

House for Sale

Editor's Note: This is the first in an occasional series about houses in the Back Mountain. If you know of a "House for Sale" that has a story along with it, call us at 675-5211. We're looking for a range of properties — some big, some small, some new, some old. If you are selling a house that you think might be suitable, ask your real estate agent to contact us, or call us directly.

By MEIRA ZUCKER
Post Correspondent

DALLAS - The house at the top of West Center Hill Road looks like a regular house. As early fall gently mellows its landscape, scarlet berries and russet leaves brush the white clapboards. The whale weather vane barely turns with the breezes. The distant wind spins the tree-tops to song, and invisible birds join the chorus. 331 West Center Hill Road looks like a regular house, but inside is a mansion, one full of stories.

According to local history, the original farmhouse was built in the 1820s. At the time, there were few homes on Center Hill Road. The farm stretched throughout the area now called Stonehedge. Remnants of the stone base of the farm's silo can be spotted just a hundred yards from the house on Highland Boulevard. When Joseph McVeigh, the longest recent resident of the house, lived there, the property still included much of the land. In the 1940s, he bragged that he could have bought the whole hill for \$10,000.

Many area residents still refer to the white farmhouse with green shutters as the "McVeigh house." McVeigh lived on Center Hill Road for over 60 years. His first wife died young, and he later married Josephine — "Big Joe" and "Little Joe," they were called. The McVeighs had no children, and Joe McVeigh donated

much of his energy and time to the community. He reportedly served many roles, from fire chief to police chief to council member, and spent countless hours entertaining the neighborhood children.

With his tweed wool cap and wooden cane, McVeigh played the part of "country gentleman." The kids learned to call him "Uncle Joe." Neighbors recall how he would mow the field next to his home just to give the children a place to run. He would hand out coins to the children, and let them play in his backyard with its frog and goldfish pond. "I'm awfully glad that my kids knew him," says a neighbor.

"He knew everybody," says Sylvia Hughes, who lives next door. He said he was involved in the early days of filmmaking, and made the first movies at Irem Temple, featuring many Back Mountain residents. Neighbor James McGuire says "he was a marvelous man."

McGuire tells the history of the partially-polished flagpole at the house. The flagpole is made of stainless steel, but



Joe McVeigh owned the house for about 60 years, and reminders of his tenure remain.



The shelf of a tiny kitchen window is perfect for a bouquet of fall flowers.

polished only two-thirds of the way up. Apparently, the pole was made at McVeigh's firm, Press Steel, and he stopped the polishing because, "his conscience got the best of him; it was done on



A formal dining room looks out onto the glass-enclosed porch.

company time," reports McGuire. McVeigh also said the stainless steel ball on top was a float ball made for a W.H. Nicholson float.

As McVeigh aged, he would take walks and visit his neighbors. "He could tell us how many trees — 1,142 — were on his land," remembers Ed Dexter.

After Joe's death, the house was sold to the Mr. and Mrs. Hall. The Hall family lived on Center Hill Road only a few years before the stately home was damaged by a severe fire.

Early one morning, the local paper boy, Peter Hughes, spotted fire while making his deliveries. "He got an award for it — a savings bond," recounts his mother, Sylvia Hughes. "We called the fire department that morning," says James McGuire. No one was injured in the fire, but the Halls decided to abandon the house without rebuilding. Hand-hewn logs still supporting the scorched floorboards bear witness to the severity of the flames.

Sally and Tucker Graham bought the house "as is" after the

fire. It had sat exposed to the elements for over a year, and the interior was thoroughly damaged. For advice and a plan, the Grahams brought in architect Peter Bohlin. He recommended a dramatic renovation which opened up the interior of the home and simplified much of the cluttered spaces of the old farmhouse and its numerous scattered additions. Bohlin added a dramatic two-story, floor-to-ceiling window, which flooded the living room with light and permitted views of the terraced gardens and patio.

The finished renovation was featured in several magazines, including *Architectural Record* and *Nikkei Architecture*. The design, for 1978, was striking; hardwood floors, clean lines, brushed metal fixtures, streamlined solid red oak cabinets. The style complemented the Graham's sleek modern furniture, but, surprisingly, also melds comfortably with the Early American antiques of the home's current owners.

"The house has really stayed current," says Claire Fox, who, with her husband Peter Scott, moved into the farmhouse three years ago. The modern cabinets and pale palette, she adds, were new in the 70s but are popular now. "If it weren't for the fire, the house wouldn't be as special right now," notes Fox.

