

# 247 King George Street: Hall, House, and Home

*By Ginger M. Doyel*



Ogle Hall at present

Homecoming is the ideal time to celebrate Ogle Hall, your Alumni home. In that spirit, this article features the building's rich history, naval heritage, and architecture. But first an important note: while the article refers to the building as "Ogle Hall," the term was not officially used until 1923.

## **Annapolis, Maryland—5 February 1776**

Her home in utter chaos with workmen throughout, Mrs. Benjamin Ogle retreated upstairs to write to her mother-in-law in London. She had so much to share about life in Annapolis—the question was where to begin?



Ballroom

Of course she had to relay the sense of imminent danger. Rumors of a Man of War coming to destroy Annapolis had most on edge. Yet this potential conflict did breathe life into the "vastly dull" town. From a lack of "balls and bouts" to very "little dining and supping out" local entertainment was scant at best. Goods were also terribly rare and expensive

she complained.

Despite these inconveniences the Ogles had stayed for the winter—partly to oversee their home's construction. Ah yes, she must not forget to mention this endless effort! Nevertheless, the work was nearly done (or so the contractors said), and Mrs. Ogle worried that the Man of War would destroy her house if it came.

Fortunately her fear did not come to pass. And today, more than 200 years later, her residence at the corner of King George and Tabernacle Street (College Avenue) stands intact as Ogle Hall or "Alumni House." More than a hall or house, however, 247 King George Street is a home. For like a *home*, within its walls the U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association keeps Alumni connected as a community, as a *family*.

## Ogle Hall, its Early History

From the State House to the William Paca House, Annapolis buildings are rich in history and Ogle Hall is no exception. Consider its distinguished beginnings.

Contrary to what the building's name suggests, the Ogles were not its original owners. Dr. William Stephenson, an Annapolis surgeon, built the house in 1739 yet died before its completion in 1742. Five years later his widow leased it to Samuel Ogle, the first of three Maryland Governors to live there.

Samuel Ogle was nearly three decades older than his wife, Anne, who outlived him by many years. When he died, Anne's brother, Benjamin Tasker, bought the house for 70 tons of Baltimore pig iron and sold it to Anne in 1760.

Ogle Hall changed hands again in 1773 when Anne sold the property to her son, Benjamin Ogle, who governed Maryland from 1798 to 1801. George Washington was among Benjamin's many esteemed guests, and the two dined together at Ogle Hall on 1 October 1773.



USNA and Annapolis, approximately 1865  
Photo courtesy of USNA Special Collections and Archives

Meanwhile, new Georgian mansions that rivaled Ogle Hall's grandeur were being built in Annapolis thanks to the city's increasing prosperity. The William Paca House (1765), Chase-Lloyd House (1769), and Hammond-Harwood House (1774) had each raised the bar for elegant living standards in town. Not to be outshined by their neighbors, Benjamin and his wife, Henrietta, made a few "minor home improvements" to bring their home into fashion.



1923 Room

In 1774 they erected a ten-foot high brick "party wall" to separate their land from the adjacent Lloyd property. Equally dramatic additions were made inside including a grand cantilevered staircase, semi-octagonal ballroom wing, and second story master chamber. This construction had clear drawbacks as Henrietta confided to her mother-in-law in 1776: *"Have not yet seen the Miss Anderson's—our house hear being in Confusion and litter with workmen and most of our furniture sent to Bell Air has prevented me from inviting them over..."*

In the end, the work proved worthwhile, as the Marquis de Lafayette later lauded the new ballroom as "the most beautiful" in America. Legend has it that Lafayette also planted the yew tree that once graced Ogle Hall's garden.

Although Benjamin Ogle died in 1809, Henrietta continued to live there until her own death in 1815. At that point James Steele purchased the property, which added further intrigue to the home's history. Mr. Steele's son, Henry, married Francis Scott Key's daughter, Maria. Mr. Steele's wife was also related to the nearby Lloyds. Mrs. Edward Lloyd V owned Ogle Hall when her daughter, Anne Catherine Lloyd, married future Naval Academy Superintendent, Franklin Buchanan, in 1835.

The Steele family maintained ownership of Ogle Hall until Sally Scott Murray Lloyd purchased it in 1839. Eight years later she sold it to Thomas Pratt, the third Governor of Maryland, who owned it until 1867. And it is there that Ogle Hall's naval heritage begins.

## From Ogle Hall to "Alumni House"



Cornerstone

For nearly one and a half centuries, Ogle Hall has enjoyed a continuous association with the U.S. Navy. Judge John Mason of the Maryland Court of Appeals forged this tie when he leased the house from Mr. Pratt in 1865 and purchased it two years later.

Judge Mason's two daughters, Bettie and Louisa, could not believe their good fortune when they moved into Ogle Hall. What more could two lovely, eligible teenage girls ask for than to live just a stone's throw from the Naval Academy and its dashing students? One can imagine the girls peering from an upstairs window at midshipmen who came to call, primping before a mirror, then descending down the grand staircase to greet their suitors.

Not surprisingly, both girls married naval officers in 1873—the year that their father died.

Bettie, the youngest, married Theodoric Porter, son of Admiral David Dixon Porter, three years after he graduated from the Naval Academy.

