

POTOMAC NEWS, Wednesday, September 5, 1973, A-14



Occoquan's Rockledge stands deserted

Rockledge is named historic state landmark

Rockledge, an 18th century building in Occoquan, has been designated an historic landmark by Virginia's Historic Landmarks Commission.

The building, built in 1760, was specified as a landmark for its architectural and engineering significance. The house was one of 30 selections named by the commission in August.

Rockledge is significant for its association with the town of Occoquan and the successive entrepreneurs who sought to realize the town's potential as a milling, manufacturing, shipping and travel center.

The finely proportioned and detailed Georgian house is also claimed to be an early work by William Buckland, foremost architect of the late-colonial Chesapeake region. Buckland allegedly supervised construction of the house under contract to the quixotic industrialist John Ballendine, the latter then being engaged in the milling and foundry industries "at or near the falls of Occoquan."

Ballendine was soon displaced from his home and businesses by an erstwhile partner, John Semple. The imaginative, but imprudent

and poorly capitalized Ballendine, attempted at one time or another to dig canals, or otherwise improve transportation on the Potomac or James Rivers; develop common carrier transportation on the Potomac; transport troops or build their cannon; and conduct sawmills.

The picturesque site of Rockledge, hacked out of solid rock and overlooking the falls of Occoquan, is a testimonial to Ballendine's imagination.

Ballendine's successor gave up the forge and expanded his milling operations to cope with the increasing production of wheat, which had become the staple agricultural crop of Northern Virginia. Semple's holdings eventually passed to Nathaniel Ellicott, a member of one of Jeffersonian America's foremost Quaker and milling families, the founders of Ellicott City, Maryland. Ellicott employed an itinerant teacher and writer, whose account of Occoquan included a reference to Rockledge, "a house built on a rock," which surely would have delighted the otherwise dour Ellicott.

