

Historic Pownal house to be renovated

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POWNAL — The Mooar-Wright House is in the process of being purchased and renovated.

The house, located next to the Solomon Wright Library in North Pownal, is believed by its current owner to have been built in the 1750s, although no documents have been found to confirm the date, or even who constructed it. If the home was built in the 1750s, it would be the oldest in Vermont. No one has been able to confirm the exact date of the house's construction.

The house is being purchased by the Rev. Gregory Dickson, who lives in Pownal and preaches at the United Methodist Church. Dickson said the deal isn't final yet, but he has begun fixing the house's chimney and roof.

The house's current owner is Margaret Lillie, who uses a section of it as a law office. She bought the house in 1994 with the intent to sell it to the Pownal Historical Society, of which she and Dickson are both members, but the society was not able to raise enough money for the sale. When Lillie left her office on Union Street in Bennington, she fixed up a newer section of the house for use as an office in 1999.

Dickson said the work will be done in phases over five years. The first phase, which has already begun and will wrap up in a few weeks, is sealing the house against the weather. He said the roof was leaking, and work is being done to fix it and re-shingle it with the same manner of shingles that would have been used in 1750. "It's in bad shape," Dickson said.

Lillie said the house has been occupied continuously throughout the years. When she bought it in 1994, after the former owners moved their furniture out, the home's defects began to show.

Dickson said he estimated the restoration work on the house will cost between \$50,000 and \$60,000, but acknowledged he is likely off in his estimates. Dickson said he doesn't feel comfortable talking about the price of the house because the deal has yet to close, but according to the Town Clerk's Office, the house is assessed at \$83,900.

Dickson said he hopes to have the house ready for public tours by 2010, in time for Pownal's 250th anniversary. The historical society has been working with other groups in town to plan a year's worth of events in 2010.

"We're doing it because it's a community treasure," Dickson said. Once the house is finished, he and his wife plan to spend their winters there, and Lillie has said she will continue to use the house as a law office.

Lillie said various architects and local historians have researched the house in an attempt to determine its age and who built it. She said records from the 1750s are hard to come by, and are hard to sort through once found, as the spelling of names can be inaccurate.

According to a history of the house written by Joseph Parks, a local historian, the legend of the Mooar-Wright House is that it was built as a tavern by Charles Wright in 1762. Parks wrote that the legend is impossible to prove, but believes the house may have been built by Dutch settlers who believed the land they were on was part of the New York colony.

Lillie said the name Mooar is attached to the house because the Mooar family are the last owners anyone in Pownal can remember. Lillie said she knew the Mooars when she visited the home in the summer, during the 1950s, and did legal work for them from time to time.

"I believe it's the oldest house in the state of Vermont," Lillie said. At the very least, she added, it's the oldest home in Pownal.

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