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'The Castle' Has Storied Past

By LYNN DOAN Courant Staff Writer

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WINDSOR LOCKS -- Half-hidden behind a layer of trees and bushes off Maple Avenue lies one of the largest and most historically rich homes in Windsor Locks.

Dubbed "**The Castle**" by old-timers, the 166-year-old mansion was built by a prominent railroad tycoon and once belonged to a member of the town's first board of selectmen. It was later auctioned off to a doctor whose housekeeper died on the Titanic. And for years, it served as a boarding house.

On Friday, it will be the site of a **Candlelight Tour** led by the Windsor Locks Preservation Association.

"People will have the rare opportunity to cross the threshold of a Windsor Locks landmark," said Mickey Danyluk, a local historian and the group's vice president. "I think they will find the dark history of the house most attractive.

"When the 26-room house belonged to Dr. Sidney R. Burnap, a surgeon and financier, the 100-acre estate named Maple Hill became a popular venue for town picnics and socials, Danyluk said. But in 1912, a death shook the household.

Burnap's brother-in-law, Alfred Woods Converse, a highly esteemed man who served as both the town's postmaster and manager of the Windsor Locks Bank, died in the house in an apparent suicide. Two weeks after his death, Windsor Locks Bank officials confirmed that \$185,000 had been stolen from the safe, local newspapers reported.

The family's housekeeper, Jane Carr, had left for Ireland the year before on family business, but she boarded the Titanic after hearing the news and was lost at sea.

When the Burnaps left Maple Hill, the land was subdivided and put up for auction. The white-trimmed brick mansion may still stand, but its spacious grassland has since been turned into one- and two-story homes.

Behind the Victorian walls of the four-story mansion, the furniture of previous owners has been refurbished and preserved by Martha and Dennis Jarvis, who bought the house four years ago for \$333,000. The couple removed carpeting to expose the home's original hardwood floors and knocked down the parlor ceiling to reveal elaborate, ivory-colored carvings.

"I had no idea that was going to be there," said Dennis Jarvis, pointing at the carvings during a recent walk through the home.

Jarvis, who is a retired manager for CIGNA HealthCare, said he and his wife have made a hobby of refurbishing homes, with Maple Hill being their third fix-up. They plan on selling the house in five to six years.

"We like fixing stuff up, so once it's all done, it's just maintenance," Jarvis said. "It's kind of too big for us anyway. Sometimes, I'll think about going to the game room on the third floor, but it's such a long walk."

Tickets for the tour, which begins at 7 p.m. Friday (10/13), are \$10 a person and will benefit the Let's Save the Windsor Locks Train Station Committee. Those interested can call Martha Jarvis at 860-623-4234.

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