Hobart Manor merges old, new

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WAYNE — George Washington never slept at Ailsa Farms. Neither did Garret A. Hobart, vice president of the United States under William McKinley, sleep at Hobart Manor.

Yet, Hobart Manor — once located on the Ailsa Farms property where William Paterson College is now situated — has been designated a national historic site by the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service.

PART OF A CASTLE built in 1877 by John McCollough, a Scottish immigrant who made his money in the Paterson wool trade, Hobart Manor was named an official state and national historic site because of its unique architectural heritage. It's one of three castles in the area, the others being Lambert Castle in Paterson and a castle on the Rutherford campus of Fairleigh Dickinson.

Known as "Haledon Hall" until its name was changed for the bicentennial, the fieldstone manor — in the heart of the college campus, nestled at the bottom of a slope behind Raubinger Hall — is in sharp contrast to the modern brick buildings surrounding it.

"I'd describe it as neo-Gothic-Tudor architecture," said Ron McArthur, as he peered out a Raubinger Hall window which looks over several "chimney pots" on the slate roof of the rectangular shaped building.

Assistant director of admissions and chairman of the college's Historic Site Committee, McArthur was in the office of Dr. Kenneth Job, coordinator of bicentennial events at William Paterson College.

Dr. Job reflected, "There's been too much emphasis on the colonial period during the bicentennial celebrations. There's a lot more to tell about where we went from there, and where we are going from this point on."

He said a commemorative ceremony will be held July 21 on the red tile terrace on the eastside of Hobart Manor when a dedication plaque, donated by the college's Alumni Association, will be unveiled.

McArthur and his committee — Virginia Randall, retired coordinator of alumni affairs, and Sally Burke, retired college librarian and Dr. Job, — did the research and accumulated historical data about Hobart Manor that convinced Trenton and Washington, D.C. of its historical importance.

Records show that Garret Hobart died in 1899 before he completed his term as vice president of the United States. His wealthy widow, Jennir Tuttle Hobart, purchased McCollough's Castle at a public auction in 1902 for a mere $5,285.

She apparently intended to use the castle as a summer home and renamed it Ailsa Farms. But she gave the mansion to her son, Garret Hobart Jr., when he was 18. Legend has it that when she presented him with the deed, he said, "What about the taxes?"

The senior Garret Hobart served as the nation's 24th vice president from 1897 until 1899. Had Hobart lived, he, and not Theodore Roosevelt, would have become president when McKinley was assassinated. While in Washington, Mrs. Hobart, as second lady, served as the White House's official hostess in place of chronically ill Mrs. McKinley. Later, Mrs. Hobart became a prominent leader in the social, philanthropic and religious activities of Paterson. Her husband died in their Paterson home, Carroll Hall.

Four years after the castle became Ailsa Farms, Hobart Jr. took his bride, Caroline Frye Briggs, there to live. Their home became a center of social and political activity as the young couple hosted prestigious guests from all over the country, including prominent senators and congressmen.

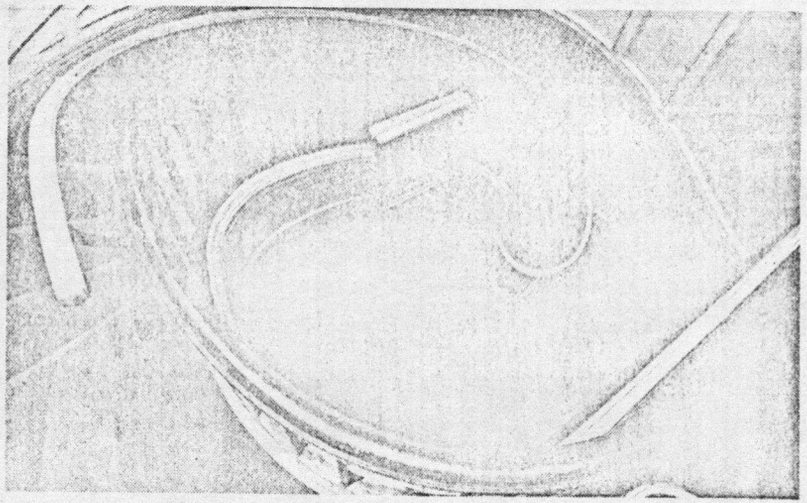
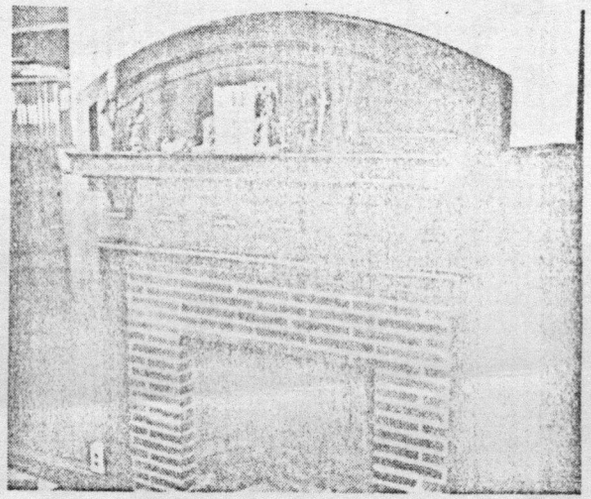
Young Hobart became the first president of the Passaic County Park Commission and vice president of the Paterson Savings Institute. In 1915 he added a red brick, three story wing that expanded the 10-room castle into a 40-room mansion including fireplaces in nearly every room in the new wing, central air conditioning, eight bathrooms and a spiral staircase in the main entrance hall.

He removed McCollough's two, eight-sided turrets and replaced them with lead glass bay windows. He also added a solarium on the roof and 11 more plots of land, or about 250 acres now occupied by William Paterson College and Camp Veritans.

Garret Jr. and his mother — who had sold her Paterson home and moved to Ailsa Farms — both died in 1941. Caroline Hobart lived alone in the manor house until 1948 when she sold it to the State of New Jersey for $200,000. The then Paterson State Teachers' College was moved from the city to Ailsa Farms in 1952.

Time has marched on and a YMCA is now located on the former site of Carroll House in Paterson.

Hobart Manor, however, is anything but a musty manse. The interior of its ivy-covered walls is teaming with college activity because the 100-year-old edifice houses the college's registrar, admissions and academic affairs offices.



The historic Hobart Manor (above) houses a sleek spiral staircase (at right) and several fireplaces, (below) each unique in its own way and designed to blend with a particular room's decor — from sophisticated (far left) to ornate to functional.