

IF THESE WALLS ...

Bodley-Bullock House, home to many prominent Lexingtonians, turns 200

By Maryjean Wall / Photos by David Stephenson

Pause at Market and Second streets, squint into the past, and you might see Gen. Thomas Bodley coming home from the War of 1812-14. The general was searching for a house to suit his social standing, a stature greatly enhanced with this popular war. Even Lexington's own Henry Clay had promised the U.S. Senate that Americans were fully capable of snatching Canada from the British.

The British countered by leaving the White House a smoking ruin. The war pretty much ended in a draw, but Bodley returned to a city celebrating victory with a procession in which throngs carried a thousand lighted candles through Lexington streets.

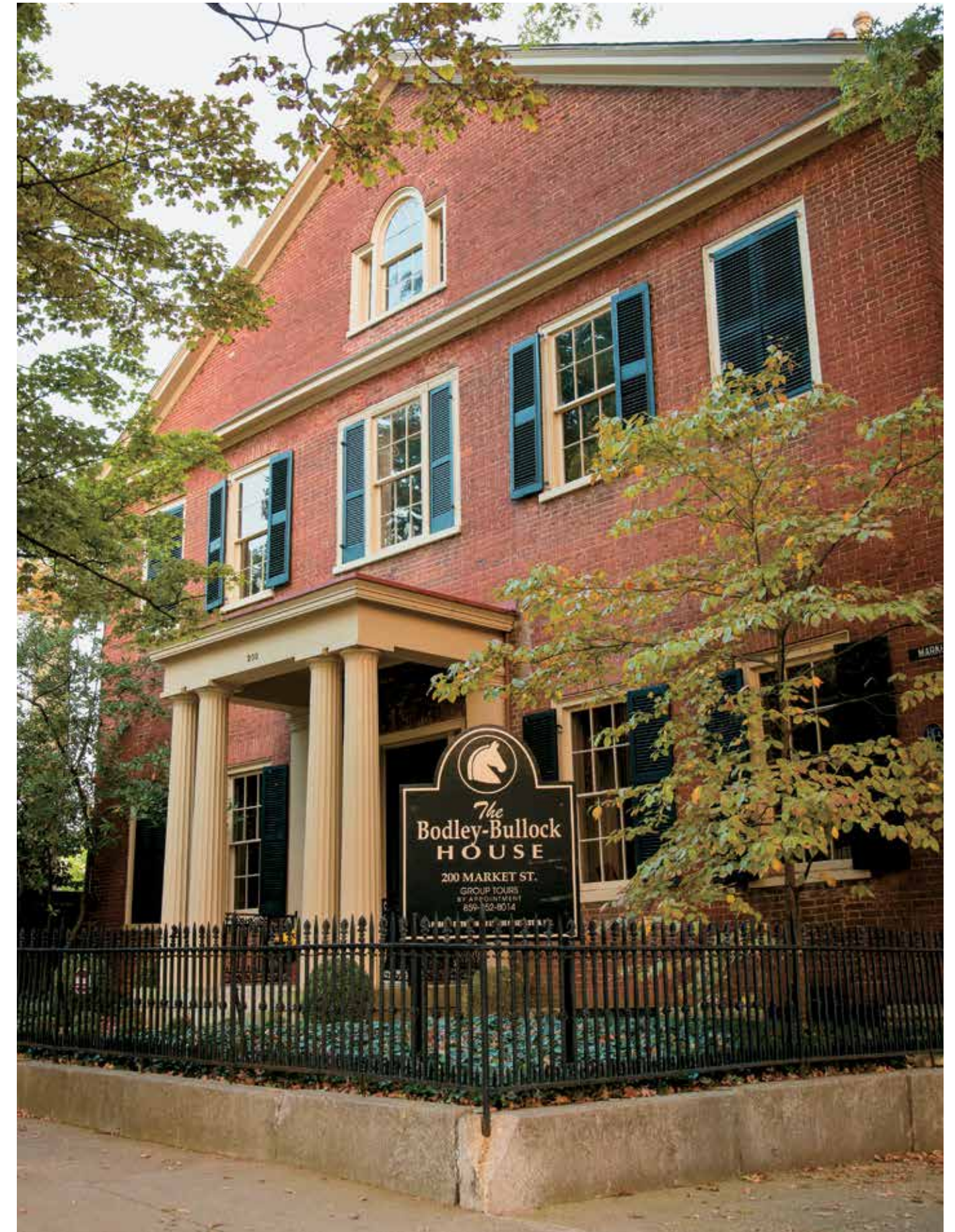
He soon found the house of his dreams. In 1814 Bodley, 44, paid a merchant named Thomas Pindell \$10,000 for a brick residence, newly built by Samuel Long, at Market and Second streets. The building has been known in more recent years as the Bodley-Bullock House, with the Bullock portion of the name taken from the last among its private owners, Waller and Minnie Bullock.

