

Clayton group turning home into museum

By **Margaret Gillerman**

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CLAYTON — Clem Yore loved to visit his grandparents' sprawling farm before it became part of Clayton, before skyscrapers blocked the stars.

"Where at night I hear whippoorwills and katydids, I think of the back porch and luxurious Missouri sky before and under which I spent the most happy moments of my life," Yore wrote in a letter on May 2, 1894.

His remembrance and more than 500 other documents are still in town, a legacy from generations of the Hanley family — the only people to live in the brick Greek Revival house that stands as a sort of time capsule at 7600 Westmoreland Avenue.

The dwelling has been in the public domain for more than a generation. But now a push is on to raise money to open it as a museum with regular hours — and to incorporate its treasures into the school curriculum.

Yore was a grandson of Martin Franklin Hanley and Cyrene Clemens Walton Hanley, who built the house in 1855. Only their descendants lived there until selling it to the city of Clayton for \$55,000 in 1968.

The papers, an old secretary desk, horsehair settee, china cabinet and many other furnishings date to the mid-1800s. A platter that belonged to Cyrene's pioneer mother, antique paper dolls, sheet music for Southern hymns and books by Charles Dickens from his day are among the remarkable holdings. There's a piano that the Hanley girls played to entertain Union soldiers in the parlor during the Civil War.

Historians regard the house — on the National Register of Historic Places — as a rare find.

The Hanley House Council, a citizens group, is working with the Clayton parks department, Clayton Alderman Judy Goodman and others to give the place life as the Historic House Museum.

They see it as a resource for the Clayton School District and the public, which gets access now only by arrangement.

"What distinguishes this house from others is its authenticity," Goodman said. "This is living history through the Hanley family."

About \$1.3 million is needed for repairs and restoration, the council says. Under its proposal, the city would continue to provide \$75,000 a year, with additional money sought through private donations, corporate gifts and grants. Aldermen are reviewing the plan.

The original opening, in 1971, included a humorous uproar between neighbors and historians over whether to replicate the privy. Even the Legislature weighed in for it, and the outhouse was built.

But eventually, Goodman said, "The Hanley House kind of fell off the radar screen and people didn't realize what a gem we have."

Clayton High School history teacher Bill Mendelsohn, who took his class to visit, said: "When my students step into the house, they are instantly transported back in time. For a history teacher, that's priceless. They see the beds and other pieces of furniture, look at the books the occupants actually read, and observe the kitchen where the slaves worked."

Student Rebecca Singer summed it up: "Usually we just read about history in a textbook. This is real history that you can touch."

Cindy Berger, a member of the Hanley House Council, plays "Aunt Nancy Cal" for tours. Nancy Caroline Hanley was the oldest surviving child of Martin's and Cyrene's 11 offspring.

Many St. Louisans with roots in Virginia — including the Hanley women — sympathized with the South during the Civil War. Martin Hanley remained neutral, but in later years, Aunt Nancy Cal hung a Confederate flag on Jefferson Davis' birthday.

The Hanleys had slaves before and during the war, and a small building behind the house was used as a kitchen and sleeping quarters for them. An 1860 slave register shows they had four that year, a 28-year-old woman with three young children.

"We know slavery is wrong, but we can't ignore it," said Sarah Umlauf, the city's Hanley House intern. "We have to tell children it existed, and it existed here."

The Hanley House Council is selling coloring books and note cards to raise funds. For more information, or to schedule a tour, call 314-290-8509.

Today, the back porch that Clem Yore loved is still there, although it has been rebuilt. The whippoorwills and katydids are drowned out at times by the bustle of the city. Martin and Cyrene Hanleys' Black Oak tree survived until 1992. The tree was 215 years old when it was felled, the oldest black oak in Missouri.

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