

Manassas Journal Messenger
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Intruders a problem for historic house

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By BECCA BLOND
 MANASSAS JOURNAL MESSENGER

■ MANASSAS PARK

One hundred and thirty nine years ago Gen. Joseph Johnston of the Confederate States Army barked out orders to his men in a bright red brick building known as the Conner House. Back then the Conner House was shiny and new and full of life.

Today the house is anything but. Its red bricks are dull and some of them are missing altogether. Its windows are boarded up, its wooden floors broken and sagging and the only people residing in the building are doing so illegally.

The Conner House, on Conner Drive in Manassas Park, has a hole in the brick on its south side. Council member William Wren said trash and waste have been found under the building and the city has received reports that children and homeless people might be

entering the house through that hole.

These reports bothered Mayor Ernie Evans so much that he warned any youths watching the televised Feb. 15 city council meeting against using the Conner House as a play area.

"If you don't believe in ghosts, there are ghosts there and you might see one if you crawl in the back hole. And there are snakes there, I have seen them and I don't want to be in the same county as a snake. So don't play there. It is a place of honor," Evans said.

The fact that children might be crawling under the Conner House to play have led Manassas Park officials to look into security measures to protect the 166-year-old house that once served as a hospital for both the northern and southern armies in the Civil War. Wren said the city manager,

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public works director and city engineer are studying ways to block the house from intruders, such as surrounding the building with a fence as well as installing a lighting system. Wren said the fence could cost between \$6,000-\$10,000 to install.

"We are trying to find the most economical, yet thorough, way to preserve this historic site until it can be fully restored," Wren said.

The Conner House's restoration is long overdue. In 1822 the house was constructed out of large blocks of red shale and held together with mortar. Wren said over the years the mortar has washed away causing parts of the house to crumble. In addition the original roof was leaking and causing interior damage to the building, so a new roof was constructed in 1996. But, while the new roof has kept out the rain, it is too heavy for the brick walls and the walls now are bulging out from the sides. The roof also is historically inaccurate. Wren also said the second floor is about to cave in.

Wren said the Manassas Park Women's Club put a lot of effort in trying to fix up the house in the last 30 years but never succeeded. However he said, they did succeed in saving the Conner House from the wrecking ball in the 1970s.

"The city manager at the time saw the building as an eyesore and was going to have



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Once occupied by Confederate soldiers the Conner House in Manassas Park is now boarded up while undergoing restoration, but through a hole in the brick there is life within its walls again. Homeless people seeking shelter and children looking for a place to play have been trespassing in the historic structure.

it plowed, but the women's club held him off and that was quite a story in those days," Wren said.

Lois Steele, a member of the club, said the club had aluminum and paper drives to raise money for the house for many years. She said the women ran a recycling center out of a trailer at what is now the Manassas Park Police Department and had bake

sales to raise money for the Conner House's restoration.

"The Women's Club took it [the Conner House] along as a project to restore it, but it was so cost-prohibitive for us that we felt we wouldn't raise enough money in our life-time to restore it," Steele said.

Steele said the Women's Club eventually turned over all the funds it had raised to the Historic Society. Wren said

the Historic Society is not sure how much it will cost to restore the Conner House, but the society is looking into funding options.

"We are doing brainstorming now to find the way to go out to the public and other organizations as well as to look into state and federal funding," Wren said.

• Contact Becca Blond at manassasjm@aol.com