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Dottie Willard will soon move from the house at the Green Hill Plantation near Haymarket when developers begin building a housing project. The town historian is battling to save the house, which she says may have played a part in the Civil War. (John Keilman, Journal Messenger)

Green Hill Plantation

House near Haymarket may be destroyed

By JOHN KEILMAN
JM Staff Writer

Haymarket was burning. Union soldiers sacked the town that cold November night in 1862, trying to rid themselves of a Confederate spying outpost. The Yankees set the old wooden houses ablaze, and entire families fled the burning buildings in their nightclothes. With the town in flames around them, many fled to what seemed the only haven: the Green Hill Plantation, a great house on a hill two miles away.

A house still sits on that hill. It is the run-down but still habitable centerpiece of 390 acres of rolling green hills just east of Haymarket. It may soon be gone, though — demolished as construction of 1,700 townhouses, apartments, condos and other houses begins in the next three months.

The developer says although he once thought of renovating the house, it is too far gone to save. What's more; he says, company-commissioned studies provide a much different version of the house at Green Hill Plantation.

"Our bottom line is that there is no historical significance," says Steven Peterson, vice president of Hazel-Peterson Cos. "The house was built in the 1950s ... If anything, the historians were saying, there

was (only) a shed in the back."

"They're out of their minds, totally out of their minds," says Sarah Turner, Haymarket town historian. She says she remembers visiting the house when she was a girl in the 1920s. "That house has been there forever," she says.

The building certainly has seen better days. Its white paint is peeling, the tin roof is rusting and the ceilings leak. But Turner says this may have been the spot where the town's first father, William Skinner, lived.

"This is the founding of Haymarket," she says, gazing at the old house. "Right here."

There's no hard proof for that, though, just as there's little to back up the account that refugees fled here that night. The building is not listed on local, state or national historic registers.

Hazel-Peterson officials at first thought they might try to renovate the house and leave it on the property, Peterson said, but changed their minds when they calculated the price tag.

"We said that if it could feasibly be done, we would do it," said Peterson. "To go out and spend \$100,000 to renovate that house is not economically feasible ... We have told Sarah she can go in and take out anything she wants.

"The house is just not in our plans

anymore."

Dottie Willard, 54, and her family have rented the house for four years. She says she has found ancient pennies the size of cookies and other odd coins while exploring the house and barns.

But to her the history isn't as important as the fact that she has enough room for three dogs, two cats and a horse. She fishes in a pond out back, she says, and has hauled in a few enormous catches.

The family will leave at the end of April.

"It's so peaceful," she says, standing in the front yard and looking over the silent hills.

Turner says she wants to move the house and put it on her three-acre spread.

"We told her she could have the house if she wanted," says Peterson. "Absolutely." He adds, though, that it would probably cost over \$100,000, and the old house probably wouldn't survive a move anyway.

Mayor Jack Kapp says the project manager told him Monday that the final decision had not been made, but the mayor said it wouldn't matter.

"We really don't have any jurisdiction," he says. "That (property) isn't in town."