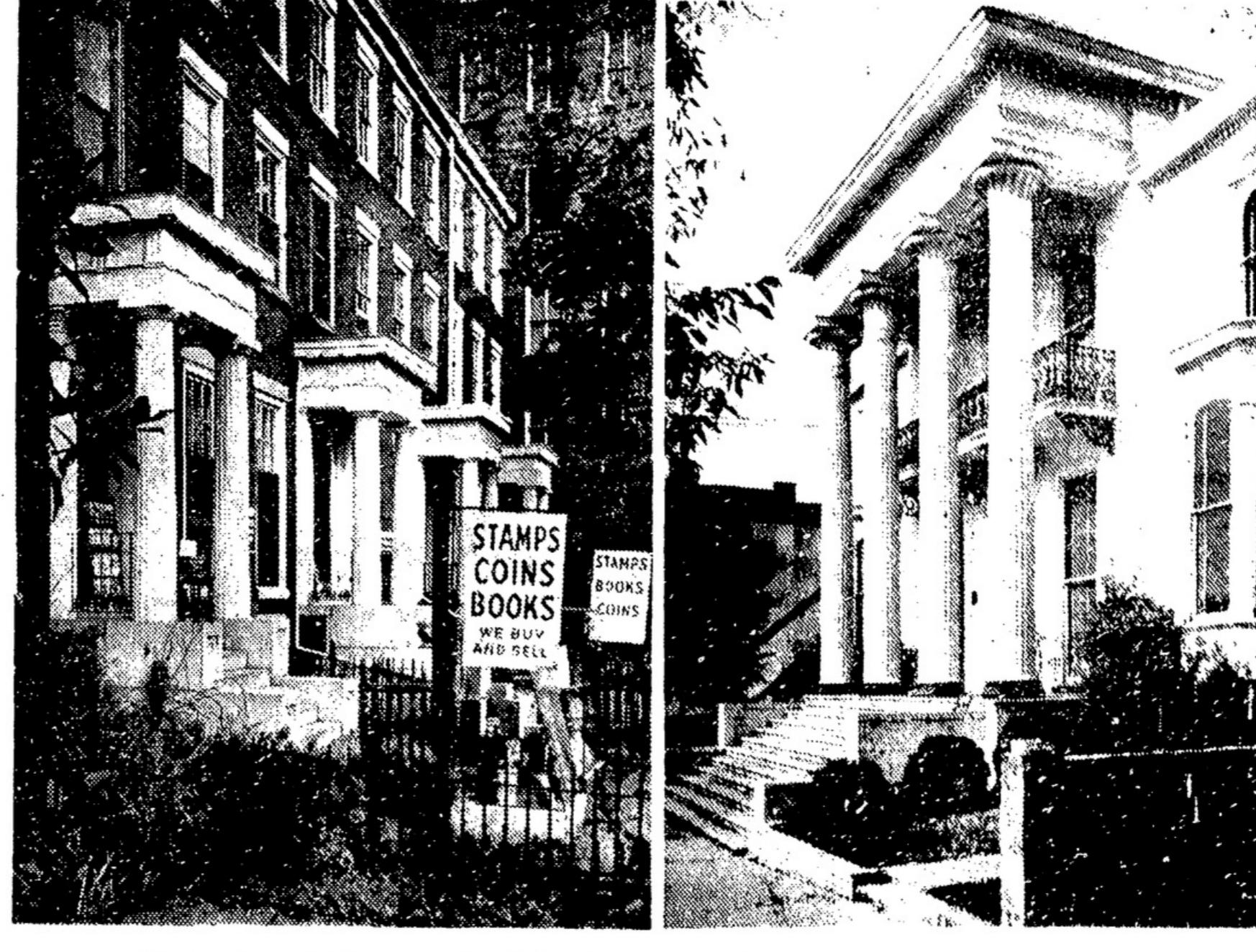
