interests to the Janney family who retained it for more than one hundred years.

Tradition has it that the Janney automatic coupler, which superceded the link and pin device used to couple railroad cars and which revolutionized train operation, was invented and developed

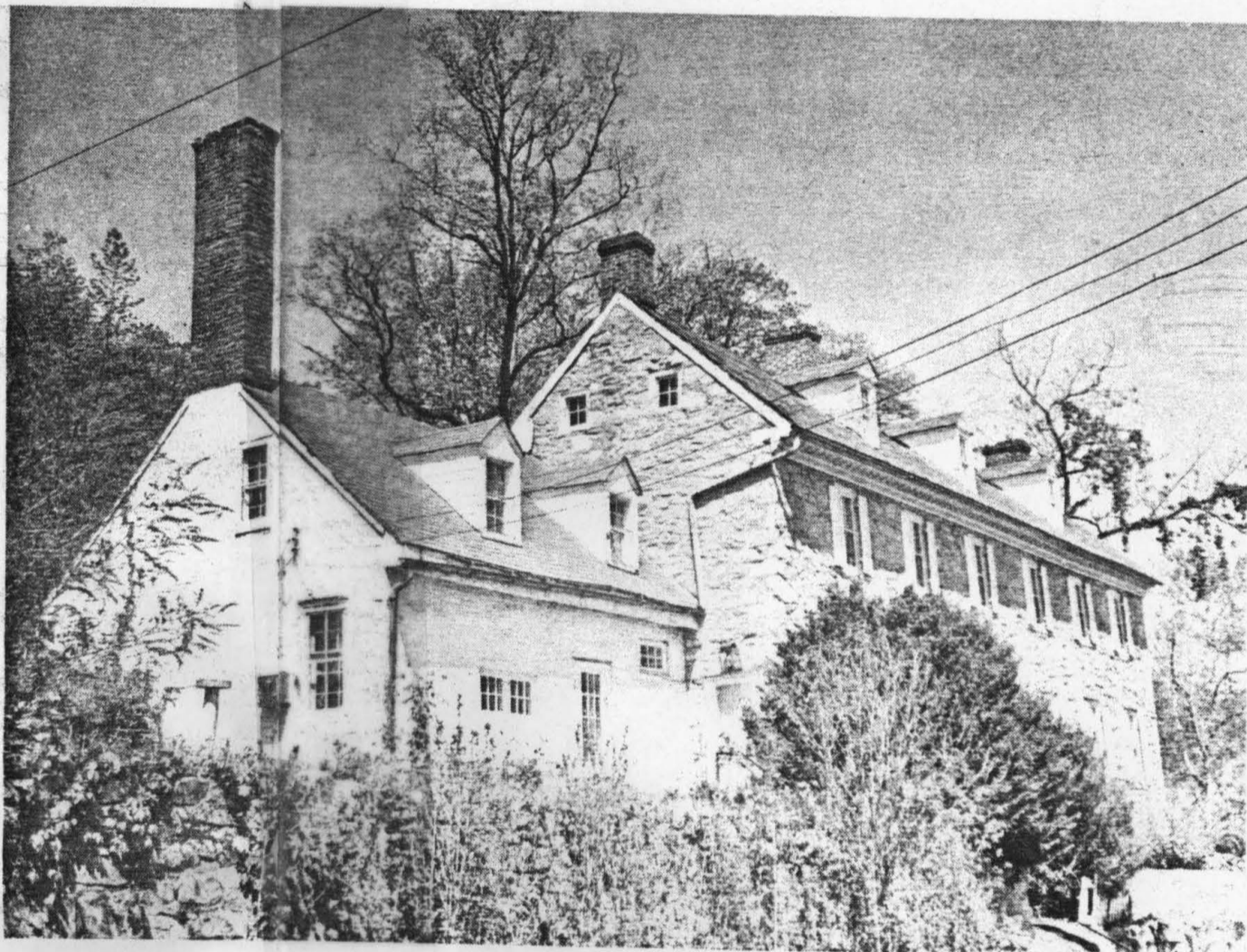
in the mill office which still stands on Mill Street.

Rockledge was acquired by Fred and Emily Barnes in 1931 and remained in the Barnes family until 1967 when it was sold by Laurence A. Barnes and his wife, Nancy, who had owned this historic home since 1954.

During ownership by Larry and Nancy Barnes the house was surveyed by representatives of Fred S. Eaton, Secretary of the Interior, and designated an historic building by the advisory committee of the Historic American Buildings Survey and certified as possessing exceptional historic or architectural interest and being worthy of careful preservation for the benefit of future generations. To this end a detailed record of its appearance and condition was made and deposited in the Library of Congress.

In 1960 Rockledge suffered severe structural damage and it now stands, a victim of "industrial progress" and a ghostly reminder of yesteryears past, whose traditions and history, part of

the American scene, may soon fade from the present picture.



"ROCKLEDGE"—Sitting atop a hill overlooking Occoquan Creek, this 1758 home of native stone and brick has had a prominent past. Now designated an historic building by the advisory committee of the Historic American Buildings Survey, a detailed record

of its appearance and condition is on record in the Library of Congress. Today Rockledge is but a skeleton of its glorious past, a victim of structural damage and vandalism.

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