

1/8/2006

NEWS & RECORD

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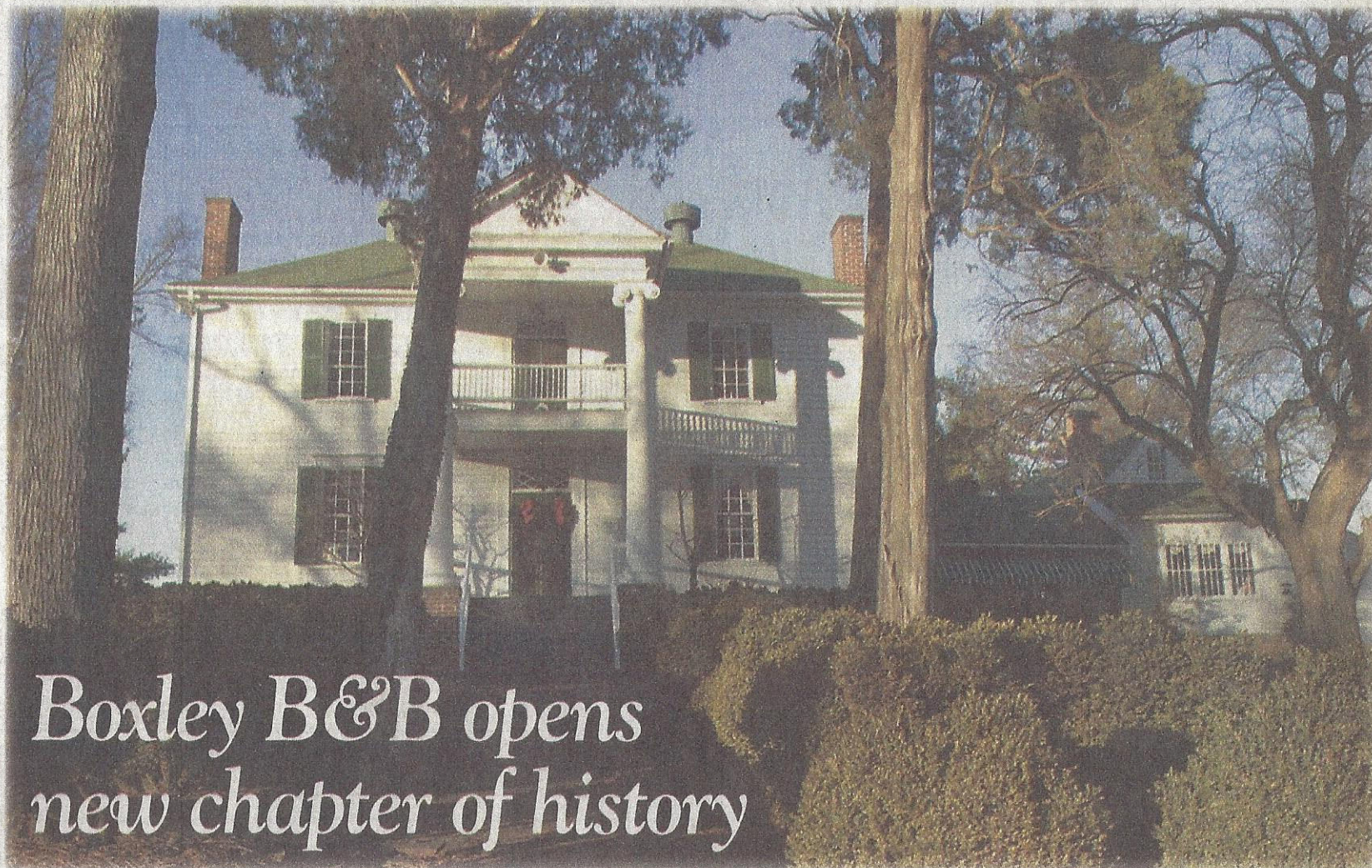
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*Boxley B&B opens
new chapter of history*

PHOTOS BY NANCY SIDELINGER/SPECIAL SECTIONS PHOTOGRAPHER

The Boxley mansion in Madison has been given new life by its homeowners, a couple who will maintain it as a bed and breakfast.

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BY DIANE JAKUBSEN
Special Sections Writer

For more than 200 years, boots have clomped over the Boxley's wide-plank floors, conversations have swirled in its dining room, visitors have relished the breezes blowing across its porches.

When Shay McNeal and Claude Poulin purchased the Boxley Bed & Breakfast this past November, they simply became the latest folks to step into this flow of life.

"Every time I think about being self-important, I look at a historic structure," says McNeal. "They're here long before we come, and they're here long after we leave. We're here for a blink."

For both husband and wife, history is more than a passing interest. McNeal has had one book published, "The Secret Plot to Save the Tsar," on the fate of Nicholas Romanov and his family, and is currently researching a book on the American Revolution. Poulin shares his wife's passion for tracing threads of history.

Living in an historic home, one they will continue to operate as a bed and breakfast, is what connects them to those threads.

