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Haymarket's Mt. Atlas gets reprieve

County could not save historic home, but maybe state can

BY DUSTY SMITH
dsmith@timespapers.com



The aging structure north of Haymarket known as Mount Atlas may have found its savior.

As land, residents and historic debris have disappeared from the estate, Mount Atlas continues to draw interest from those who seek to preserve buildings that help tell the county's history.

A nonprofit preservation group has agreed to take on the task of finding either a person or group to take responsibility for the home and possibly restore it.

"We are on the path," said Gordon Lohr, of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. "We are hoping a private homeowner will buy it and have a historic home to live in."

The group does not retain owner-

ship of the properties it works to protect, but rather works as a mechanism to ensure the preservation of the historic properties it oversees, Lohr said.

"It's a picture of our past," said Don Wilson, a historian with the county's library system, referring to historic structures. "At the rate we're losing them, we cannot afford to lose anymore."

After the Board of County Supervisors decided in 2000 not to include the 1795 home in its historic renovation plan, many thought the home would be demolished as the land it sits on is further developed.

The county boasts a significant number of historic structures, but, over the years, many have not been maintained. County officials are forced to pick and choose which of the many historic properties they can

afford to renovate and maintain.

Two years ago, Mount Atlas was cut from the list of properties the county would attempt to save after it was determined that the cost of moving the building to the Brentsville Courthouse Historic Site would be almost \$250,000.

"The county was given the opportunity by the estate to move the house, restore it," said Robert Bainbridge, the county's historic preservation planner.

But the deteriorating condition of the home meant that significant structural work would have to be done to make the building stable enough to transport. Supervisors decided the \$250,000 price tag was too high.

At the time, Supervisor Ed

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Wilbourn (R-Gainesville) was quoted in local newspapers as saying, "If we go down the road of saving every house because it is old, we would soon deplete the county's budget."

That is not to say the county shirks its duty in regard to preservation. Work is now under way to restore Ben Lomond Manor and the Brentsville Courthouse. The Old Manassas Courthouse was completed earlier this year.

In fact, the county has a long history of preserving its history. The biggest problem is the large number of potentially historic projects that could be undertaken.

But since the high cost deterred board members from saving Mount Atlas, Bainbridge said he looked for other ways to save the house.

"It is pretty significant in terms of its architecture," he said, explaining the home's importance.

Wilson agreed that the home was worth saving and suggested its run-down condition may be the reason for so little interest in

its preservation.

"Because of the condition of the house, there's been no great move to save it," Wilson said. "It is one of the oldest buildings in that part of the county. It is a significant house from that time period. It is worth saving."

The property where Mount Atlas sits was part of Robert "King" Carter's 41,000-acre Bull Run Tract.

In 1795, Peter B. Whiting built the home that remains today.

The house has changed hands several times, serving as a home for families named Carter, Whiting, Foley, Gossom and Padgett.

Barton Padgett and his wife, the former Pauline Gossom, were the last people to live in the home.

When they moved into a smaller ranch house built on the same property, many items were left in the historic structure.

Through the windows, bed frames can be seen leaning against the walls. An old heater that looks much like an old-fashioned console stereo remains sitting by the fireplace.

A mural known as "Maiden at Peace" was sold long ago. Most of what remains is trash.

An old suit of clothing—dusty,

gray and worn—still hangs on the formerly screened-in back porch.

Only the front portion of the three-story house is original. The rear portion of the house was a later add-on, according to county records.

Supervisors now plan to rezone the parcel so that the historic home may be sold separately from the rancher that sits next to it.

Lohr said his group has already been working with a Realtor to find a new owner.