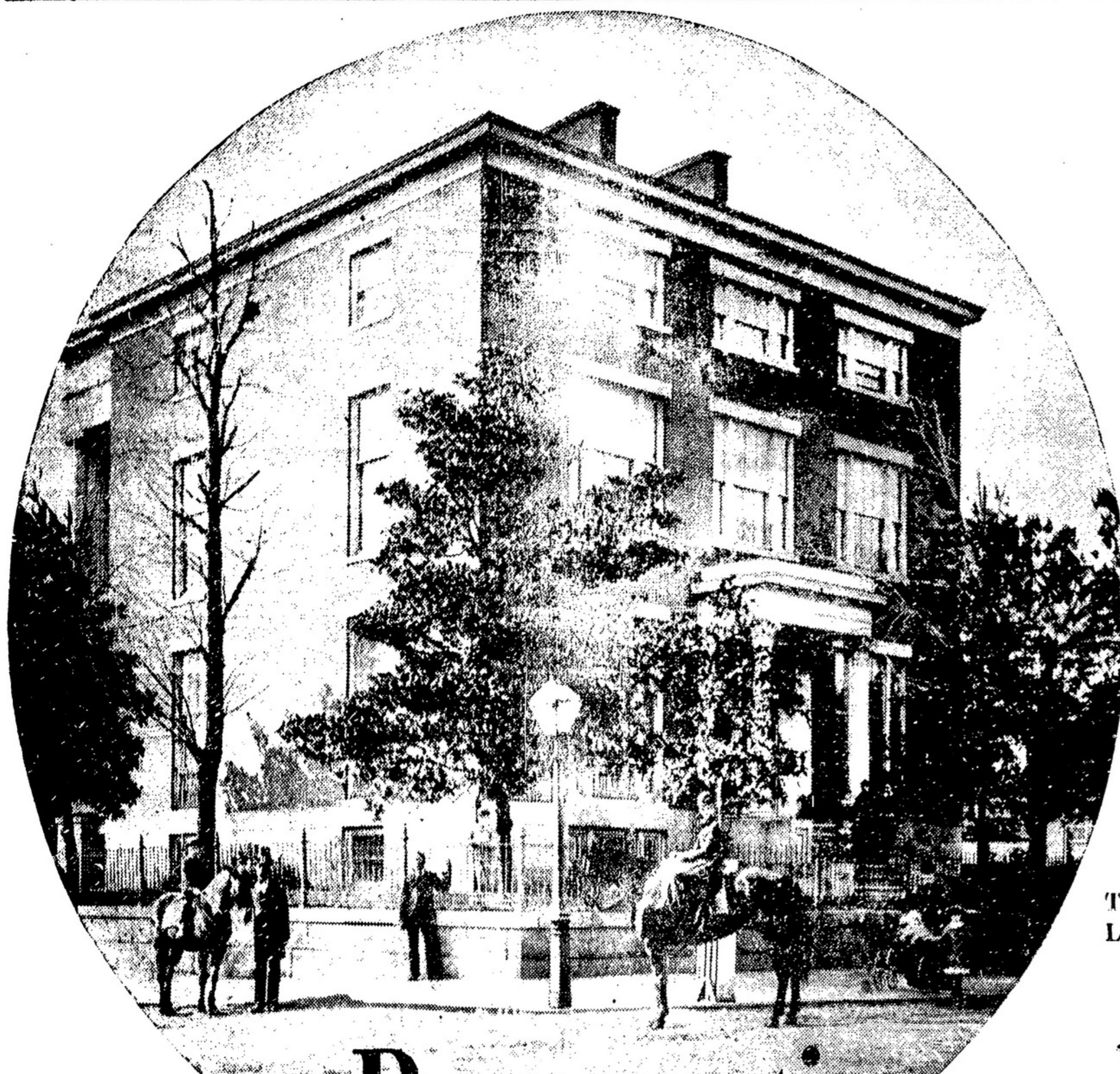