When Fox and Scott initially saw the house, the interior was well-maintained, but the gardens and grounds had become overgrown with hemlocks and shrubbery. It was "landscaping by chainsaw" jokes Scott. "It was like Sleeping Beauty's castle," adds Fox. As they gradually cleared the back yard, they uncovered a glorious planned garden. Behind the garage, a stone patio and stone barbecue, once hidden by overgrowth, were discovered. Behind the rock-rimmed pond with its hand-carved stone bridge, they unearthed two five-foot-long, handmade stone benches. "It's like archeology," says Fox. Just recently, the couple found a small flagstone path winding behind the rhododendrons, which leads to a compact stone birdbath.

All of the stone work leads to another "Uncle Joe" anecdote. Most of the extensive stonework, including the enclosed stone porch in the front of the house, was built during the Depression. Reportedly, McVeigh created his own small WPA to clear fields and build walls, and hired many struggling residents of the Back Mountain during those stressful times.

When Fox and Scott first moved in, more than 20 people came by to tell



Light streams into the living room through the two-story industrial window, one feature of a 1976 Peter Bohlin renovation following a fire in the house.

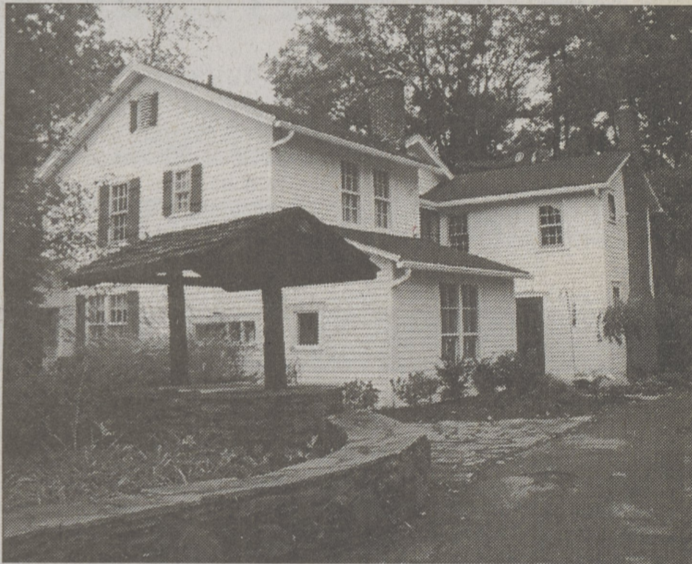
stories of Joe McVeigh. In the basement, they discovered McVeigh's old name sign, resting on a beam. They quickly learned the history of their home, and grew to respect the unique aspects of a farmhouse-turned showhouse-turned home.

All of the windows on the first floor are different. The huge industrial window reveals chickadees fluttering from feeder and chipmunks scurrying across the driveway. Beveled glass French doors lead to the stone front patio. The original well, looking like a prop from a fairy tale, still sits just feet from the house.

While living in the farmhouse, Fox and Scott never felt they needed to remodel. "It's like a painting that's almost done," says Scott, "and we just have to fill in the edges." For them, that meant uncovering,

maintaining, and replanting the extensive landscaping and box gardens behind the house. They trim the lilacs from McVeigh and divide the tulips from the Grahams. It's as if "Uncle Joe" is working his magic all over again.

Peter Scott and Claire Fox are leaving



331 W. Center Hill Road has been restored to past glory, though new owners will undoubtedly find new treasures.



Clarie Fox and Peter Scott can relax now that they've finished the "landscaping by chainsaw" that revealed hidden treasures.

Center Hill Road now; he earned a promotion and they're off to New Jersey. But memories of their stay will linger, and, with luck, a bit of the goodness in the house and land will stick to their soles. "It is almost like a living entity," says Scott, "I'd much rather have someone buy it who will take care of it."

PHOTOS BY CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

Just the Facts

331 W. Center Hill Road has three bedrooms and three baths, a living room, family room and formal dining room. It comes with about 1 1/2 acres of grounds, some wooded. There's a barn/garage with room over for a studio or office, and a glass-enclosed porch. The heat is gas-fired baseboard, there's public water and sewer. Taxes are about \$2,200 a year. It is listed at \$249,900 with Kevin Smith at Ruth K. Smith Real Estate, 696-1195.

RELIGIOUS SERVICES

BACK MOUNTAIN HARVEST ASSEMBLY - 340 Carverton Rd., Trucksville. 696-1128. Pastor, Daniel S. Miller. Christian Education for all ages, 9:30 a.m. Worship 10:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. Wed., 7 p.m., "Genos" youth service. Midweek home groups; call for days and times. Weekday prayer 6:30-7:30 a.m. Visitors welcome.

DALLAS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH - 4 Parsonage St., Dallas. 675-0122. Rev. William D. Lewis, Pastor. Sunday School 9 a.m.; Morning Worship 10:30 a.m.

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