

Restoration is mammoth affair

Prince William Public Library
Manassas, Va.

By **BENNIE SCARTON JR.**
JM Assistant Editor

MANASSAS — It's listed on both the Virginia Register of Historic Landmarks and the National Registry of Historical Places.

It was built on land originally owned by the Hooe family, one of the first families to settle Prince William County.

It served as the Confederate headquarters of Gen. Joseph E. Johnson and a field hospital for the Union Troops during the Second Battle of Manassas.

It was once the home of one of the largest dairy farms in the county.

Yet the historical Conner House in Manassas Park, once a glorious Manor House, has fallen into disarray. It now stands all boarded up.

Only through the efforts of the Conner House Historical Society has any effort been made to save the structure, the only significant historical site in the City of Manassas Park.

Due to its deteriorated state, the society has a mammoth job in its efforts to get the building restored to its original stage.

The society has already raised enough funds to put a security system into effect in and around the building in the hopes of keeping any vandals away.

Also, the society has received grants and has donations totaling \$20,000 which will be used to fix the roof.

This will be the first major renovation project on the structure which society members hopes will one day become a museum.

The roof will be put back to its original pitch line and the metal-covered roof will be replaced with cedar shakes.

Manassas Park roofer Jimmy Gheen has volunteer his services to help with the project.

"We hope to get the new roof on by spring and this will make a big improvement in the appearance of the house," said William A. Malcom, director of Parks and Recreation, who has been overseeing the restoration project for the past three years.

"People like to see progress being made, and when the roof is done, it will show them that we are moving forward," said Malcom.

After that project is finished, the next step will be restoration of the stone and mortar work in the structure, along with the exterior wood and window trim work.

Malcom estimates that cost to be about \$60,000, with a completion



Rebecca L. Stevens, regional historical architect, left, prepares to tour the Conner House with William A. Malcom, director of Parks and Recreation for the city of Manassas Park. Stevens was invited to tour the site of the historic mansion to make recommendations on how funds can be obtained to restore the structure. (Bennie Scarton Jr., Journal Messenger.)

date of three or four years.

The major expense, however, repairing the inside which was in very bad shape.

That work could amount to a whopping \$200,000 or more.

To help the society with that part of the restoration, Rebecca L. Stevens, a regional historical architect with the National Park Service, toured the site on Tuesday.

After viewing the structure, Stevens noted that while the building was in bad shape it was certainly feasible to repair it.

"I've certainly seen worse historical buildings restored," she said at the site.

Stevens, who has worked on such sites at the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials in Washington and the C&O Canal, offered suggestions on how the Conner house should be restored and possible ways to secure funding.

"It's such a historical structure, every effort should be made to get it back in shape," she said, noting that there were firms that specialized in the restoration of historical structures.

The society is unclear as to the actual building date of the manor and hopefully Stevens can help them shed some light on the actual building date which is speculated to be in the late 1700's.

Malcom said he has documentation to show that the Conner House was the childhood home of

Virginia Beverly Hooe Mason McClain.

"If this is proven, we then know that the construction of the house occurred prior to 1808.

"This is known because a fire insurance policy on the property has been found under the name of Bernard Hooe Jr., grandfather of Virginia McClain, he said.

Malcom believes the construction of the Conner house and the Stonehouse at Manassas Battlefield Park may have taken place at the same time — in the mid 1700s.

"The stone used in both dwellings is quite similar — perhaps even coming from the same quarry and being built by the same person," he surmised.

Stevens was asked by Battlefield Park Superintendent Ken Apschnikat to see if she could find out about the similarities of the two structures.

"These landmarks have tremendous educational values, telling about lifestyles in different periods of history," she said.

Aside from the role of the house during the Civil War and its close association with Signal Hill, the Manassas Battlefield and other significant landmarks, the house is an excellent example of a manor house for a large general farm in this area of the state and is the only third antebellum residential structure in this vicinity.



William A. Malcom and Rebecca Stevens get a close up look of the stone work in the Conner House whose construction could date back to the late 1700's.

(Bennie Scarton Jr., Journal Messenger)