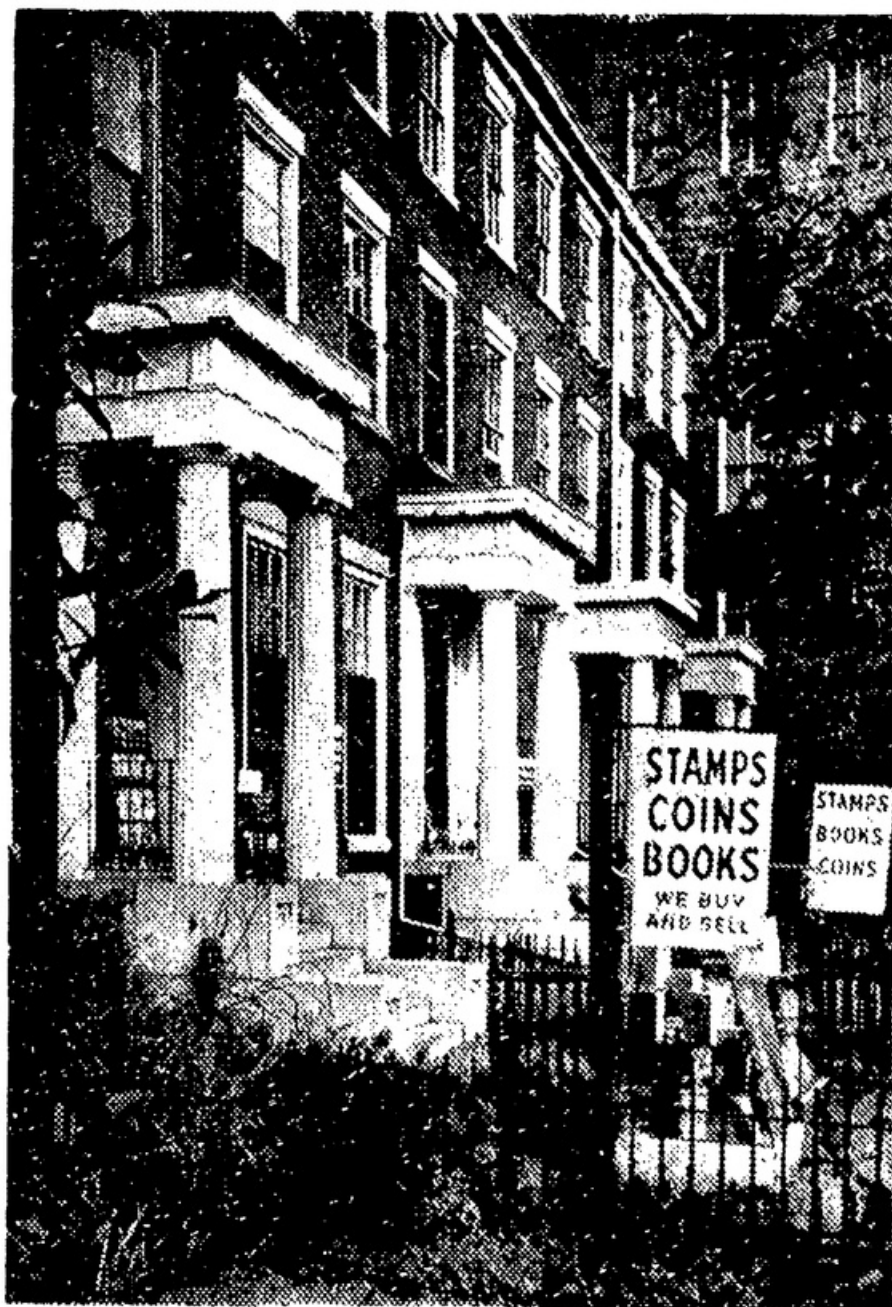