"It humbles me greatly when I realize that in any one of our three

homes (the couple also owns historic properties in Virginia and Atlanta), I can walk in and, in the case of two of them, know that people literally discussed George Washington's administration in that home," McNeal says. "And in three of them, they discussed and debated the Civil War. That to me is just overwhelming."

The Boxley's oldest section, featuring the kitchen, dining room and a new loft office for Poulin, dates back to 1785.

Although details are scarce, the story of the house's evolution over more than two centuries is an interesting one.

It is believed the kitchen wing was built either for Peter Scales, father of Madison founder

Randall Duke Scales, or Edmund Brewer, an earlier owner of the property. According to "An Architectural and Historical Survey of Madison, North Carolina," the main house was built roughly 40 years later for William Hegwood, (some

records have "Haguewood"), who bought the land from Scales.

At that point, the Federal-style house faced the Dan River to the east, with Tuscan columns supporting a two-story front porch.

After Hegwood went bankrupt and died in debtor's prison, the deed



Exposed beams in the loft show Roman numeral markings made when the home was built, which helped the builders construct the home.

Want to go?
To learn more about the Boxley Bed & Breakfast, 117 Hunter St., Madison, visit www.theboxley.com (under construction) or call 427-0453.



TOP: This guest room at the Boxley Bed and Breakfast has a traditional decor. Another bedroom has an African theme.

BOTTOM: The Boxley's updated kitchen has a new island and state-of-the-art appliances while still maintaining the home's integrity.

to the house went to Pleasant Black in the 1830s. Sometime in the 1840s, the Blacks undertook a dramatic renovation, adding a two-story porch

with the grand columns on the south end of the house that transformed

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the home into the Greek Revival adaptation it is today.

The Blacks married into the Webster family, which owned the home through most of the 20th century. Nan Ellis Webster, who inherited the home in the 1950s, kept the home until her death in 1985. Her nephew, Mike Webster, bought the house then and rescued it from serious disrepair before opening it as a bed and breakfast.

McNeal and Poulin bought the home from Monte and JoAnn McIntosh, who had purchased the B&B in 1993.

The couple has enjoyed the discoveries they've made within the house: the timbers in the kitchen wing appear to be pit-sawed, a very early sawing method; pink mortar between the fireplace bricks in the kitchen indicates it was made mostly with mud while the exterior portions of the chimney look lighter — and better — because that mortar was mixed with lime; depressions in the wood in front of the centuries-old fireplace tell a story.

"They're not where the floor has settled," McNeal says. "They're where people have stood and turned and worn down the wood. That's extraordinary. I can feel that."

McNeal and Poulin discovered the Boxley in their search for a home that would be centrally located between one daughter in Atlanta and another in the Washington, D.C., area. As an author and consultant, McNeal can work anywhere, as can Poulin, who is a pension fund consultant.

"From the minute I saw it on

the Internet, I loved it," says McNeal, and she starts describing the spectacular Ionian columns and the porch connection between the kitchen wing and the main house. "There was a very strong visceral attachment."

After two visits to the Boxley, the couple, who were looking only for a home and not a B&B, started imagining the possibilities.

The plans are grand: an upscale B&B that also serves sumptuous gourmet dinners for overnight guests; the Boxley Cultural Series featuring artists, authors and chamber music at least twice a year; a small vineyard on the small strip of land behind the Boxley; weekend seminars on etiquette for young adults; a small gift shop across Hunter Street called The Boxley II; and themed weddings and parties.

"This is an extraordinary experiment," McNeal says. "We're looking for the best use of the Boxley. I want to do whatever comes along that makes sense."

McNeal is brimming with excitement for her new old home — and for the town she now inhabits. She admits she and her husband bought the Boxley with little more than a passing glance at Madison. They figured even though they'd be living in a small town, they'd be traveling to major metropolitan areas enough not to miss the energy.

What they have since discovered is they may not need to travel as far as they thought to find what they're looking for.

"I looked up Christmas Eve day and said to my husband, 'Wow, I've been caught up in

the painting, the carpeting, the refinishing and all that, and we don't have anything for Christmas. I better run to Greensboro and get some gifts,'" McNeal says. "And he said, 'You don't want to drive into Greensboro.'"

They decided instead to walk over to Madison's downtown and see what they'd find.

"I couldn't believe it," she says. "I'm walking into one adorable gift shop after another. They were all precious inside, and I got cute things at ridiculous prices. It was just a fabulous experience."

By the time they finished their shopping, night was falling. Neighbors were gathering at a bonfire, throwing in holly leaves for good luck, and luminaries lined the sidewalks.

"We came home and spent the entire Christmas Eve night talking about why doesn't anybody know about how great Madison is, and here we were, we had bought a house here," McNeal says. "Now we're absolutely tickled to be a part of Madison."

Although the B&B is not officially open, they opened two suites to guests over Christmas and hosted a dinner for the Rockingham Library Society in mid-December. The couple is still upgrading suites, and the kitchen improvements, which have been done with minimal impact to the wing's historic element, are not quite complete. McNeal is aiming for a Valentine's Day opening.

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