

That House, That Sacred Ground

by Terry Richards

An embarrassing eyesore is one of our first sights upon entering the Town of Milton from the South on Route 7. Chimney Corners, VTrans, Charlebois Trucks, Gardener's Supply, "Yuck, what is that?"

"That", the decaying old home on the left in front of Gardener's Supply Distribution Center, is what remains of the farm and living space of the man "who, at Gettysburg, may well have changed the course of world history when he ordered his 2nd Vermont Brigade to attack the right flank of Pickett's Charge." General George Stannard, born in Georgia, Vermont, was this man. His biographer, George Maharay, wrote "Had Pickett's Charge succeeded and the war ended, North and South might have become two nations. That didn't happen and the Union was preserved." If "Gettysburg provides the climax of the war, then the climax of our history, must be Pickett's Charge."

General George Stannard lived and worked here. *Here*. He bought the home and the land. He built barns and sheds for the farm. But he had lost his right arm in the Battle of Fort Harrison in 1864. He built a farm that could be run by a one-armed man. He built, lived and worked here.

After a couple of years, the General moved to Burlington. He had some business reversals. The farm was sold and changed hands. The Raymond Sanderson family owned and farmed the land until 1989. The Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation bought the land for further development. The barns were burned as a training exercise for the Milton Fire Department. Various ideas for use of the home were floated. They included full restoration for historical education and honors, new site of the Milton Historical Museum, or razing the structure to build new businesses. The State of Vermont had designated the site as on the State Historical Register in April 1980. Nothing could be changed without numerous proper permits and State approval.

Still, local interest continued. Two different appraisals for restoration costs were done, at ten year intervals. They ranged from \$200,000 to \$500,000, depending on degrees of restoration. At our Civil War Soldiers' Monument Rededication in 2004, historian and noted author Howard Coffin emphasized the home's historical significance and said, "It should be saved." In a 2013 email, Mr. Coffin said, "I will do everything I can. The house needs to be saved. A monument would be without any value, [there's] already a big one in Georgia." Three local schoolgirls took action in 2005-2006

for assistance, The Preservation Trust of Vermont (PTVT) has been of great help and inspiration. Field Representative Ann Cousins joined committee members, which includes some Society members, last December on an inspection of the Stannard House. She offered great advice, possibilities, requirements and suggestions for consideration. Ann noted the most historically valued parts were already lost in the missing barns and sheds. She also stated her belief that the foundation, most walls, hardware in the cellar, the roofing and, especially the storm windows were original. Some elements are extremely rare.

The next step is an accurate assessment of the condition of the house by a PTVT-approved contractor, which has been scheduled at publication time of this newsletter. Our community needs to decide just what can and should be done with the General George Stannard Historical Site. In addition to previously listed ideas for its use and recognition, one seductive one was voiced at different times and different ways in the past year. Milton Select Board Chairman Darren Adams suggested renaming that portion of Route 7 *The General George Stannard Highway*. Senator James Jeffords has in the past suggested a History



Select Board Chair Darren Adams discusses the house with owner Bobby Miller on an August 20, 2013 tour.

Lorraine Manley

to "fix-it-up." August Cyr, Alison Joseph and Mae Kemsley patched, painted, and fundraised to save the house. The hurdles of cost, permits and, especially the presence of lead paints stopped the projects. Industrial zoning is also an issue.

More local attention came to General Stannard's home and farm in the summer of 2013. Members of the Milton Select Board noted its decay and the impression it made on visitors' entrance to the Town of Milton. Thus began renewed interest from our community, our Planning Commission and our new Improvements Committee, which was formed in early 2014 to beautify Milton and its gateway, the General Stannard House and the Route 7 corridor among them. The Planning Commission and others ensure consistency and appropriateness.

In response to the committee's request

Corridor, with consistent historical signage running through the Champlain Valley. Howard Coffin has authored highly praised guidebooks on Champlain Valley military history, driving tours and the recent *Something Abides*. Can these dreams be combined and have their focal point be the Stannard House?

We, the community of Milton, have the opportunity to do something very important, something crucial to the future of our Town. It is always easy to say something cannot be done. It is always hard to actually pursue change in difficult times. But please ask yourselves the simple questions: "If not us, who?" and "If not now, when?"

Positions are still available and participation at all levels is encouraged on the Milton Improvements Committee, and we are gathering names of people interested in this cause on your enclosed Society membership form. *Thank you!*