Glenview Mansion
AT ROCKVILLE CIVIC CENTER PARK

History

Glenview Mansion today is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its 1926 architecture and formal gardens, but has a rich history going back to 1838 when the core of the current house was built. The home and property have served as one of the largest farms in the region under the Bowie family 1836-1917; a country estate for the wealthy Dr. and Mrs. Lyon 1917 – 1953; and as a public destination since 1957 for the City of Rockville. Glenview Mansion is now used for private rentals as well as a variety of public programs.

Early Settlement

The region which became Montgomery County was first settled by Europeans in the early 18th century. Before Rockville was formed, large tracts of land were sold to wealthy plantation and merchant families. Many of these tracts were not farmed or built on until years after they were first sold.

The land where Glenview Mansion now stands was once divided into several smaller tracts of land that were surveyed in the 18th century, including "Mill Land" and "Hobson's Choice."

Tobacco was a profitable crop in the region during the early 18th century and it was probably grown on the few small farmsteads which were likely to have existed on these tracts. Within a couple of generations, tobacco had robbed the soil of its fertility and the land was left fallow or planted with grains such as wheat, barley and corn. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, some of the most successful businesses near today's Rockville were grain mills such as Muncaster Mill and Veirs' Mill.

1836-1917

In 1836, Judge Richard Johns Bowie, an attorney from a wealthy Georgetown family, purchased three tracts of land to form a property that he called "Glen View." Judge Bowie was well-known as an attorney who served as State's Attorney for Montgomery County, a U.S. Congressman and Chief Judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals.

Bowie's 1836-38 house, which forms the core of the present Glenview Mansion, was a four-bay stone building. Because no illustration of the house during this period is known to exist, an exact description of the architecture is not available. It is likely that the house had relatively simple decorative features with a front portico, perhaps in a Greek Revival style. The grounds probably included a barn, summer kitchen, smoke house, privy and sheds as did most Maryland farms. Large estates like "Glen View" also included slave quarters.

After the Civil War, Judge Bowie deeded a small piece of ground in the northeastern corner of the park, referred to as the Smith property, to one of his former slaves. Today, the foundation and a hand-dug stone well survive. In the woods across Avery Road to the east of this property are the remnants of a family burial plot. On a 1917 city map, it is labeled "colored cemetery." Parts of gravestones have been found on the site.

In 1880, Judge Bowie donated five acres of his land for the Rockville Cemetery. An additional two acres were donated by Judge Bowie's widow, Catherine in 1889. Many prominent local citizens are buried in Rockville Cemetery, including Judge Bowie and his wife. Author F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda were originally buried here, but were moved in 1981 to St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church Cemetery in downtown Rockville.

The earliest known photograph of Glenview, which was taken at the time of Catherine Bowie's death in 1891, was published in 1904 in the Baltimore Sun. It featured a steeply pitched roof, a prominent cross-gable, a second-story porch and had many gothic details, reflecting the architectural style between 1850 and 1870.

In the early 20th century, the mall (front lawn) had several features that have since been removed, among them a formal rose garden, which was located on the west side of the mall. A barn located on the north side of house was later removed to allow for the building of the mansion's east wing.

From 1904-1917, Glenview was owned by Charles J. Fox, Franklin Fox and Emma J. Walters. During this period, the owners made further changes to the mansion by adding a simple frame addition to the east side of the house where the porch had been, three front dormer windows and a front portico with an enclosed second-story porch.

1917-53

In 1917, Mrs. Irene Smith purchased Glenview and in 1923 married James Alexander Lyon, a prominent Washington DC cardiac surgeon. The intended use of the property was as a summer home. It was common at that time for wealthy families to purchase second homes for entertaining.

The Lyon family undertook a major expansion and stylistic transformation of the mansion, and implemented significant changes to the property's landscape. The existing house was redesigned in a neo-classical style popular at the time as a result of high-profile restorations such as Williamsburg, VA.

