

Va - Pr Wm / Occoquan

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## Historic Rockledge Mansion Being Brought Back to Life

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Rockledge, the historic home designed by William Buckland and recently purchased by Donald Sonner of Occoquan, was the subject of a talk at the Potomac Branch of Prince William Library Wednesday night.

Sonner, spoke to an audience of approximately 35 people who came to hear how the restoration of Rockledge is progressing.

The house was built around 1758, according to information that Sonner has obtained from the Library of Congress and other sources. The first owner was John Ballendine. Ballendine commissioned Buckland, who also is responsible for Gunston Hall, the home of

George Mason, to design the house; but Sonner said it has none of the ornate carvings that are found in many of the Buckland style homes.

He commented that Rockledge was decaying and virtually falling down when he first saw it. "I said, well, at least I have a nice piece of land."

Only later, when he heard so many people say it was impossible to rebuild, was he challenged to try to find a way to put it back in as much of its original state as possible.

The job was so laborious that Sonner said he would start each working day with 20 men and the following day at least ten would quit. "It got so we hired everybody who was walking," he

laughed. "Every night I would say a prayer that they would come back the next morning."

The building is "probably the strongest house in the country" now that it is 75 per cent completed, according to Sonner.

The Sonners are trying to keep it as original as possible. They will copy the trimmings, and the floors are in much the same state, with a little patchwork required for the cracks and crevices.

Rockledge has about 14 rooms and nine fireplaces. One room will remain unfinished so people can see the way it looked before the restoration. It still has its original trough by the old spring house and it will be

functional when it is completed.

Mrs. Sonner said that she plans to bake bread in the oven next to the open hearth in the kitchen. "We will live in it when it is finished." Two bathrooms are being added, and the home will be all electric.

Sonner mentioned that the fireplaces had been tested on a recent candlelight tour before Christmas "and they all work."

He added that the original stones are extremely heavy. They are four feet across the face and two feet thick.

"My husband likes to say he gave me Rockledge for Christmas," smiled Mrs. Sonner, "but that is only because it was right before Christmas when he got word it was for sale."