

## Welcome To Tarboro

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The Barracks Coming Back to Life

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Have you ever patched a roof or hung some sheetrock?

What about replacing a light switch or wall outlet?

No problem, right?

And yard work? You do it for relaxation, don't you?

Now, keep those thoughts in mind.

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Back in 1858, William Battle, hired architect William Percival, who advertised offices in Richmond and Raleigh, to design a home for his wife.

It would become what has been known as The Barracks these past 162 years and would play an integral part in the history of Tarboro.

The imposing brick home was built by Battle on Glenburnie, the Dancy plantation across the railroad tracks, in what was just outside Tarboro, at the time.

Over the decades, the house has had its share of owners and on Feb. 14, 2017, with a "FOR SALE" sign in the front yard, a fire broke out in the one-story area near the rear of the house. The damage was serious, although the main portion of the Italianate-style structure was essentially undamaged.

As reported in an article in The Tarboro Weekly, "The two-story section remained intact, with significant smoke damage, but observers said they thought it could be restored."

Enter Chris and Meredith Henry.

At the time, the couple lived in Chicago, but because his company wanted him to relocate, they were looking at communities along the East Coast.

"I was in transportation logistics and my company (he has since joined another firm) wanted me to relocate," he explained. "South or North Carolina or Virginia ... they didn't care, so we were looking."

"We were looking for kind of a project home. We had looked at a couple of houses in Rocky Mount, but didn't really see anything. The realtor said she wanted to bring us to this little town that had some really interesting homes and we saw something."

He said the couple looked at a couple of houses, but weren't interested, before arriving at The Barracks.

Since the couple knew the region to which they would be relocating, they had already been researching the market in the area and unbeknownst at the time, they had already seen and talked about The Barracks.

"I realized it while we were looking," Meredith said. "I told Chris that this was the house we had seen (online)."

The interesting thing is that Chris' first impression wasn't, well, impressive.

Because of the fire damage, he wasn't sure it was a project he wanted to undertake — maybe too much of a project.

But Meredith couldn't get The Barracks out of her head.

"We looked at other houses," she explained, "but I couldn't get this one out of my head. I kept thinking about it and what we could do with it."

When everything was said and done, the couple decided on The Barracks and began the process of negotiating the price for the fire-damaged property that had been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1971.

Chris said, "We purchased (the house) in the summer (June) of 2017 and lived in an old farmhouse off Highway 64 until we could get the second floor ready. Folks told us that winter was the coldest in years."

Chris explained that the renovations were a do-it-yourself project.

"Essentially, it's Meredith and her father (Mickey Mitidiero), myself and, on occasion, a son and a daughter. Her father has done a lot of work like this and I drew on my prior experiences where I had picked up various skills."

Chris and Meredith emphasized that by eliminating the cost of labor on the project, it could be doable.

"We are the electricians, plumbers and carpenters. We put the skills we have learned previously to work," he said. "We know there are cases where we have overdone some things."

It's not like there were folks knocking at the door to do the work. "We contacted 14 or 15 contractors," Chris said. "It was either too big for some or too small for others. In the end, we got one estimate."

It is, after all, a pretty daunting task. "It's a lot," Meredith said. She said she had an aunt who works with stained glass and had worked in the house and that "about 175 panes" of glass had been replaced.

To those Tarboro residents who had been by the property before the Henry's began their project, it maintained a jungle-type appearance and some say they didn't even know the house was there because it couldn't be seen because of the vegetation.

“When we got started (cutting back vegetation), we saw how overgrown it really was,” Chris explained. “We removed 300 trees that were at least six inches (in diameter).”

As the project has moved along, the Henrys said they have worked as funds allow.

“The challenge has been that there’s not been a lot of financial support from banks,” Chris said. “I talked with friends in Chicago in the industry and they don’t understand that. They thought it would have been a sure thing.”

The couple said the biggest challenge is staying positive.

“It’s paycheck-to-paycheck,” Chris explained. “You just stay after it and keep doing.”

To start, the project entailed tackling the fire damage, including cleaning the soot from the walls and floors.

Chris explained the different phases of the project.

“Phase One was to make it livable, so we could get out of the farm house. Phase Two was the infrastructure, including the plumbing, electrical and sewer, but we had to answer the question of how do you protect the historic integrity and still manage updates?”

Chris said Phase Three will be to finish everything up while Phase Four will essentially be a punch list of finishing what he called “little things.”

Chris and Meredith feel like the end is in sight.

“The fun part,” he said, “is that we’ve done things we don’t remember we’ve done.”

Along the way, things that should have been relatively easy haven’t been.

“Not one light fixture change has been easy,” Meredith said. “Something that should be a 15-minute project turns into a three-hour job.”

While there is a tremendous amount of work involved, Chris says, “We actually have so much fun doing this. We have a really good time with each other.”

“It’s fun discovering different things,” Meredith said.

“And addressing the rumors,” Chris said.

Among them, that the house was a hospital during the Civil War (it wasn’t) and that Confederate soldiers utilized the cupola to key an eye out for Union forces.”

“That would have been impossible,” Meredith said, using her hands to show a width of about six inches and explaining that that was the width of the floor around the edge of the cupola. “There would have been no place for them to stand.”

“And,” Chris added, “there was no line of sight to see troops coming.”

Chris said another rumor was that the plans for the house were inside the base of the walnut staircase. After taking it apart, they weren't.

As the project has progressed, the Henry-Mitidiero crew has rebuilt a roof, using a two-piece ramp to hoist sheets of plywood to the top with raw manpower.

Along the way there have been hundreds of feet of electrical wiring and plumbing, 75 electrical outlets and 35 switches and, currently, there are 120 4x12 sheets of drywall being hung.

All of the drop ceilings have been removed and 12-foot ceilings are now back throughout the house.

As Meredith put it, there have been a couple of ah hah moments.

“In the cellar, there are wood pegs (no nails) in the floor joists.”

Chris added that cedar shavings were used as insulation.

“Turns out that termites and bugs don't like it, but it made a mess.”

The couple did make a couple of observations — Meredith that the project wouldn't be so taxing if they were 10-to-15 years younger and Chris that they had failed miserably in an effort to downsize.

The couple feels they are on schedule and, as they said previously, they just keep doing what they're doing and enjoying the fruits of their labor.