Richmond 11, Virginia, Sunday, September 24, 1950



Linden Row (left), example of Greek Revival architecture, is zoned for business; Universal Life Insurance Company kept the exterior of the old George House

The Nolting House
Lost to progressHancock-Palmer-Caskie House
Now Red Cross headquarters

Preservation or Progress?

By Betty Sessler

WILL downtown Richmond soon consist only of the sleek, streamlined buildings of the twentieth century or will there remain the occasional reminders of the past which give a city its character?

The problem of what to do with the beautiful, antebellum mansions, nestled in the heart of the city's business area, has been fought out again with the planned demolition of the 103-year-old Nolting House at Fifth and Main Streets to make way for a modern insurance building.

The battle of words was waged through the newspaper columns as other Richmonders worked quietly in a joint effort to save the Nolting from destruction on the corner where Edgar Allan Poe once lived.

Most of the letters urged that the new owners, the Equitable Life Insurance Society of the United States, follow the example of another insurance company of retaining the exterior of the old building but remodeling the interior to suit the modern uses.

On the other hand, one or two writers spoke in defense of "progress." Why continue to live in the past, they asked.

The insurance company, however, announced last week that the old home could not be saved.

The fight to preserve the flavor of the Old South has a familiar story to a small group of Richmonders who have devoted their lives to saving fine examples of early architecture from the wrecker.

Some of the city's most famous landmarks have missed demolition. The Old Stone House, the John Marshall House and the White House of the Confederacy.

As in these cases, some battles have been won. The old homes have been saved to become museums, headquarters for historical societies or church houses.

Some of them have been adapted to modern use without disturbing the feeling of the old. An example is at 116 and 118 on Ninth Street, which made attractive office out of the 103-year-old George house. One of the oldest homes in Richmond has become a funeral parlor.

Other Homes Leveled

But many more have been leveled. In their places, where once passed the story of another Richmond, now stand filling stations, new stores and office buildings.

Just across the street from Linden Row, East Franklin Street's example of Greek Revival architecture, was being considered for rezoning for business purposes. The City Planning Commission appointed a committee of three to advise on a plan to dislodge the old which might give some of the fine buildings. The plan, however, was not adopted, but the city was given permission to buy some old houses.

Named to that group were Dr. Wyndham B. Branch, then president of the William Byrd Branch of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities; Marcus L. Wright, Jr., Richmond architect; and Miss Mary Winfield Scott, who sometimes is referred to as Richmond's "Great Preserver."

Buildings were broken down into those "most essential" to preserve; "important" to preserve; "desirable" and "interesting" to preserve. The first group, of course, includes those that the committee felt should be saved at any cost.

The Nolting House will be the first to go from among the 22 buildings placed in that first class, "Buildings Most Essential to Preserve."

It is one of four residences ranked in importance by the committee with buildings featured on Richmond's travel folders—the Capitol and Governor's mansion, St. John's Church, the Old Stone House, the White House of the Confederacy and the Wickham-Valentine House.

The other three houses, given priority along with that of the Nolting, are Craig

House, at Nineteenth and Grace Streets, built before 1788 and owned by the William Byrd Branch, APVA; the Crozet House, First and Main Streets, dated 1814 and until recently used as an antique shop, and the Palmer House, at 211 West Franklin St., dated 1852 and still owned by the family.

The Nolting House, built in 1847 by John C. Hobson, formerly of Goochland County, but owned by members of the Otto Nolting family since 1873, is the keystone of a number of old houses still standing on Fifth Street.

Across Main Street is the Caskie House, built by Michael Hancock in 1808-09, and owned by the Hancock family until 1842.

The Hancock House at 12 North Fifth St., built by Frederick Bradford, a John H. Peacock, in 1810, was used by Second Presbyterian Church as the Cecil Memorial House.

The Barret House, 13 South Fifth St., built in 1844, was saved from destruction in 1936 and purchased by Miss Scott and Mrs. John H. Peacock, who are continuing the efforts of D. D. FitzGerald, Inc. The Scott-Clarke House, built in 1841 at 9 South Fifth St., is now headquarters of the Richmond Guards Company.

Examples of Preservation

What can be done to fit the landmarks of the past into modern city life has been demonstrated by a funeral home and an insurance company.

The Frank A. Riley undertaking establishment is housed in one of the oldest homes still standing in Richmond. The old frame building, also the Daniel Call House, was built before 1788 and originally was located in the southwest corner of Broad and Ninth Streets.

Miss Scott, in her book, "House of Old Richmond," says a sale was made to Alexander Brooks in 1819 who paid \$160 for "one wooden house and \$1.25 for one palmette fence." Brooks, the owner, moved it to its present site at 217 West Grace St.

Frank Riley purchased the house in 1936 for \$25,000. It was practically taken down and rebuilt and the inside entirely altered.

Miss Scott writes that "the Call House is charming and serves as an example of how an old dwelling can be adapted for business purposes if there is sufficient will to persevere it."

The Universal Insurance Company, Miss Scott asserts, is the first Richmond firm "to utilize an old house without disfiguring its character."

