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Harford County Rededicates Historic Joesting-Gorsuch House Saved from Demolition

BEL AIR, Md., (Nov. 21, 2016) - Harford County's historic Joesting-Gorsuch House was rededicated on Friday in Street, eleven miles from where the blue house escaped demolition and once stood for more than two centuries. The November 18 rededication was hosted by County Executive Barry Glassman and included descendants of the home's original owners.

With its main structure dating to the mid-to-late 1700s, the Joesting-Gorsuch House is listed in the Maryland Historical Trust and is believed to be one of Harford County's oldest homes. Named for two of its former owners, the structure was renovated over the years, beginning as a farmhouse, then a family home, and later as a pro shop and clubhouse on the grounds of the Winters Run Golf Club in Bel Air.

When the golf course owners elected to sell some of their property, the new owner planned on razing the structure to make way for five new houses. The unsettling news was announced last year at a public meeting: the historic house would have no place to call home.

What happened next was recalled at Friday's rededication by preservationist and author, C. John Sullivan Jr. "I stood and said, 'Am I the only person left in Harford County that cares about an old house?' Apparently someone heard my remarks. That someone was County Executive Barry Glassman."

The Glassman administration in fact saved the structure piece by piece, dismantling it and storing the parts in containers. Floorboards, rafters, wooden panels, and bricks from the fireplace were carefully collected and tagged for reassembly sometime, and somewhere, down the road.

The new location, on county-owned property at 3525 Conowingo Road in Street, was the site of Friday's rededication held on the one year anniversary of the day the disassembly began.

Sullivan served as the volunteer project manager for the rescue and relocation, which was funded by dedicated revenue from the county's hotel/lodging fee to promote tourism. Below are some of Sullivan's notes on the reassembled structure's interesting features, including a connection to the original sidewalks in the Town of Bel Air:

"The boards on the first floor of the reconstruction are yellow pine; looking up to the ceiling the exposed floor joists of the second floor exhibit a beaded edge. Evidence of having been pit sawed appears on the joists. The underside of the original second floor poplar boards show a pleasant patina as one views the ceiling. Each of the walls on the first floor is finished in plaster much like the finish on walls in the original structure. The stairs to the second floor are of yellow pine; looking up, a converted kerosene lighting fixture lights the visitor's way. The second floor poplar boards and end wall paneling are salvaged from boards from the historic structure. Wood paneling surrounding the fireplace is constructed to reflect the design of the original door panels with an elongated panel on the top. The paneled wall with two doors matches the paneling on the door located at the opposite end of the reconstruction. The doors of the paneled wall are held together with tiny nails, wooden pegs and glue. The exterior doors are made from solid mahogany. The exterior door frames and sills are constructed from ancient oak from the original dwelling. The three-inch-thick slate fireplace hearth is a slate from the original slate sidewalks in the Town of Bel Air. Located inside of the closet adjacent to the working fireplace are original stairs from the oldest section of the Gorsuch-Joesting House. The brick porches on either side of the structure are laid in a herringbone pattern. The brick foundation and chimney are laid in a Flemish bond pattern."

Pointing to the brick fireplace at Friday's rededication, Mary Kay Field, granddaughter of William and Elizabeth Joesting, remembered seeing her grandmother cooking there over the fire.

County Executive Glassman revealed a plaque above the same fireplace, marking the occasion and thanking Sullivan, the Harford County Historical Society, Reiff Brothers contractors, and county employees for their efforts.

He noted plans for the Joesting-Gorsuch House to be opened one day as a visitor's center. It sits near property where the county executive also envisions creating an agricultural research and learning center for the next generation.

Speaking of the reconstructed house, sometimes called the "blue house" after its blue-grey exterior, County Executive Glassman said: "The blue house pays tribute to our agricultural heritage. Historic homes change over time as society progresses, and they evolve each time they are updated or rebuilt. They are an expression of where we are today. But this interpretation will stand for another 250 years."

Quoting the words of Canadian architect Arthur Erickson, he said, "Buildings that move the spirit have always been rare, but in every case they are unique, poetic, and products of the heart."

County Executive Glassman concluded, “I will admit the decision to save this house was indeed a product of the heart; a decision I am most proud of and one which will represent the heritage of Harford County beyond all of our lifetimes.”



County Executive Barry Glassman, left, and preservationist and author C. John Sullivan Jr. celebrating the rededication of Harford County's historic Joesting-Gorsuch House. Saved from demolition by the Glassman administration, the centuries-old house was disassembled at its original location in Bel Air and reassembled on county-owned property in Street, Md.



Harford County's historic Joesting-Gorsuch House. The dedication plaque reads: "Historic Joesting-Gorsuch House is an example of eighteenth and nineteenth century frame dwellings. Originally built in the late 1700s on property in Bel Air, the house was enlarged in the 1800s and was once part of an agricultural homestead that included a bank barn and other outbuildings. Named for two of its previous owners, the house was moved from its original location and reconstructed in 2016 on this site where it has been preserved for future generations".

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