

# Maxwell Place



Elevation fronting Rose Street H. S. S. S.



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*The Cover: The front cover is an unsigned architectural drawing circa 1870. Possible architects for Maxwell Place were: Thomas W. Boyd, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania or Phelix L. Lundin of Lexington, Kentucky, and a native of Sweden. Note: The tower in the drawing shows a concave-sided pyramidal roof or belvedere. The belvedere is believed to have been lost during a storm in the late 1880s. The back cover is a drawing by artist John Quinn and is a composite of late 19th century photos of a Gazebo at Maxwell Springs, just below Maxwell Place.*

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## *Introduction*

Come with me back in time and let's explore the history of Maxwell Place, the President's home at the University of Kentucky. My interest in old homes is long standing. I grew up with parents who refurbished old homes because they truly enjoyed the process. My father would do all the basics, including stripping the plaster down to the brick, installing new plumbing, and rewiring the electrical system. Mother would select paint, fabrics and carpets. We'd enjoy a year or two in the lovely finished product and then move on to a new challenge.

My interest in older homes has continued through the years. Living in Maxwell Place has inspired me to research this home's intriguing past and dream about its future.

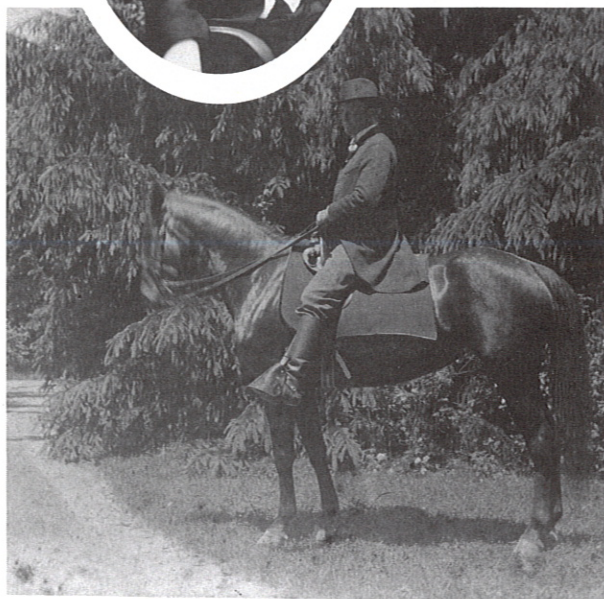
Maxwell Place, built in 1871, is an Italianate brick villa located right in the heart of the University campus. It is surrounded by an iron fence that encloses a beautiful yard with old stately trees. The residence has been the home of eight University of Kentucky presidents. It is a mansion rich in wonderful memories and fine traditions.

I would like to take you through the years and share with you some of these interesting memories and cultural events.

Judy Wethington

## *From Maxwell Springs to Maxwell Place*

*Maxwell Place circa 1890.*



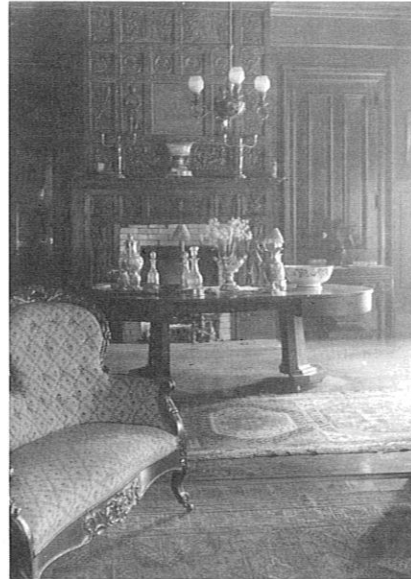
*Judge James Mulligan on horseback in front of Maxwell Place.*

Springs figure prominently in the history, natural and human, of the Bluegrass region of Central Kentucky. A hunting party encamped at McConnell Spring is said to have given Lexington its name. The three springs known as Maxwell Springs took their name from a member of that party and a founder of Lexington, John Maxwell, who owned the large tract that contained them in the southeast quadrant of early Lexington and who gave the area around the springs over to public uses. Though the springs have long since been built over and lost from sight, they were a focal point of earlier times in Lexington. The scene of militia musterings and troop encampments from the Indian Wars to the Civil War, Maxwell Springs was also the site of political gatherings, Fourth of July celebra-

