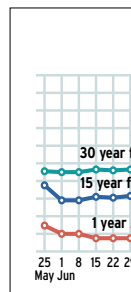


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The Temperance Perry Williamson House Restoration of a treasure

BY IRIS JUNE VINEGAR
CORRESPONDENT

You come upon it suddenly as Middle Street turns into Cedar. The utterly charming antebellum Greek revival cottage appears directly in front, reminding you that people live and die, but houses can endure for centuries. Take the Temperance Perry Williamson House, for instance, an 1858 painstakingly restored home in historic Louisburg, about 32 miles north of Raleigh.

Picture the gracious hostess standing at the four-column entrance in her fashionable blue-silk gown with ruffled flounces, hair done up in ringlets topped with a frilly lace cap.

Of course if she returned today, the lady might marvel how it could be in such great shape 153 years later. But to understand the tremendous effort it took owners Dean Ruedrich and Cynthia Satterfield to restore the historic treasure, you have to envision the changes the structure endured in the years since Louisburg native Tempie Perry Williamson, a widow with two young sons, moved into her new home. She had left North Carolina in 1846 to marry John Williamson of Covington, Georgia and lived there until he died 12 years later.

Tempie's brother Willie Perry, a physician and wealthy landowner, had the two-bedroom Williamson House built for her in 1858 by Albert Gamaliel Jones, a prominent Greek-revival homebuilding specialist, when she returned from Georgia. Built on land once part of a 90-acre plantation known as the Fox Swamp Tract and now standing regally on a 1.7-acre lot, Williamson House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The property was also a former home of John H. Williamson, born into slavery in Georgia and transported to Louisburg with Tempie's slaves when he was 12. Williamson taught himself to read and write and served six terms in the N.C. General Assembly after the war. He also published two newspapers advocating better educational and industrial opportunities for African Americans.

Ruedrich, an award-winning professional restoration specialist, points out that Franklin County is a historic preservationist's dream, with 37 houses on the National Register of Historic Places. "It's amazing to us that all these houses have not just survived but have thrived," notes Satterfield, a historic preservationist, conservationist and fund raiser for the Eno River Association in Durham.

Although Ruedrich and Satterfield knew Williamson House was a historic treasure when they purchased it in 1998, it took the husband and wife 12 years to restore the run-down structure originally built as a one-family house. When they bought that home, "It had already been chopped in two as a duplex," Ruedrich told me, adding that Tempie's great granddaughter-in-law Marnie Williamson, who died 14 years ago,

had lived in half of the house while renting the rest to tenants.

There were other problems as well: The roof leaked and parts of it had collapsed; the floor of the large front porch had fallen through and some of the home's five fireplaces were covered with metal. The most time-consuming repair was suspending the house and putting in a new foundation. But the good news, Ruedrich said, was that

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At top, before restoration, the Williamson house had issues that needed immediate attention. The roof leaked and parts of it had collapsed; the floor of the large front porch had fallen through and some of the home's five fireplaces were covered with metal. Above, the home has since been returned to its former grandeur.

WILLIAMSON

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almost all of the original parts were there. Despite the wear and tear, he said, “it was easy to see through the modification and find original material like gems waiting to be polished.”

Some of those “gems” were uncovered after the crew jacked up the house and removed the old foundation. While cleaning the bricks, they found some dated 1858 and signed in wet clay by mason P.W. Motley. It was an important historical discovery. “You’re rarely that lucky,” Ruedrich told me.

Another “find” good for a chuckle surfaced when they opened up the formerly divided central hall. Someone had written on a bathroom wall, “Hot as hell, rain in the a.m” and dated it Sept. 14, 1946.

The Williamson House once more has a grand central hallway with beautifully crafted woodwork and original interior features that needed little altering. Faux painting techniques were used to make the pine doors look like rosewood and the baseboards to look marbleized. Noting that the porch posts, unbled (untapped) heart pine siding and shutters are in perfect condition 153 years later, Ruedrich predicts that “kept painted, this wood will last at least another 150 years.”

If the cottage appears larger than 2,056 square feet, that’s because, notes North Carolina architecture authority Catherine Bishir, “the high ceilings (13 feet) and robust details in one-story antebellum Greek revival houses give you a feeling of spaciousness”. Bishir is the author of “North Carolina Architecture” and also wrote



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CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

the description and history of Williamson House for N.C. State Historic Preservation’s 1975 nomination of that home for the National Register of Historic Places.

Today, if Tempie Williamson were to return to her home, she’d find it little changed except for the kitchen which in the old days was detached from the house because of fire concerns. Williamson House now has a completely renovated kitchen with an island, soapstone countertops, walnut cabinets and stainless steel appliances, as well as a real furnace and air conditioner. The original heart-pine floors are in excellent condition but the glass window sash had to be rebuilt, cleaned and glazed.

Tempie would certainly be intrigued by the 800-square-foot 1790 structure in back of her house that wasn’t there before — a former “law academy” used for teaching individual or small groups of law students. Ruedrich, who discovered the building in a nearby community, says it can be used as a guest house, office or in-law suite.

But Tempie surely would approve of the home’s rose-colored exterior paint, which is near its original shade, and the landscaping that includes new English boxwoods and crepe myrtle trees as well as mature holly and oak trees.

Of course the 12-year restoration could not go unnoticed by the neighborhood. Lucy Allen, a former long-time mayor of Louisburg who lives in a historic house a couple of blocks away, says Williamson House has come back to life. “Dean and Cynthia have done such wonderful things with it that not only does the outside look the way it might have been, but the inside as well. It has the sense of life and continuity that it has had with generations of people caring for it and having their life stories involved in it. The rooms are generous and gracious, touched with the kind of sensibility that has dignity and yet the feeling of home and warmth that has been captured once again.”

Historic Williamson House, with two large bedrooms and two full baths, is listed with Re/Max City Centre Realtor Paul Setliff of Raleigh for \$239,000.

Learn More At www.PaulSetliff.com
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 919-637-7129



The 800-square-foot, 1790 structure behind the home, moved from another property, was a “law academy” used for teaching law students.