

Historic Ben Lomond House targeted for renovation and a "new life"

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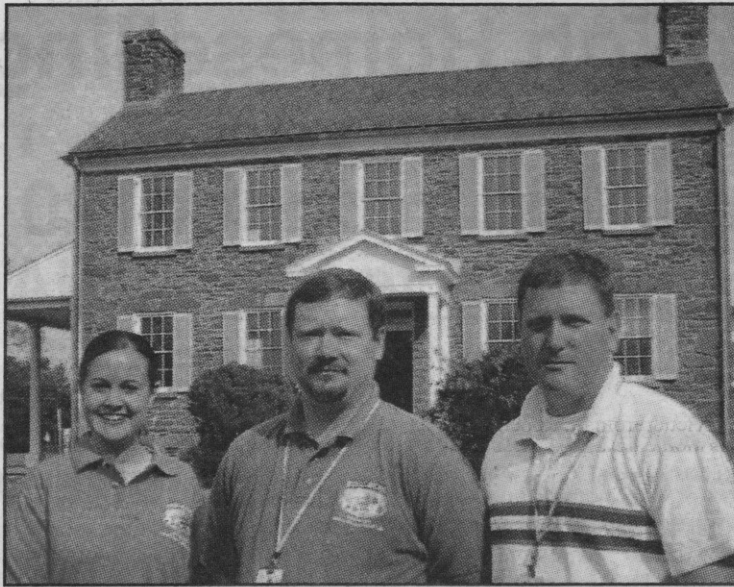
If local history buffs had their way, Prince William County would fix up all the historic buildings currently falling into disrepair. The Public Works Department has another plan, though, a plan not only to restore but also to reuse structures, giving them new life. "We can't restore everything. We need to find a use for these buildings," said Historic Preservation Manager Brendon Hanafin.

Currently, there are active preservation projects at seven county historic sites, including Ben Lomond Historic Site on Sudley Manor Drive, Old Bennett School and the Barnes House, according to Hanafin. The county also is negotiating with the owner of Williams Ordinary, who has expressed interest in selling his property.

At Ben Lomond, workers have installed new cedar roofs and stabilized three outbuildings, including a dairy, smokehouse and slave quarters. Hanafin said he looks forward to interpreting the grounds, noting there are few existing sites in the county that include slave quarters.

"It's exciting that we have the opportunity to talk about different cultures in our history," he said.

Brian Posey, site manager, said the house, built in 1832, was used as a field hospital in 1861, and still has many of the original signatures, or



Catherine Hubbard / the Bull Run Observer

Katie Finucan, interpreter, Brian Posey, site manager, and Brendon Hanafin, historic preservation manager at the Prince William County Department of Public Works, are working to preserve and interpret the Ben Lomond house, which is undergoing a series of renovations to renew the site for future generations.

lesced there. He said at one time every available space was used to house the soldiers, even the small landing in the staircase leading to the upstairs. "It was so packed with soldiers you could not walk without stepping on one," he said. The county is still improving the house and expects to install new furniture and wallpaper, he said. Hanafin noted that the best of the graffiti would be on display after renovations.

Eventually, the site will feature restrooms and a giftshop, Hanafin said.

"All of our sites are growing," he added. He noted that since the site opened in July, there have been 800 visitors.

Recently, Hanafin presented an update on historic preservation efforts in the county, where he discussed efforts to restore the Barnes House, an important African American site in the county that had been slated for demolition as part of the project to widen VA 234. Once located in the Independent Hill area, the mid-19th century home

has been moved to a temporary site where it awaits a final destination. The department plans to interpret the building, one of the county's only remnants of a post-Civil War African-American Settlement, and hold education programs there, he said.

Williams Ordinary, a tavern in the 1760s, will likely serve once again as an eatery, this time an upscale restaurant, where friends and families can gather and talk about the day's events.

"We don't want to stray too far from what it was built for," said Hannifin, who has worked with the department for three years, after serving as an assistant manager of operations at Leesylvania State Park in Woodbridge. "It's a beautiful building," Hanafin said of the tavern.

Anyone who has visited the Judicial Center on Lee Avenue in Manassas may have been intrigued by a beautiful old school next door. Perhaps passersby paused from their busy day to admire its deep red brick, its long, wide windows and its tall front columns.

The inside of the Bennett School, built in 1908 as an agricultural school, is just as captivating. When workers removed the walls and other structures added mostly in the 1960s and 1970s, they discovered the original decorative moldings, original windowsills completely intact and 10-foot long slate chalkboards.

"Everything's intact," Hanafin said. "It's almost as if the folks who put

in later things knew the importance of the historical site," he continued.

The school, now vacant, will serve as a training center, Hanafin said. Redesign and construction should be complete by late 2006.

On Oct. 30, the staff will host a series of hard-hat tours of the school. Call 703-792-4060 for more details.

Residents who were schooled there are invited to share their stories, photographs and mementos,

Hanafin said. "We want to hear stories about the school. They will help us tremendously," he explained.

Residents can help preserve these and other historic landmarks by joining the Prince William Historic Preservation Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to raising funds for preserving county-owned historic sites. The foundation has raised about \$10,000 since its inception in 2003 and is planning more outreach efforts and projects for the upcoming year. "There's a lot of good stuff that they'll be doing," said Hanafin.

"There's been a tremendous amount of positive reaction from the community," Hanafin said, noting that people from outside the county have been supportive as well. "Memberships are coming in on a weekly or daily basis," he added.

More information on becoming a member of the foundation is available at 703-792-4754 or by e-mail: historicpreservation.pwcgov.org.