

Colonial Home Built in 1746 Defies Time

Sound Construction Justified in Bladensburg House, Still Sturdy.

Over a doorway in the Bostwick House on River road, Bladensburg, Md., hangs a slab of weatherbeaten and warped wood. Light falling through a large colonial doorway reveals four numbers, "1746," cut centuries ago by an unknown carver as the completion date of the mansion of Christopher Lowndes.

When Lowndes, an English merchant, chose the site for his home along the banks of the Eastern Branch, the name of Bladensburg was unknown, and the spot nearby where ships landed was known as Garrisons Landing. Much of the building material for the Bostwick House was doubtless carried ashore at that spot, and painstakingly fitted into what is now one of Maryland's most romantic homes.

Historians have sought geological records of the surrounding country in an effort to discover the source of the foundation stones, and have finally concluded that even these were brought from England as ballast for one of the merchant ships that came to this country for a cargo of American furs. Like many of the older colonial homes, the bricks were made in England and used as ballast for merchant ships operating between England and America.

Graded Into Terraces.

The plot of land upon which the house stands was made up from three lots graded in front with five terraces, each level being about the size of the average city home-site. Tall trees, many of them dead, stand guard over the historic home.

One striking feature of the construction of the house is a huge chimney, sweeping out in a curve from the side of the house to the ground, forming what appears to be a buttress. In the base are two tiny cells which were used as a prison for unruly slaves. It was when the home was renovated about 30 years ago that the iron bars over the one tiny window in the prison were removed.

Hung on the top of this chimney are metal numerals, replacing the wooden slab which now hangs inside the hallway. The original wooden slab fell during a wind-storm about 35 years ago. At that time the house was the property of James H. Kyner, whose daughter, Mrs. Felix E. Christofane, now occupies the home.

Mr. Kyner began a program of reconstruction about 30 years ago, and, while much of the structure was repaired and replaced, the home remains essentially the same as when it was built. A gigantic front porch was cut away and replaced by a smaller one designed to keep the colonial flavor of the place. The foundation stones of the porch have not been removed and the space once occupied by most of the porch is now a flower bed.

Doorways Enlarged.

Doorways were enlarged and some of the original windows were removed and replaced with larger ones. The glass in most of the panes was evidently made many years ago, for it is handblown. Hand-blown window panes are rapidly disappearing in this country and are being replaced by leaver rolled glass. Three dormer windows on the third story were not touched during the rebuilding.

The charming old drawing room, running the full width of the home, has a mantel measuring 7 feet in

height and 11 feet in length. The fireplace is still used, and the Venetian marble used in its face is as clear and white as the day it was installed. The walls of the drawing room are hung with big game trophies from all parts of the world, collected by Mr. Christofane on his hunts. Antique furniture, including a massive square piano, a spinnet and a large handmade chest, are arranged in this room. The chest, bearing marks of some hard usage, is put together with dowel pins and is still as firm as the day it was built.

The living room and dining room are paneled with walnut below the chair rails, extending all around both rooms. In one corner of the dining room is an antique corner cupboard filled with delicate china, most of it quite old. In it are several pieces of rare English table decorations of the type which graced most colonial homes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Marble-faced fireplaces are in both rooms.

Reception for Lafayette.

These rooms were the scene of a reception for Lafayette during the Revolution when he and George Washington made frequent trips through the territory around Washington.

In the rear of the home is a small stone house, supposedly used as a kitchen in the days when culinary art was largely manual labor. Iron hooks still hang from the hand-hewn beams overhead and the unfloored dirt floor is packed hard, indicating it was used a great deal. The ceiling and beams overhead are blackened with smoke, but it is doubtful if it could have been used as a smokehouse because of its proximity to the home. A large crack has developed along one wall of this building and restoration is needed to save it.

The rear of the property is built up with modern barns and other farm buildings, all well kept and in harmony with the design of the old home. With continued care such as the historic house is now receiving, it should remain standing for many more years, for Mr. Lowndes built a really permanent home. The foundations are 28 inches thick, and the recent renovations revealed that the beams and frame behind the brick outer wall are large and in remarkably good condition.