The Bodley-Bullock House has history. It also has a ghost. This year marked its bicentennial, a milestone few Bluegrass buildings have attained. From its location at the southeast corner of Gratz Park, the house has witnessed immense change over time, from those days when homing pigeons carried race results — to modern times when videos stream over smart phones.

To appreciate this lengthy existence, consider that Bodley and his wife, Catherine, entertained when socialites in Lexington still clung to the Colonial custom of piling their powdered hair in towering arrangements atop their heads.

For the past 30 years the Junior League of Lexington has leased the house from Transylvania University, making its headquarters here and making the building available for wedding receptions and other events. Modern brides descend an elliptical staircase that remains as awe-inspiring as it was during the Bodley era.

The stately three-story Federal-style brick mansion occupies a prominent corner of Gratz Park. Period furnishings add to the historic ambience.



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Waller Overton Bullock, a physician and also a sculptor, crafted a bronze bust of the family's gardener, Frank Ross.



A view of the Bodley-Bullock House from West Second Street as it looked early in the 20th century

The house was built in the Federal style, a three-story brick presently measuring 14,004 square feet (with 10,498 square feet above ground) and with five windows across the second floor facing Market Street. The first and fifth windows of the second floor and the first window of the main floor were constructed as blind bays. Original Federal features included a fanlight doorway and a second-floor Palladian window.

The exterior was intended to match the appearance of another residence built, like a bookend, at the southwest corner of Gratz Park: the Hunt-Morgan House, also marking its bicentennial this year.

After the Bodley-Bullock house changed hands for the third time in 1834, the fanlight doorway and Palladian window facing Market Street were replaced with a square, Greek Revival porch and pediment. Soon afterward, a two-story portico was added to the north side. The intention was to add Greek Revival features to the building at a time when this architectural style had begun its wave of popularity throughout the United States.

The two-story portico on the north side faces the garden, which Minnie Barbee Pettit Bullock lovingly maintained with the help of gardener Frank Ross. Her husband, Waller Overton Bullock, a physician and also a sculptor, crafted a bronze bust of Ross that remains on display in the house. A brick wall encloses the garden, which at one time was contained within an iron fence. Buried in the garden is Bozo, the Bullocks' pet dog. Bozo's likeness, sculpted in bronze by Dr. Bullock, can be seen inside the building.

The ghost wandering the halls is said to be that of Minnie Bullock, haunting the residence as some say she did during her lifetime. She was a stern teetotaler who absolutely forbade alcohol in the house. This led husband Waller to slip across the road to the Lexington Public Library, where he managed to nip a daily drink in secret while reading the newspaper. His flask is displayed on a mantel in the house.

Despite her strict manner Minnie Bullock engaged in numerous good works. She earned

respect in the community as a founder of the Lexington Garden Club and as a leader in restoring the John Hunt Morgan House in Lexington and the Ephraim McDowell House in Danville. But the other side of her personality was legendary. She did not like children. She wrote into her will that alcohol never be served in her house.

Hence, the rising of the ghostly legend. Junior Leaguers began to sense Minnie Bullock's spectral displeasure when glass above a second-floor conference table shattered the day after the league found a legal loophole around Minnie's ban on alcohol.

On another occasion, a young boy who had gone upstairs for a nap ran back downstairs, screaming that a "mean old woman" had told him to get out of her bed. Could it have been Minnie?