Sadly, Bettie saw little of her husband who spent 20 of his 43 year naval career at sea. Naval Academy Professor William O. Stevens later recorded the hardships of such a "Naval Career" in his satire, "Another Annapolis Alphabet." As Stevens rhymed,

*N stands for Naval Career;  
It's Lovely, but isn't this Queer?  
Though the calling must be  
To follow the sea,  
When the orders arrive—it's "Oh Dear!"*



David D. Porter  
Photo courtesy of USNA Special Collections and Archives

During her husband's absence, Bettie resided with their children at Ogle Hall, which she received after her mother's death in 1899. She lived there until her death in 1909, leaving behind two beautiful heirs: Marguerite Cusachs and Rosalie Van Ness.

Like her mother, Marguerite also married a Navy man, Carlos Cusachs who taught Spanish and French at the Academy. Beginning in 1914 she and Rosalie co-owned Ogle Hall, until Rosalie transferred her portion to Marguerite in 1923. Marguerite Porter Cusachs lived in Ogle Hall until 1944 when she sold it to the U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association. The following October the property was dedicated as "Alumni House" during the Naval Academy Centennial celebration.

### Architecture and Decor



Ballroom plaster cornice

Since 1944 the Alumni Association has restored Ogle Hall to reflect its original colonial grandeur. Its gracious architecture and decor make it the ideal setting for wedding receptions, rehearsal dinners, class reunions, brunches, and more. Guests at these events and other visitors might be surprised to learn how the space has evolved in 264 years. Here are just some of the changes that have taken place.

Unlike today, guests originally entered Ogle Hall through a "jib door." The jib door, which can be used as a window or door, is located in the larger of two front entertainment rooms. In contrast to other early "Annapolis plan" buildings, the rooms face the street instead of a backyard garden (although it is possible that its front yard was once a garden). Ogle Hall's backyard initially contained a courtyard, which included a brick kitchen. The property also contained a brick stable at the time.

Three decades after its completion Benjamin and Henrietta Ogle renovated and

enlarged Ogle Hall. In addition to adding a grand staircase, second story chamber, and ballroom wing with a raised ceiling, they re-trimmed the house. The new ballroom received the most ornate trimming, a magnificent plaster cornice.

Ogle Hall evolved further in the 19th century. By 1858 a small addition had been made to its southeast side. At about that time, Ogle Hall was also painted white according to a Warren collection photograph. By 1878 a wing had been added to the property's smaller unit, and within a decade its northwest side received a porch, which was removed in the 1940s.



Based on diagrams found in Jean Lee Eareckson's Report, "Ogle Hall—Alumni House 1739-1982"

As shown by the diagram, Ogle Hall witnessed extensive changes in the 20th century as well, including the addition of its balcony and charming red wood fence. The building was restored in the 1930s and again after a devastating fire struck on 7 July 1971, which damaged the stair hall and northeast corner. Captain William Busik '43 had recently become executive director of the Alumni Association when the fire struck. He remembers receiving a call at about 6 a.m. and jumping into his car only to discover that it would not start! However, soon Captain Busik reached Ogle hall and by 8 a.m., the fire was under control. Although extensive damage occurred to the building, it was able to be used just four months later for Homecoming, thanks to the Annapolis Fire and Police Departments, Naval Academy Alumni, the Historic Annapolis Foundation, and others. Ogle Hall's décor enhances its appearance and historic significance. Antiques such as the Hepplewhite Sideboard belonging to the first Secretary of the U.S. Navy grace the entrance foyer. Paintings of Naval ships and portraits of figures including Commander Franklin Buchanan offer lessons in American naval history.

A discussion of Ogle Hall is incomplete without recognizing those who have invested in its preservation and ambiance. Since 1944, the Alumni Association, Alumni, and other stewards have maintained its historic relevance and ensured that it will always be welcoming as the ancestral headquarters of the Alumni Association. Take for example the Class of 1952. Its members have taken ownership of Ogle Hall's ballroom, including the restoration of its cornice, which entailed removing 27 layers of paint from its surface. The Class is also responsible for Ogle Hall's flag and flag pole, and makes possible the annual lighting of its Christmas tree along College Avenue.

Additional antiques and paintings are located on Ogle Hall's second floor and attic, although these floors mostly serve as office spaces. A complete modern plan view and virtual tour of Ogle Hall is available at <http://www.usna.com/Events/AlumniHouse/AlumniHouse.htm> (click on the Ogle Hall floor plan).



1907 Room

## Homecoming 2003

Soon, Naval Academy Alumni and their families will return to Annapolis from near and far for Homecoming 2003.

Hopefully, many will explore in person the rich history, heritage, and architecture of 247 King George Street, one of the oldest buildings in continuous use in Annapolis. Known as Ogle Hall or Alumni House, this charming building is also a home, and is well worth visiting.



View from Ogle Hall's courtyard-the large tree to the right is where the Yew Tree once stood

Sources: Orlando Ridout V and Marcia M. Miller, "Architecture in Annapolis: A Field Guide" (Crownsville: Maryland Historical Trust Press, 1998).

Jean Lee Eareckson, "Ogle Hall-Alumni House 1739-1982" (Annapolis: Historic Annapolis, Inc. 1982).

Henrietta Ogle, letter to her mother-in-law, 5 February 1776.

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