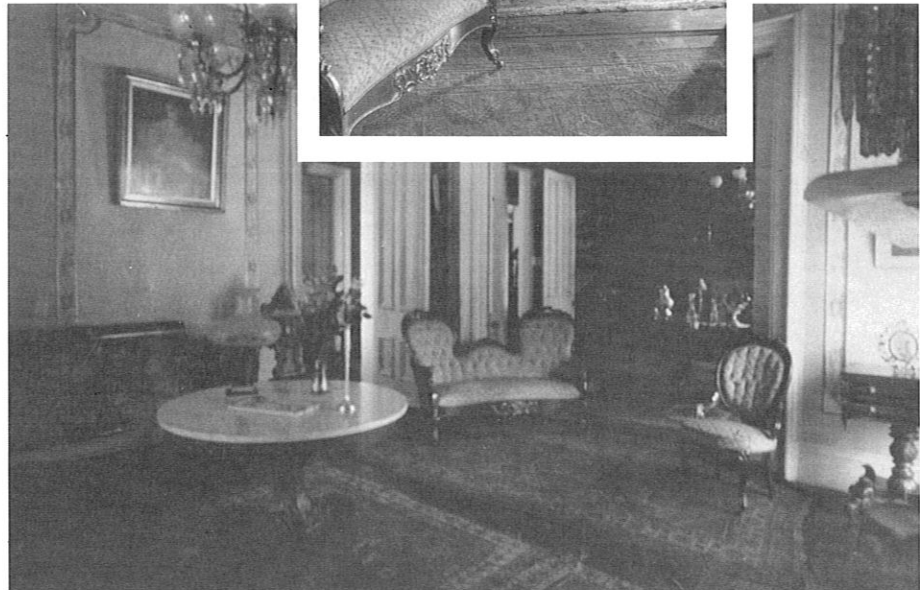


tions, and agricultural fairs. The centrality of the springs to the life of the region was noted by Henry Clay who remarked that "No man can call himself a true Kentuckian who has not watered his horse at Maxwell Springs." The statesman's own Ashland occupies a site atop the same low ridge which overlooked the springs. At midcentury, an amphitheater and other buildings including the Bullock house on the present site of Maxwell Place stood on the grounds but these were burned in 1861 when a Union encampment surrounded the springs. The area was also stripped of old-growth trees which troops cut for fuel. A national watershed, the war transformed Maxwell Springs as well. The thirteen-and-a-half acre tract which became the site of Maxwell Place was first separated from the original Maxwell holdings and sold in 1820. Shortly after the war, it was purchased by

*Dining room at Maxwell Place.*



*Music room with a view to the dining room circa 1900.*

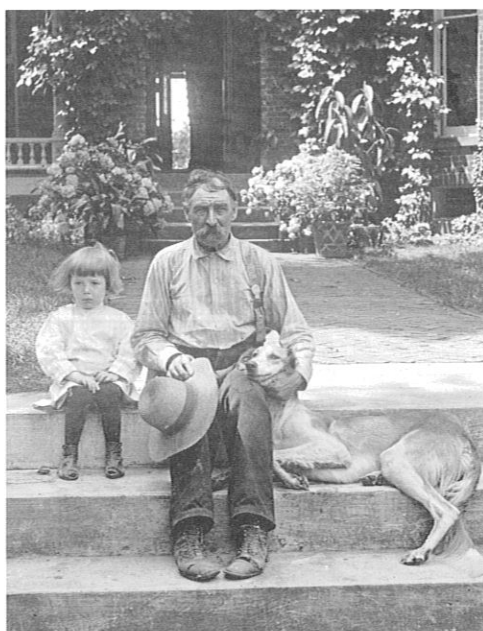




Dennis Mulligan, an Irish immigrant who became a prominent Lexington businessman and politician. It was he who had the Italianate villa known as Maxwell Place built on the property and presented it to his recently wed son and daughter-in-law, James Hillary and Mary Jackson Mulligan. His family's residence established at Maxwell Place, the younger Mulligan was soon embarked on a long and distinguished career as a journalist, jurist, legislator, and diplomat. His relatively short tenure on the bench of the Recorder's Court in Lexington earned him the title of "Judge" by which he was universally known for the rest of his life. He also gained wide renown as a formidable orator and a minor poet whose "In Kentucky" was as widely loved as it was parodied. Mary

Jackson Mulligan died in 1876; in 1881 Judge Mulligan married Genevieve Morgan Williams of a socially prominent Nashville family. It was under the second Mrs. Mulligan that Maxwell Place acquired a reputation for gracious entertaining, and a tradition of notable visitors was established. There was strife, however, between the children of the first marriage and the second, and, in his last years, the Judge was estranged from his wife. With his death in 1915, the Mulligan period of Maxwell Place came to an end.