The clincher has been the smell of bacon, which some swear they have noticed in the house – quite a stunner, since there is no fast food restaurant cooking up bacon nearby. Minnie reportedly ate a pound of bacon every day.

While stories of Minnie's ghost are mildly amusing, the primary narrative of the Bodley-Bullock House has been its owners. Most left a lasting mark on this city.

Bodley, a former Indian fighter, purchased the house while Lexington was experiencing a huge economic expansion as a result of the war. Some Kentuckians had grown wealthy by furnishing food, munitions, and gunpowder for the war's western campaigns. Financial growth was reflected in real estate prices. Town lots in Lexington sold for nearly as much as lots in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York.



Minnie and Frank Bullock left their imprint on the house during their ownership.

Bodley's house was central to the city — and to Lexington society. The ultimate social event was Bodley's escorting the popular French general, the Marquis de Lafayette, past the house in 1825 on a procession to Transylvania University.

Lexington could not coast forever on its rising fortunes. When a global financial crisis developed throughout the United States in 1819, this city, like many others, was hit hard. Real estate began selling for one-sixth the amount that property had brought a few years previously. The *Kentucky Gazette* cited one example: a house that formerly sold for \$15,000 selling for only \$1,300. Men were out of work and begged for jobs where once jobs had gone begging for men. The effects lingered into the 1820s. Soon after Lafayette's visit, Gen. Bodley lost his savings — and his house.

Bodley lived only until 1833. He was among the victims of a cholera plague that swept through the city that year. One of the strangest stories to emerge from the epidemic was that of a cellar-digger, William "King" Solomon. This man, an al-

coholic, was often in trouble with city authorities. Yet in a remarkable turnaround he won the city's gratitude for taking on the monumental task of digging graves for cholera victims when most people had fled the community in fear. Samuel Woodson Price painted Solomon's portrait in 1849, and the artwork, initially exhibited at the Phoenix Hotel during the 1850s, has long been on display in the Bodley-Bullock House. The painting was so favorably received in the 1850s that the *Louisville Journal* reported with great admiration of the piece, "You can see the whiskey in every feature of the old fellow..."

Bodley appeared to be renting a house on Main Street, near Walnut Street, when he died at age 61.

The Bodley-Bullock House had passed through several more owners before 1837 when a businessman, Daniel Vertner, pur-



With help from gardener Frank Ross, Minnie Bullock lovingly tended the garden.

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The spiral staircase is one of the house's important architectural features. Quilts that belonged to Minnie Bullock's sister and made in Eastern Kentucky remain on display today, as do Minnie's collection of snuff bottles.



chased it for \$15,000. Vertner died in 1861, the year the Civil War commenced, but his wife, Elizabeth, and niece, Rosa Vertner Jeffrey, carried on in their residence. The latter, a novelist and poet, penned a novel, *Woodburn*, about social life in the antebellum South.

Jeffrey slanted her writing nostalgically for those mythical magnolias shining in the Southern moonlight. But like many others, she took the wrong side. Kentucky, caught in the middle as a border state of divided sentiment, developed into highly contested territory. At various times, either the Union Army or the Confederates set up camp in Lexington — with their officers occupying the former Bodley House.

One time, the federals threw a grand ball in the house, painting an American flag in chalk on the wooden floor where guests waltzed through the night. Author John Fox Jr. wrote a fictional version of this ball in *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come*.

Vertner's widow sold the house to William A. Dudley in 1865, the year the war ended. As president of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad he held a prestigious position, for the railroad was Kentucky's main connection with the booming North — and the recovering South. Dudley brought his father, Dr. Benjamin Winslow Dudley, to live in the house until both died in 1870. Dr. Dudley was a renowned surgeon who pioneered medical techniques and had assisted in elevating Transylvania to its vaunted status in the 1820s.

Descendants of these Dudleys lived in the house until one among them, Mrs. Dudley Short, sold the residence in 1912 to the last of its private owners, the Bullocks. The Bullocks were leading citizens (he was a founder of what became the Lexington Clinic; she, the founder of the Garden Club of Lexington), but their renown did not eclipse that of their long-term house guest: Minnie's sister, Katherine Rebecca Pettit, who helped found settlement schools at Hindman and Pine Mountain. The schools brought education to generations of mountain residents.

