

# ***A FAILURE OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH “COPT” PERTAINING TO THE USE OF THE “GRASSLAND” HOME AND REAL ESTATE BY WAY OF A PROPOSED LONG-TERM LEASE***

The Trustees of The Grassland Foundation, Inc., announce reluctantly a total failure of a “meeting of the minds” between **The Grassland Foundation, Inc.**, on the one hand (as the prospective “**Lessor**”), and **Corporate Office Properties Trust (“COPT”)**, on the other hand (as the prospective “**Lessee**”), by way of a prospective long-term lease of the improved and historic “Grassland” real estate at Annapolis Junction in Western Anne Arundel County, Maryland (a “National Register” designated property) improved by the “ante bellum” “Grassland” modified Georgian-style two-story brick home and other remaining dependencies. In the last issue of the *Grassland History Notes*, it was reported that, late in the year 2000, the Trustees had been approached by the President of COPT about such a possibility and, in fact, certain rather specific, but verbal, assurances were mentioned by the COPT official in terms of “how much” money COPT was prepared to invest in the project.

To make a long story short, and after two meetings between this same COPT official and a special committee of the Trustees of The Grassland Foundation, Inc., selected to meet with COPT, COPT was unwilling to “follow through” on such verbal statements. While at least two possible versions of a proposed Lease were discussed during the course of the two meetings held at COPT's office during 2001, nothing has occurred which would indicate a possibility of an agreement with COPT on anywhere near the “terms” that were verbally discussed at the very outset (end of the year 2000). Whether economic conditions may have entered into the change in COPT's thinking is uncertain. COPT has not responded to a letter which it received from the Foundation during January, 2002, posing to COPT certain specific questions and requesting certain “yes” or “no” answers thereto. During the year 2001 COPT did employ a prominent Annapolis restoration architect, who “surveyed” existing conditions at the home and who prepared therefrom in some detail a Preliminary Report of his findings, dated September 26, 2001, three copies of which your Foundation have.

## **Plan “B” Moves Forward**

Therefore, at their most recent meeting (April 13, 2002), the Trustees of The Grassland Foundation, Inc., have voted approval of certain Trustees' Resolutions authorizing their officers to execute certain documents (agreement) with The Maryland Historical Trust which hopefully will result in the funding of the following intermediate repairs/replacements to and at the main home at “Grassland”: electrical repairs (complete replacement of the wiring now in the home); roof repairs/replacements (now ongoing); replacement of a leaking furnace pipe in the basement of the home (now done and accomplished) after a furnace contractor had inspected the furnace and advised “against” any replacement of the old oil burning boiler; the employment of an architect to make the required “permit” drawings showing proposed replacements (to their original nineteenth century appearances) of the two outside “front” porches of the home (which would result in the restoration of the second floor outside porch on the “front” side of the home which parallels present Maryland Route No. 32 to the way it was in the Nineteenth Century *in lieu of* the twentieth century now “closed in” second floor porch at that same location); testing for the presence of lead based paint in the house and/or window repairs; and stabilization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century side “lean to” or rear addition to the home so that bathroom repairs/renovations can be made inside of that addition.

This will hopefully result in a “grant in aid” by the Maryland Historical Trust to the Foundation in the amount of \$50,000.00 which would be supplemented by private charitable contributions which have been assured within the limits of the work described in the preceding paragraph. The architect has been selected and is poised to begin work. The scope of the architect's employment includes his recommendation for the number and location of electrical outlets.

### **Home Continues to be Occupied**

The home continues to be occupied, for nominal rent, by Irene Cash (widow of Billy Cash, Sr., who passed away during this past Winter). It is believed that accomplishment of the foregoing will greatly improve the outside appearance of the main home.

This would represent the second "grant in aid" to the Foundation from and by the Maryland Historical Trust. Several years ago, the proceeds from a similar "matching grants" procedure resulted in the stabilization of the remaining outbuildings (including, especially, of the one remaining slave cabin).

While the foregoing moves forward, the Trustees continue (as they previously have) to keep their eyes open for possible long term uses for the property, including, especially, whether some prospective long term tenant can be found who is financially able to "pick up" the restoration/conversion process from the Foundation at the cost and expense of the prospective tenant in exchange for the several different types of "tax credits" and/or "tax deductions" which would then be available to the tenant thus making such repairs/renovations, as well as such tenant receiving from the Foundation a possible long-term tenancy of the property. This has not been and will not be easy, but hope abounds. In the meantime, the rents received from the Cashes have thus far paid the real property taxes and for minimum amounts of insurance coverage.

### **Possible Future Project**

Once the foregoing has actually occurred, the "next step" in the total restoration process would probably result in the removal of the World War II era "rear" addition (on the side of the home which parallels Hercules Road) and its possible replacement with a smaller brand new porch, with bathroom facilities possibly, that would "lead into" the Hercules Road side of the home at the location of what is believed to have been an earlier (Nineteenth century) outside door (now closed over in some fashion). However, it is emphasized that the foregoing "talked about" addition removal and replacement will have to be the subject of a future "third" combination "grant in aid" (from the State) to be "matched" with private contributions.

If any of our readers have any questions about the subject of this article or would desire to receive more information, please contact the Foundation's officers.