

Love of history leads Nelson to restore homes

By Bellenda Laughlin
News intern

In this age of fast food, hectic schedules and a modern pace, Kitty Nelson of Marshall finds the time to appreciate the value of older things and is helping preserve today's heritage for future generations.

Aside from being a piano teacher, dog breeder, lover of antiques, traveler and grandmother, Nelson, along with her husband, Tim, is restoring two homes across from the First Presbyterian Church on North Street in order to help preserve the era of the older homes.

At one time North Street was the line between two farms. During the Civil War, the Confederates used the "Rock Church" as a hospital, and later the Union troops used it as a stable. It is the oldest standing church building in Marshall.

According to Nelson, the construction of the two homes is thought to have been completed around 1870 as part of the original Allen Addition. The houses were owned by the Montague sisters and their mother since 1900.

"There are people in town who remember the homes with shutters and picket fences and remember the sisters having people in for tea," Nelson said.

She added the houses were Victorian cottages, and she wants to restore them to what they might have looked like.

"The church bought the houses and has maintained them until this past March when they agreed to sell them to us so that we can preserve them," Nelson explained. "That is what we are in the process of doing right now."

The Nelsons are stripping the old paint, replacing bad boards and trying to find period furniture to put in the houses.

The homes still have their original construction and are structurally sound. No structural changes will be made to the houses at all, Nelson said. The exterior is being completed first, and the interior decorating will come next.

"It's fun to think of what the houses look like now and what they will look like when they're finished," Nelson said.

She added most of the old woodwork is intact, and the kitchens almost are in their original state.

"Older homes have a certain charm," Nelson said. "You have the woodwork and the whole atmosphere of an old house. You can think of all the people that went there and all the entertaining that went on."

Nelson said by restoring older homes and buildings she can preserve them for future generations so others can see how things used to look and how their beauty and history can be maintained.

Nelson hopes to get the houses placed on the National Historical Register.

"We hope that North and Arrow streets can become part of the historical district of Marshall as well," Nelson said.

She has been interested in restoring old homes for quite some time, and she and her husband restored a home in Pittsburgh in 1968.

Nelson said many people are discovering older homes and are starting to preserve them.

"By preserving the older houses, we can help preserve our heritage," Nelson added.

Nelson also has a guest house behind her home on North Street that is furnished and available for anyone who will be in the area for more than a short visit.

"The two-bedroom home is totally furnished and is ready for company any time," Nelson said. "It can be used by people who are in Marshall for any length of time. It is like a home away from home."

Nelson said she became interested in old houses and antiques because she and Tim came from families that liked old things and lived in old houses.

They met at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, where Tim graduated with a degree in history and Nelson with a degree in music.

The Nelsons lived in Chicago while her husband attended McCormick Seminary and then moved to Auburn, Neb., for seven years. There they really got into antiques.

"Our friends lived in older homes and had antiques," she said. "We had also inherited some antiques from our fami-

lies. We went from one taste to another. When we got married, we liked Danish modern, and now everything we have is Victorian. We began to appreciate the older things because they last. With care, keeping them in good shape and polishing them, things will last longer."

Over the years Nelson has developed a love of dishes and colored glass.

"The family pieces that we inherited began our love of antiques and the Victorian look," Nelson said. "Our house has lent itself to being furnished with antiques."

"When you see the workmanship of some of the antiques, you can see that people took a great deal of pride in what they made," she added. "A lot of antiques were very lovingly made because it was something people enjoyed doing."

She also enjoys playing the piano and teaches music to preserve that heritage. Another hobby is breeding English cockers, something in which she became interested when they lived in Scotland. She enjoys traveling, as well.

"We like to travel and do so quite a lot," Nelson said. "Right now we are mostly into grandchildren. They have the priority. We want to watch them grow up."

The Nelsons have two children. Chris lives in North Carolina and has two children, while Claudia lives in California and has one boy.

For now, Nelson spends most of her free time working on the houses.

"We have worked on the houses since about the middle of May," said Nelson. "We hope to have them completed by the fall. It is always a longer project than you expect it to be, but when it is done it will be very rewarding, and I hope that it will encourage others to do the same thing, as well."



Kitty Nelson

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