The firm has put an ultramodern interior into the 103-year-old George House, erected in 1847 by William O. George. For three decades, beginning in the 1850's, it was the home of Henry Crafer Cabell and usually is called the Cabell house, although the family never owned it. The exterior has remained the same with the exception of a two-story

addition built in the back between the house proper and the kitchen wing.

Before the Nolting House flared up last month, the most recent controversy was that of Linden Row, built in 1847-51.

The houses, once the center of Richmond's social life, were lost years ago when the Medical Arts building was erected at Second and Franklin Streets. Three already

were zoned for commercial purposes, mostly antique stores, and the City Council acted on the other two houses in February 1949.

This, after two years of indecision, the houses were zoned for business and eventual destruction seemed certain. Miss Scott stepped in and purchased the first three, located at 100, 102 and 104 East Franklin St.

The house, she says, will now suffice to serve as office buildings for large companies and she hopes to let them to that use.

As the consequence, the John Marshall House on the corner was preserved and the remainder of the block was purchased for the new school building.

The White House of the Confederacy once faced similar death. Built in 1816-18, and designed by Robert Mills, the most famous architect of the day, the home originally belonged to Dr. John Brockenhough, one-time president of The Bank of Virginia.

Purchased by the city in 1861, it became the home of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, and his wife, Varina. The house took possession in 1865. The building was in the hands of the United States government until 1870 when it was returned to the city. In 1871, it was made into a public school, called Central School, and continued as such until 1890.

Move for Destruction

In November, 1899, the School Board decided the former White House no longer was suitable for a school and a move was made to tear it down. The building was saved, however, when Colonel John B. Cary, on Dec. 9, 1899, offered its restoration to the Board of Education for a proposition to build a new school and to the Confederate Memorial Library for use as a museum as soon as the new school was ready.

The transfer took place, appropriately on David's birthday, June 3, 1894. The house was restored and fireproofed. On Feb. 22, 1896, it was opened to the public as the Confederate Museum.

The very organization that has led the fight to preserve the memories of antebellum Richmond was born from the efforts to save the Crafter-Cabell House at 1812 East Grace St.

The William C. Branford House, at 1814, was formed when the home of Poet "Helen" seemed about to go. The unpretentious weatherboard house, built in 1784-87, originally owned by Adam Craig, father of Jane Stith Craig to whom Poe addressed his immortal poem.

In 1911, the house was purchased by the Richmond Methodist Association and, according to Miss Scott, "the garden was destroyed, the oak cut down, and a large brick building, the Methodist Institute, erected on the corner of Ninth and Franklin Streets. In 1935, this building was no longer in use and the Craig House, itself, was about ready to collapse."

Miss Scott reports that the "young pastor of Trinity Institutional Church set to work to save the house." From his effort sprung the Craig House Branch, APVA. The property was purchased in 1935-36 by that organization, the Methodist Institute torn down in 1937 and the house, kitchen and garden gradually restored by gifts.

For some time the house was used as a Negro school, but this was transferred to Virginia Union University just before World War II. Since then, the house has been rented to various persons, including Miss Elizabeth Fleet, history teacher at Thomas Jefferson High School, who died in an accident last year.

There are many other old houses that have been put to good use.

The Wickham-Valentine House, built in 1812, is used as a museum.

The Norman Stewart House, at 707 East Franklin Street, built in 1814 and once the residence of General Robert E. Lee, in recent years has been the headquarters of the Virginia Historical Society.

The handsome home of Bolling W. Haxall, built at 211 East Franklin St., in 1858, was sold to the Woman's Club in 1900 and has been its headquarters ever since.

Early picture of Call House
Old home is a funeral parlorCall House, as remodeled
The old adapts to businessPhoto from Valentine Museum and Library
The John Marshall House
Women fought to save it

Valentine Museum's Exhibit

The photograph of the 103-year-old Nolting House will have the place of honor when the Valentine Museum holds a preview of a new exhibition of "Old Buildings in Modern Richmond" Tuesday.

Focal point of the exhibit of enlarged photographs will be 22 buildings designated by the City Planning Commission's advisory committee on historic zoning as those "most essential to preserve."

Also included will be photographs of buildings deemed "important," "desirable" and "interesting" to preserve. Each group will be broken down into "churches," most of which still are used for religious worship; "buildings now in public use," many of them the places of former battles, and "residences."

The exhibition will be open to the public on Wednesday and will continue through December.