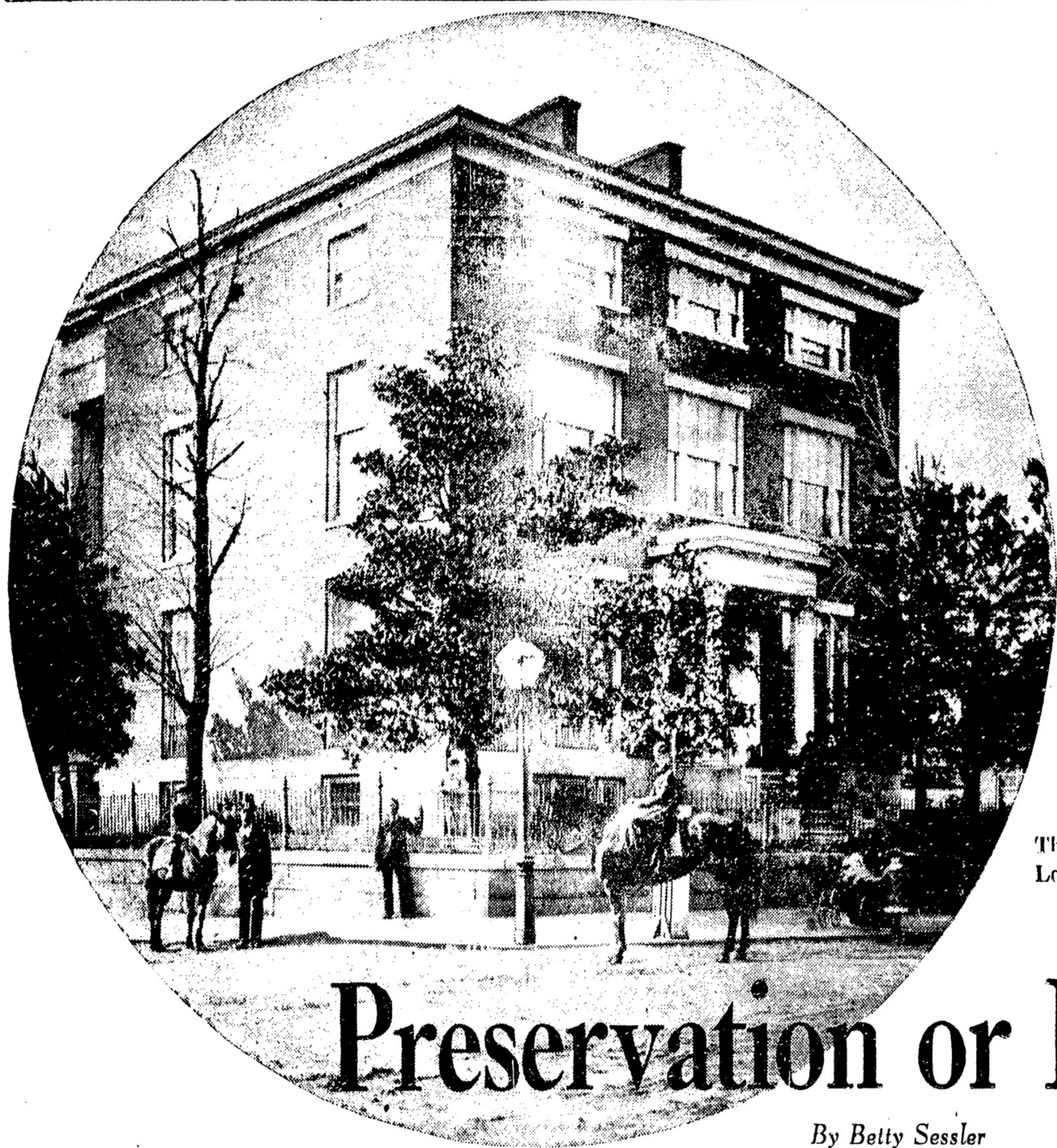