*One of Judge Mulligan's sons with  
the gardener and his pet.*





## *Maxwell Place - The Presidential Years*

*Dr. Frank McVey, Lady MacKenzie, Sir Leslie MacKenzie  
& Mrs. McVey in the garden.*

After the death of Judge James Mulligan the University of Kentucky purchased the thirteen-and-a-half acres with residence in 1917 for \$40,000. A major renovation took place in 1917/1918 which included additions and enclosures at the rear and a long narrow pergola leading from the drive to the tower vestibule. In 1918 **Dr. Frank L. McVey** became the first presidential occupant of the newly refurbished Maxwell Place. Except for normal updating such as heating and air, upgraded kitchens, personal decorating, and other necessary repairs the house has not changed that much since 1918. The house during



*A gathering on the lawn in 1927.*



*Maxwell Place after the 1917 renovation.*



*Getting ready for a tea at Maxwell Place.*

the years of the McVey residency was beautifully appointed with paintings by Bodpotchin, Hergesheimer, and etchings by Edward Fiske. Furnishings included Duncan Phyfe couches in the library and Empire-style furniture in the dining room. Dr. and Mrs. McVey started a tradition of gracious hospitality and welcomed as visitors students, townspeople, and the distinguished from



*The wedding feast for Janet McVey and Harry Tilton in the sun room.*



all over the world. The gardens and grounds of Maxwell Place were the settings for huge student teas and receptions in the spring and fall each year, with hundreds attending. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt's visit in 1934 was the largest social event of the McVey era, which ended in 1940.



*Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt and scouting attendants under the pergola 1934.*



*Dr. & Mrs. Herman Donovan.*



**Dr. Herman L. Donovan**, the University's fourth president, and Mrs. Donovan moved into Maxwell Place in July 1941. The Donovans presided over the house during the war years and the post war expansion. Continuing in the McVey tradition, the Donovans entertained and welcomed such guests as Alben Barkley, Jesse Stuart, Milton Eisenhower, and Fred M. Vinson.

**Dr. Frank Dickey**, former Dean of the College of Education, brought his young family to the freshly decorated presidential house in December 1956. Vivid colors in the decor included brick red in the library, turquoise in the kitchen, and bright Kentucky blue in the two boys' room. Notable additions were two large brass chandeliers from the state Capitol at Frankfort, one of which was hung in the reception area and the other in the living room.



*President and Mrs. Dickey, sons Joe and Frank Jr. and daughter Ann at the piano.*



*President and Mrs. Kirwan presenting the Spoke Wheel award to Dick Webb.*



The Vice President for Administration at the University of California at Berkeley, **John W. Oswald**, was appointed the sixth President of the University. Dr. Oswald and his family moved into Maxwell Place in 1963, but resided there for only a short period of his administration. In November 1967, the University trustees authorized the demolition of the presidential house. Not a glorious era for the aging Italianate mansion.

In August 1968, former U.K. football coach and Dean of the Graduate School **Dr. Albert D. Kirwan** became interim president. Dr. Kirwan and his wife Betty decided to move to Maxwell Place and once again establish it as the home of the University President. During his tenure the decision to tear down Maxwell Place was reversed. On 27 May, 1969, the Board of Trustees changed Dr. Kirwan's title from Interim President to that of President.



*President John D. Oswald, 1965.*

*Dr. David P. Roselle.*



**Dr. Otis Singletary**, Vice Chancellor of the University of Texas at Austin, became the eighth President of the University in the summer of 1969. The Board of Trustees gave Dr. Singletary and his family the choice of moving to Maxwell Place or to another location in Lexington. The Singletarys wisely chose the former and for eighteen years lived and entertained as had presidents since 1918.

On 1 July, 1987, **Dr. David P. Roselle**, former Provost of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, became the ninth President of the University. After some substantial redecorating and upgrading Dr. Roselle moved his family into the 116-year-old dwelling. The Roselles continued the tradition of the previous presidents of entertaining and making Maxwell Place a center for receptions and gatherings.



*Dr. and Mrs. Otis Singletary.*



*President and Mrs. Charles T. Wethington, Jr.*



*Front entrance to Maxwell Place, Spring 1992.*



University of Kentucky Community College Chancellor **Charles T. Wethington, Jr.** became Interim President in December 1989. Dr. Wethington and his wife Judy moved to Maxwell Place in November 1990. In September 1990 Wethington became



*Dining room with chandelier from state Capitol and table from the McVey period.*



*The library.*





*The sun room.*

U.K.'s tenth President and the eighth to occupy this venerable home. The final section of this booklet shows Maxwell Place as it looks today. The beautiful color photos vividly express the enduring elegance and charm of this very special home, as well the taste and style of its present occupant.



*The entry hall and staircase.*



*The garden.*



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### *The Colophon*

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