A west wing which included a conservatory was added and the east wing was reclad to match the new construction. A large wing was also added to the north side of the house with servants' quarters located on the second floor and a covered "arcade" entrance with French doors and fanlights.

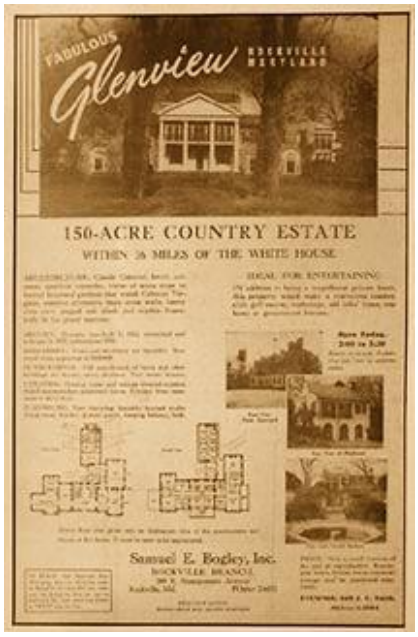
Inside the Glenview Mansion, the entire first-floor space of the 1836-38 Bowie house was combined into a grand entry hall with a large staircase and a palladian window above the landing. Several doors from the Bowie house appear to have been reinstalled in the renovated house and the marble mantelpiece appears to date from that period.

On the property, the Lyons added a formal garden, a pond, deer enclosure, wooden gazebo, a curved stone wall with a decorative iron gate for the drive and a full-size Cottage playhouse for their daughter. Behind the playhouse, a bowling green was added. A large number of outbuildings were also constructed on the property, including a garage, a dairy, several barns and a gatekeeper's residence. A large two and one-half story building was erected on the site of the present mansion's parking lot.

The mansion was put up for sale by the Lyon family in 1953, after the death of Irene Lyon in 1950. The Montgomery County Historical Society bought the property, planning to open a community museum. The Society realized after a few years that Glenview was too costly to maintain and sold the property to the City of Rockville in 1957.

1957 to present

The City purchased Glenview Mansion and surrounding 28 acres for $125,000 to become a civic center – a controversial decision based on a referendum that passed by only 40 votes. It immediately became a popular place for community meetings and events. With plans to utilize the property for historical, cultural and recreational activities, the City named it "Rockville Civic Center Park." Because of the location of the mansion, it was referred to as the "Civic Center Mansion." In deference to the mansion's history, the City restored the name "Glenview Mansion" to the house in 1993.



During the early years of ownership, the City removed many of the Lyons' outbuildings including a barn, garage and greenhouse as they were in poor condition. The1938 cottage playhouse and 1926 formal gardens remain as originally built. In time, the City purchased additional land to expand the park to its present 153 acres. The property includes a forest preserve comprised of one hundred acres.

In 1960 the City added the F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre and Social Hall to the Rockville Civic Center Park. In 2002, the Croydon Creek Nature Center was built in the park. Other park features include parking areas, tennis courts, a playground, storage and recreational facilities, as well as nature trails.

In 2007 Glenview Mansion was added to the National Register of Historic Places for the significance of the 1926 architecture and the adjoining formal gardens. In 2011, the City of Rockville designated Glenview Mansion and 64.28 acres of the surrounding land as a historic district.

The City has established policies, standards and oversight to ensure the historic integrity, aesthetic appeal, economic viability and varied usage of Glenview Mansion continues into the future.

Glenview Mansion is a public destination featuring: monthly art exhibits in the second floor galleries rooms; Sunday afternoon concerts once a month; Holiday Open Houses during December; and special programs such as the annual Bridal Expo.

Glenview Mansion may be rented for private events. Guests today experience the elegance and grandeur as it was built in 1926. Weddings, social celebrations, business meetings and conferences are all welcome.

Discover Rockville's hidden treasure, Rockville Civic Center Park and all its venues - Glenview Mansion, Cottage, F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre, Social Hall and Croydon Creek Nature Center - it's where events, arts and entertainment, history and nature come together.