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Up for grabs: Baltimore's storied 'Mount Royal' mansion dates to 1792

By **JACQUES KELLY**
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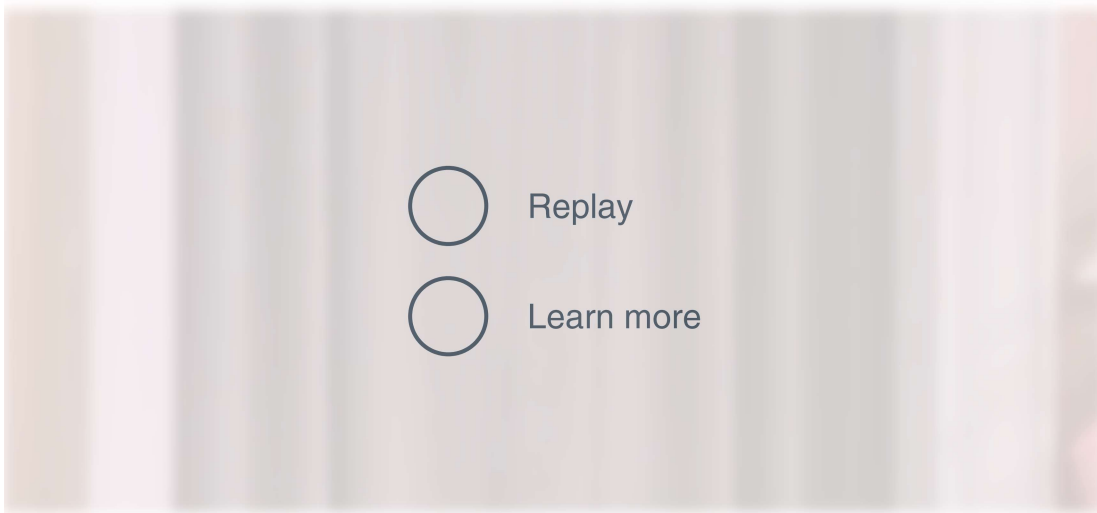
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The mansion sits at the top of the Park Avenue hill with the stony authority of the oldest member of a family. It should. The city-owned Birckhead-Bond House is the oldest surviving building in [Reservoir Hill](#). It rests on ground once owned by Charles Carroll of Carrollton and was a private residence from 1792 until 1922.

Baltimore City Council member Leon Pinkett, who lives nearby on Eutaw Place, has asked for a survey of sentiment to gauge what residents would like to see happen to the city-owned mansion, which has been declared surplus property. Pinkett's Survey Task Force solicits neighborhood opinion and involvement in finding a buyer and awarding the property.

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“Too often when the city disposes of property, the community involvement process comes at the end. I don’t want that to happen,” Pinkett said.

The house is a rare urban survivor — an 18th-century summer residence that somehow never got demolished and replaced by rowhouses or an apartment house. It stands on the original configuration of the land, surrounded by heavy stone retaining walls, and sits on about two wooded acres, which includes a garden dell.

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Writer William Stump, in a 1954 Sun article, called it a Baltimore history-book mansion.

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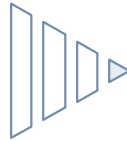
“It is not falling to pieces. It has not been neglected. Indeed, standing

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of the dignity it must have known when
he wrote of the home called Mount Royal.

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Mount Royal was constructed in 1792 by a physician, Dr. Solomon Birckhead, who wanted a place for his family to live in the summer months. His daughter, Christina, inherited it and married Hugh Lennox Bond (nearby Lennox Street preserves that name). Their son, another Hugh Lennox Bond, a judge, supported African-American public schools, emancipation and black rights.



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In 1922 the property, through a bequest, was deeded to the Baltimore Monthly

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name, Norse Hill Home. Known as the Norwegian Seamen’s Home, it housed 55 sailors. They paid \$3 a day for lodging and three meals. Why Norway? The country had more ships at the Port of Baltimore than any other country. A Sun article said the home’s operators felt, “It was not good to have young seamen staying at waterfront boarding houses.”

The seamen’s lodge did not last too long. The city bought the property — it was at one point briefly owned by the Orioles’ Peter G. Angelos — and was converted to institutional uses: a Pratt library reading room, mayor’s station and multi-purpose neighborhood center.



Discussion of the fate of the Mount Royal comes at a time when Reservoir Hill has emerged as an excellent example of a diverse neighborhood where residents have adopted and restored well-constructed homes built in the Grover Cleveland-Teddy Roosevelt era. To walk along Callow Avenue or

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Height Elementary, and after years of complaints, the [**old Madison Park apartments are now gone**](#) — and their [**North Avenue site up for redevelopment**](#).

It's in a place where history lives. Writer Gertrude Stein lived on Linden Avenue briefly with her family, whose members included David Bachrach, photographer to the famous. Prolific writer Christopher Morley lived in the shadow of the Mount Royal estate on Park Avenue. His big 1940 movie hit was "Kitty Foyle," and a close read of Morley's prose affords colorful depictions of Reservoir Hill, even if he doesn't call it that.

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"We need to ask about a renaissance for this building," said Pinkett. "It's the kind of place that could even be a mayor's residence."

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