



MANSION HOUSE HISTORY

1801-2018

The present Mansion House, built in 1801, is the third home built on the estate now known as Druid Hill Park. The second home, designed and built by Colonel Nicholas Rogers in the late 1700s, was destroyed by fire in 1796. When fire destroyed the Rogers' temporary downtown residence in 1801, the family returned to their estate before their new home was completed. Two wings, planned for either side of the Mansion House, were never built. The basement reportedly housed the kitchen and storage areas. The first floor consisted of a drawing room, salon, and dining room interconnected along the rear of the house, with a central hallway dividing the master bedroom and study. Five other bedrooms were located on the second floor.

In 1860, Lloyd Nicholas Rogers, son and heir of Colonel Nicholas Rogers, reluctantly sold his 475-acre estate to the City of Baltimore for \$121,009 in cash and \$363,027 in city stock. Rogers left the mansion the day after the inauguration of Druid Hill Park and died just weeks later, never having returned to his ancestral home. Under the direction of John H.B. Latrobe, the Mansion House was converted into a public pavilion in 1863. The original entrance was removed and a 20-foot-wide open porch was added around the entire home. The interior was "Victorianized" with Gothic arches, ornate ceilings, and an elaborate staircase on the 2nd floor that led to a cupola.

The next major renovation to the building occurred in 1935 with the enclosure of the porch, just before the Mansion House enjoyed short-lived fame as a restaurant. "All Roads Lead to the Mansion House" - or so claimed an advertisement that billed the restaurant as "every man's country club in the very heart of Baltimore." The restaurant was "air-cooled by nature" and featured curb service, a modern Milk Bar, a doughnut-making machine, and dining on the veranda. The restaurant soon closed, however, due most likely to the lack of a liquor license.

In the mid-1940s, the building was used as a day school for the Young Men's and Women's Hebrew Associations and later housed Zoo administrative offices. When the Hall of Jewels exhibit (featuring exotic birds and small mammals) opened on the Mansion House Porch in the mid-1950s, the building was informally labeled the "Bird House" and operated as such for nearly 30 years. In 1978, extensive renovations were begun to restore and, at the same time, modernize the Mansion House. Bird exhibit residents were relocated throughout the Zoo, and the building was used exclusively for administrative offices and educational programming.

During the late 1990s, the Mansion House exterior was rehabilitated through a million-dollar allocation in the State of Maryland's capital budget. In 2012, the 212-year-old building was renovated to include the comforts of 21st century. New paint, storm windows, and carpet were installed, and for the first time in the porch's history, air conditioning. The building, now restored to its original grandeur, continues to house administrative offices but also serves as a popular rental venue for weddings, corporate parties, and other special events.