

# A 1746 Buttress In Bladensburg

By James C. Wilfong

Often the buttress is associated with cathedrals or other structures of vast size.

If you are not familiar with the architectural feature, the dictionary calls it: "a projection structure to support a wall or building, especially to receive lateral pressure acting at a particular point in a single direction".

A home in Bladensburg has a buttress in its south gable end construction. There must be countless thousands who have admired it curiously over the years, particularly since the opening of Kenilworth Avenue a decade ago.

Bostwick, at 3901 48th St., is one of Bladensburg's few remaining original structures and was erected in 1746 by Christopher Lowndes.

The buttress was added a half century later by Benjamin Stoddert, our first Secretary of the Navy and son-in-law of Lowndes. Later, LaFayette visited the house during his farewell visit to America.

Family correspondence tells that Stoddert was concerned about a crack of serious proportions which developed in the south gable end of the mansion. He applied his engineering know-how and erected the buttress as we see it today.

Also, he built two dungeons or cells in its base. But as far as it is known, they have never served other than as a storage area for garden tools and the like.

Meanwhile, Stoddert's buttress put an effective end to cracking or settlement. The fact that it was placed about 175 years ago indicates that it has stood the test of time.

The feature is unusual in that it has a shingled roof surface to tie it aesthetically to the mansion proper. And buttress and mansion provide a provocative bit of residential architecture.

Bostwick has many architectural delights in addition to the great sweeping reinforcement at its south wall. Unseen from the front, a well proportioned palladian window opens from the library wall to the rear garden.

The dining room is paneled from floor to chair rail in black walnut. The mantelpiece in the living room is 10 feet long and rises 7 feet above the floor. When next you pass Bostwick note the relationship of center dormer and entrance door below. The two do not line up but you would not change them if you could.

(The writer, an employee of C and P Telephone Co., is a long-time buff of historical houses and unusual architectural features therein.)