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Thornton Wilder slept here, maybe...

By Joe Bills

Monadnock Ledger-Transcript Staff

PETERBOROUGH When they purchased their 184 Union St. property in September 2005, Rob and Paula Fox had a vision. Little did they realize they weren't the first to have it.

Now, this weekend, they are officially opening their doors to share it.

Both the Foxes are originally from the East Coast. She was raised in Connecticut and he on Long Island.

They had enjoyed staying at bed and breakfast-style inns during their travels and had a dream of opening their own. By the time they started looking for one, they were living near Cleveland, Ohio.

"We always knew that we wanted to come back to the Northeast, so when we decided to do this we started looking for places," said Rob. "It had to be the right town and the right property. We kept finding the right property in the wrong town or the wrong property in the right town. When we came to Peterborough, we loved it. We chose the town and went looking for the property."

According to their research, the residence they have recently transformed into Little River Bed and Breakfast dates back to the 1870s.

"It could be older," said Paula, "but we traced it back that far and we were happy with that. We'll probably do more investigating at some point, to see if we can trace it back any further."

What they do know, however, is that by the time the MacDowell Colony purchased the property in the early 1900s, documents referred to the structure as an old farmhouse.

The building apparently served as the fledgling colony's first male dormitory until the mid-1920s.

"The timing is close enough that we like to think that it is possible that Thornton Wilder might have stayed here when he was writing 'Our Town,'" said Rob. "I'm not sure how we'd know that for certain, but it is possible."

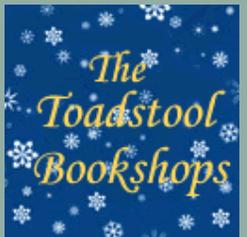
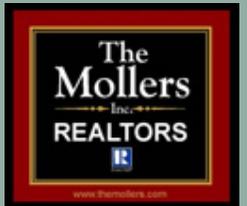
When construction was completed on a new male dormitory in the years after World War I, Fox said, the MacDowell Colony no longer needed the Union Street property for daily operations, so Marian MacDowell turned it into the MacDowell Colony Inn and operated it as such until the 1940s, when the outbreak of World War II cut into the tourism trade.

"We had no idea about that part of the history when we bought the house,"

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said Paula. "It is a nice thought to think that what we're doing is actually recapturing some of the past."

In the years that followed, the house was used as a private residence and even housed the Peterborough Tool Company for quite a few years.

Located just feet from the Nubanusit River, the building had no clear access to the waterfront when the Foxes purchased it, the remedy for which was part of what they call phase one of their renovation. The river side of the house has now been opened up, with a deck from which guests can see and hear the water.

"It was important to us to highlight the water, since that was a big part of what drew us to the property in the first place," said Paula. "The same was true when we chose our name. We chose Little River because it seemed like the Contoocook was the big river in town, and only later found out that Nubanusit actually means "small waters."

Now, with their first phase of renovation all but complete, the Foxes will host a pair of open houses this weekend. On Friday there will be a special open house just for members of the Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce from 3-7 p.m. An open house for the general public will follow on Saturday from noon to 4 p.m.

"Up until this spring, we weren't really running a B and B, we were just renovating a house," said Paula. "Now we're at the point where that is changing."

They accepted their first guest in February, even though they were still something of a work in progress.

"So far, each room we've finished, we've gotten done because we had a reservation and it needed to be done," said Rob. "So deadlines have been a good thing, and the open house has been another one."

This week, the Foxes were busy putting the final touches on their fourth, and for now final, guest room, in preparation for the weekend.

"This will be an opportunity for people to see the whole place and everything that we've done," said Paula. "That won't be possible when we have guests here."

As phase one nears completion, the Foxes are already thinking about phase two, although they are in no rush to dive back in to another round of renovations.

Their plan is to eventually turn the building's third floor, where they now live, into a multi-room suite that can accommodate larger groups.

Currently, each of their rooms is equipped with a queen bed and set up for one or two guests. Before the large suite can be opened, however, they will have to remodel their carriage house into living quarters for themselves.

"It might be a couple years before we're ready to think about that," said Rob. "For right now, it will just be nice not to be in the midst of a construction project for a while."

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