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PRINCE WILLIAM

EXTRA

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The Bel Air plantation house will open its doors to the public tomorrow for the first time in 15 years. Bill Naedele, right, and his wife, Randi, have made major renovations since they moved in. Randi Naedele grew up in the house, which her parents bought in 1949.



BY MARGARET F. THOMAS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Bel Air Tour to Reveal a Houseful of History

By CHRISTINA A. SAMUELS
Washington Post Staff Writer

They say ghosts walk the halls of Bel Air, a 200-year-old former plantation tucked in the midst of Dale City.

Tomorrow, visitors will have a chance to share the halls with the spirits, as Bel Air opens its doors to the public for the first time in 15 years.

Even if the ghosts appear, guests have nothing to fear. The ghosts confine their

activity to mysterious footsteps, slammed doors or an icy-cold hand on the back of a neck, said Randi Naedele, who grew up in Bel Air, moved away, then returned to Prince William County in 1992. She and her husband, Bill, live in the house now.

Tomorrow's open house, from 1 to 4 p.m., is a fund-raiser for the Weems-Botts Museum in Dumfries. At Bel Air, there will be entertainers in Colonial dress, and visitors are welcome to bring a picnic lunch. No children under

10 will be allowed inside the house.

Bel Air, a 14-room, three-story house, was built in 1740. However, its foundation is the remnant of a fort built decades earlier, about 1680. In Prince William, only Rippon Lodge, another private home near Dumfries, is believed to be older.

Bel Air retains many of the features of its Colonial past, including a row of cedar trees that marked a carriage trail leading

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Historic Bel Air House Opens Doors to Visitors

BEL AIR, From Page 1

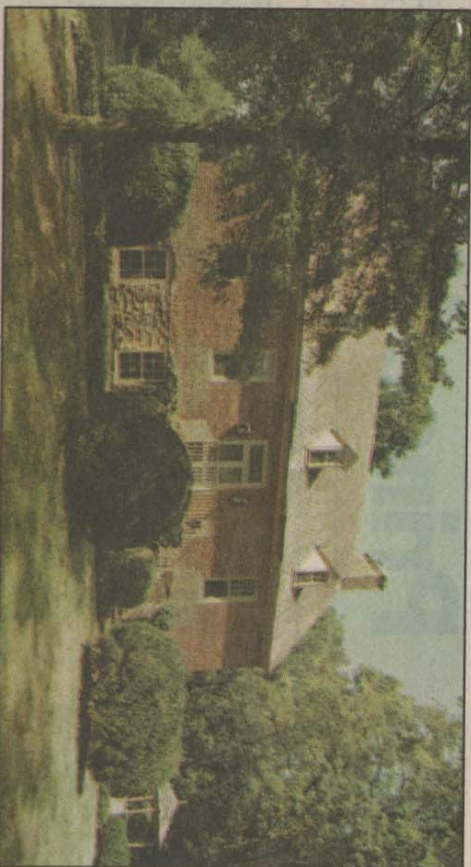
to the front of the house, a 22-foot-wide chimney and a movable partition in the central hall that allowed the drawing room to become a grand room for parties.

Major Charles Ewell, a cousin of the Washington family, built the house. George Washington slept there, reportedly, on a honeymoon trip to Mount Vernon. Parson Mason Locke Weems, the Washington biographer who invented the famous cherry tree story, married

Ewell's granddaughter Frances. They moved into Bel Air in 1808 or 1809.

Randi Naedele's parents, William and Anne Flory, bought the house in 1949, beginning a restoration project that would take decades. The family restored the original architecture, brought in period furnishings and installed electricity and running water.

Bill and Randi Naedele also have made major renovations, shoring up Bel Air's sagging foundations. Randi Naedele said she didn't



PHOTOS BY MARGARET E. THOMAS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Excavations of the grounds of the Bel Air plantation, left, have turned up such items as pieces of English pottery, Indian arrowheads and British coins. A medallion, below, is embedded in the house, declaring it a historic property.

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think about how special Bel Air was as she was growing up. The isolated location meant there were only a few children within miles of her home. She and her brother learned to entertain themselves on the farm.

But now she appreciates the solitude.

"I feel as though I'm in an entirely separate, disappointed world," Randi Naedele said.

Even the grounds around Bel Air hold a part of history. Students excavating a small piece of land uncovered clay roofing tiles, shards of English pottery, buttons and belt buckles of Union soldiers, Indian arrowheads and British coins.

Prince William is already well known for its Civil War history. In Bel Air, the county has a well-preserved remnant of its history before the Revolutionary War, said Jeanne Hochmuth, the curator of the Weems-Botts Museum.

"When you go there, it's like you're going back in time, even more than in some other places," Hochmuth said.

Tickets for the open house, at 5299 Saratoga Lane in Dale City, are \$10 for adults and \$3 for children 10 and younger. Children younger than 6 are admitted free. For more information, call the Weems-Botts Museum at 221-3346.