Many quilts and coverlets handmade in Eastern Kentucky and once belonging to Pettit remain in the house. Also on display is Minnie Bullock's collection of snuff bottles, some dating to the



SUZANNE DORMAN

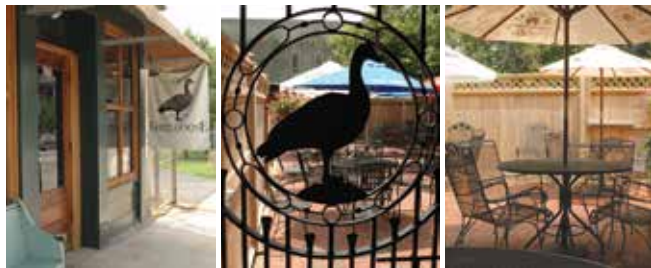
The Hunt-Morgan House, on the southwest corner of Gratz Park, shares a history with the Bodley-Bullock House. Both celebrated their 200th anniversary this year; both have been home to families of significant note in Lexington.

John Wesley Hunt was among the first millionaires west of the Allegheny Mountains when he built this house in 1814. As far back as 1795 he had opened a general store in Lexington, according to *The Kentucky Encyclopedia*. He participated in two of Kentucky's emerging industries, importing Thoroughbreds from the East and manufacturing hemp packaging for cotton bales.

He also began a dynasty that was to include his grandson, Confederate Gen. John Hunt Morgan, and great-grandson, scientist Thomas Hunt Morgan. The latter was the first Kentuckian to win a Nobel Prize, in 1933.

The Hunt-Morgan House stood in danger of destruction in 1955 when the Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation was organized specifically to save the residence. The Trust acquired and continues to maintain the Hunt-Morgan House as its flagship property.

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Even today the gardens of the Bodley-Bullock House provide a restful sanctuary.

1700s. Minnie's role as an insider in the snuff bottle culture is revealed in a number of letters held by the University of Kentucky's Special Collections. The letters were written in 1949 and tell about the trail of stolen snuff bottles. Minnie apparently received the letters as a matter of interest to an insider. Some of the stolen bottles were valued at \$200 to \$550.

Like Gen. Bodley before him, Dr. Bullock saw action in the nation's armed forces. He served in France during World War I, as a major in the renowned medical corps, organized at Good Samaritan Hospital and called the Barrow Unit. Josiah Combs wrote that a crowd upward of 15,000 turned out on a drizzly day to cheer the unit as it marched to Union Station. Dignitaries presented each member with a carnation. On its return home in 1919, the unit paraded from the

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train station to Cheapside, again cheered by thousands.

The Bodley-Bullock House had come full circle with its first and last private owners serving in wars. Bullock, who retired from practice shortly after World War II in 1946, died in 1953 and his wife died in 1970. Minnie Bullock willed the house to Transylvania University, and the Junior League was awarded long-term use of the house in 1984.

The league renovated the house and garden, winning the Ida Lee Willis Memorial Foundation Award for historical preservation. Since 1986, when the restoration was completed, the league has maintained its Lexington headquarters at the house.

One day early this past summer, as the annual Lexington Junior League Charity Horse Show neared, the league's leasing office on the Bodley-Bullock property was pulling double duty: as temporary storage for an overflow of trophies and ribbons to be awarded at the horse event. The house that has played so many roles through the years was filling yet another purpose.

Ghost and all, the Bodley-Bullock House has stood as a stalwart of Lexington through 200 years, a window to the past that continues to fill an important niche in the present. **KM**



Situated throughout the house are trophies belonging to the Junior League of Lexington, which leases the Bodley-Bullock House.

The image features the logo for RW THOMPSON LANDSCAPING LLC in the upper left corner. Below the logo is a photograph of a landscaped garden. In the foreground, there is a white wooden bench with two patterned cushions and two white wooden chairs. Behind the bench is a low stone wall. In the background, there are trees and a large stone pillar. The text "Design - Installation - Maintenance" is written in the lower right corner of the photograph, along with the phone number "859-260-1122" and the website "www.rwthompsonlandscaping.com".