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Richmond 11, Virginia, Sunday, September 24, 1950



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 Nolling House
Lost to progress

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 touched off again with the planned demolition of the 103-year-old Nolling 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 futile effort to save the magnolia-framed mansion 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 adapted to its use and will be razed.

The fight to preserve the flavor of the Old South is a family affair to a small group of Richmonders who have devoted their lives to saving fine examples of early architecture from the wreckers.

Some of the city's most famous landmarks just 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 destroying the feeling of the old. An insurance company at 116 South Third St. has made attractive offices out of the 103-year-old George House. One of the oldest homes in Richmond has become a funeral parlor.

Other Homes Levelled

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 a year ago when 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 upon a plan of historic zoning which might save some of the finer 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 R. Stanton, then president of the William Byrd Branch of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities; Marcellus Wright, Jr., Richmond architect; and Miss Mary Wingfield Scott, who sometimes is referred to as Richmond's "Great Preserver" because of her efforts at saving old homes.

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 Nolling 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 Nollings, 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, 211 West Franklin St., dated 1852 and still owned by the family.

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

Across Main Street is the Caskey House, built by Michael Hancock in 1808-09, and used by the Red Cross as headquarters since 1942.

The Bransford House, at 13 North Fifth St., built by Frederick Bransford, a tobaccoist, in 1840, now is used by Second Presbyterian Church as the Cecil Memorial House. The Barrett House, 13 South Fifth St., built in 1844, was saved from destruction in 1936 when purchased by Miss Scott and Mrs. John H. Roebuck. This building now houses the office of D. D. Fitzgerald, Inc. The Scott-Clarke House, built in 1841 at 9 South Fifth St., is now headquarters of the Richmond Gunn 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, known as the Daniel Call House, was built before 1796 and originally was located on the southeast corner of Broad and Ninth Streets.

Miss Scott, in her book, "House of Old Richmond," says a sale was made to Alexander Brooks in 1849 who paid \$180 for "one wooden house" and \$125 for one paling fence. Brooks had the house moved to its present location 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 preserve it."

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

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 1870's, it was the home of Henry Coatsworth 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 Nolling House flare-up last month, the most recent controversy was that of Linden Row, built in 1847-53.

Two houses in the row of Greek Revival-style residences, 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 shops, when City Council acted on the other five houses in February, 1949.

Thus, 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 houses, she says, are well suited to serve as office buildings for large companies and she hopes to put them to that use.

Oldest Once Doomed

Richmond's very earliest house still in existence once was doomed for demolition. The Old Stone House, built before 1783, passed down through the family of Samuel Ege until it was auctioned in 1911.

Threatened with destruction, it was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Granville G. Valentine for the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. For several years it was rented as an antique shop and then was vacant for some time.

Mr. and Mrs. Archer Jones conceived the idea of making it into a shrine to Poe even though there was no indication that he had ever visited the home. The shrine was organized in 1921 and opened to the public the following year. Ingeniously had saved an unusual house.

The Richmond School Board, dedicated to educating young people, was almost responsible for destroying the home of the first chief justice of the United States.

The home of John Marshall, built in 1788-90, went to his daughter, Mary, after his death in 1835. In 1907, the lot, by then reduced to 64 feet on Marshall and 154 feet on Ninth Street, was purchased from Marshall's granddaughters, the Misses Anne and Emily Harvie, by the city of Richmond as part of the site of the new high school.

Walter Russell Bowie's life of Mary Cooke Branch Munford (the late Mrs. Beverley B. Munford, who in 1919 became the first woman to serve on the city School Board) tells of her fight to save the building.

The city, Bowie writes, had put the house in office and storage use. The whole look of it was neglected and drab. Mrs. Munford, who heard of the plan to tear down the building, by chance, from a School Board member, thought it an act of irreparable vandalism. She aroused the Richmond Education Association and many other organizations of the city

until they stormed the School Board and City Council with their protests.

The board and Council were reluctant to give way. They insisted that if they preserved the Marshall House, they would have to crowd the high school onto the part of the half-block frontage that was left. This, too, failed to satisfy Mrs. Munford and her followers. They refused to accept anything less than a "fitting" school.

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 Brackenborough, onetime president of The Bank of Virginia.

Purchased by the city in 1861, it became the home of Jefferson Davis until the Yankees 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, 1889, 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 R. Cary, on Dec. 9, 1890, offered a resolution to the Board of Aldermen that an appropriation be made for a new school and that the White House be turned over to the Confederate Memorial Literary Society for use as a museum as soon as the new school was ready.

The transfer took place, appropriately enough, on Davis' birthday, June 3, 1864. 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 Craig House at 1812 East Grace St.

The William Byrd Branch, APVA, was formed when the home of Poe's "Elen" 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 Nineteenth Street. By 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 this effort sprang the William Byrd Branch, APVA. The whole 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 art center but this work 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 automobile 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 St., built in 1844, and once the Richmond home 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 1854, was sold to the Woman's Club in 1950 and has been its headquarters ever since.

Hancock-Palmer-Caskie House
Now Red Cross headquartersEarly picture of Call House
Old home is a funeral parlorCall House, as remodeled
The old adapts to businessThe John Marshall House
Women fought to save it

Valentine Museum's Exhibit

The photograph of the 103-year-old Nolling 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 the 22 buildings designated by the City Planning Commission's advisory committee on historic zoning as those "most essential to preserve." The Nolling House was one of four houses so selected.

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 prizes of former battles, and "residences."

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