

GAINES HOUSE FULL OF CIVIL WAR HISTORY

The run-down house at 204 N. Murray St. in Gainesboro may not look like much today, but it was the site of many saved lives in 1862 after the Battle of Mill Springs in Kentucky during the Civil War. Confederate troops had lost a battle there, and more than 404 wounded men were sent down the Cumberland and Roaring Rivers to doctors. The house in Gainesboro, now called the Gaines House, was one of the homes turned into a



make-shift hospital for the soldiers.

“The accepted story is that the house was built by Major Gaines,” Ed Butler, president of the Gaines House Association, said. “He was a Revolutionary War veteran, and had fought in the French and Indian War in Florida and Alabama back during the American Revolution.”

Since then, the house has passed through several families, including the Putty family, and the Vanhooser family, who were the last people to live in the home. A small group bought the house in 2001, but soon realized the needed renovations were more than they could handle alone. They sought the help of the newly formed Gaines House Association in November of 2012.

So far, the organization has repaired the foundation of the two-story section of the home, treated the rust on the metal roof and gave it a fresh coat of paint.

“Everybody knows the roof’s painted now, so they can see our progress,” Butler said. “Our next project, which will be about an \$8,000 project, is to repair the foundation under the one-story section. Unfortunately, nobody will be able to tell we’ve done anything. Despite the fact that it won’t be visible, it’s got to be done. The big timbers that hold that house up are decayed. We don’t think they’re termite-eaten; they’re just nearly 200 years old and need to be replaced.”

The foundation repair has to come first on their list of repairs, Butler said, or the house will crumble before they get the chance to do anything else. For example, they would love to tear down the two-room addition to the back of the house that was added in the 1940s. A passerby from the street can tell that the addition clearly doesn’t fit with the style of the rest of the house. And there is an even more important reason Butler would like to see the offending portion removed. Back when the builder fixed the two-story section’s foundation, he unearthed several historical artifacts: a buckle, broken pottery, an old glass syringe and some medical bottles. He even found what appears to be blood from Confederate patients stained on the floorboards. Butler believes that the old home’s

outhouse was likely located not far from the house's original back door. It could be a site of even more historical finds.

"That hole could have been filled up and the last addition built over that location," he said. "I have had several people tell me what a treasure trove they have dug out of old outhouses: old guns, knives, books — people dumped all sorts of stuff in outhouses back then. I would love to find this one, or at least be around when someone does."

What to do with the old home once it is in good condition has been discussed by the Association, and the top idea right now is to make it a space to be rented out for meetings, parties or other special events.

"There is currently not a publicly available meeting place in Jackson County," Butler said. "Even the chief deputy at the Sheriff's Department mentioned that when they have meetings, they have to go to Putnam County because they don't have a meeting room."

The progress of the restoration so far has been slow. The organization is working on getting a few small grants, but will need help from the public to save the Gaines House. Right now, a large chunk of their money goes to paying insurance, the mortgage, and basic utilities bill.

"We have to raise \$5,000 a year just to pay our overhead, and then we have to raise money to try to work on the building," Butler said.

They are also interested in getting listed with the Tennessee Civil War trail; however, that also costs money.

"I would love to put that sign up with the next grant we get, but I'm tied to the house's foundation — we have to get that repaired first," Butler said.

Anyone interested in helping further the restoration efforts can donate to the Gaines House Association by mailing donations to P.O. Box 462, Gainesboro, TN 38562. Supporters can also become an Associate Member for \$20 a year, a Family Member for \$50, a Foundation Member for \$100 a year, and an Endowment Member for anything over \$100 a year.

To keep up with the Gaines House's restoration progress, follow the group on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GainesHouseAssociation, or visit their website at www.SaveHistoricGainesHouse.com.

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