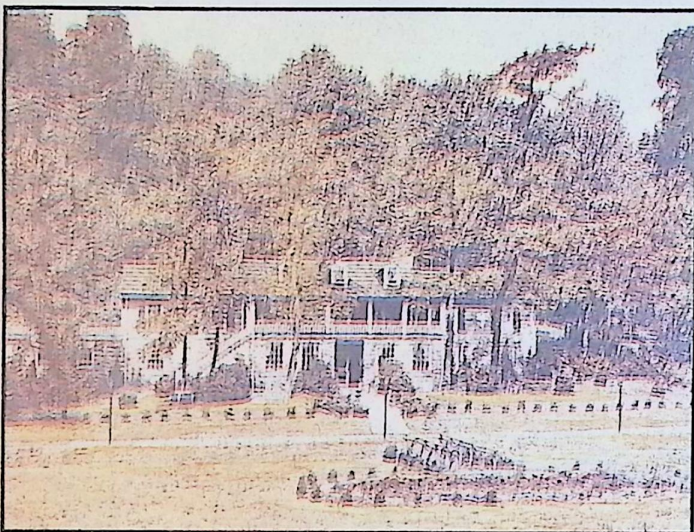




Students are tops in the Mountain Empire / Page 5D

Community

Bristol Herald Courier
Bristol Virginia-Tennessean
Sunday, July 10, 1994



The Eastman Antique House, pictured in its prime, was constructed with hand-hewn logs and millstones taken from old mills in Tennessee, Virginia and North Carolina.

Even in neglect, Bristol landmark invites Visions of Glory

Sitting quietly at the foot of a wooded hillside on the Lee Highway, the former Eastman Antiques house still retains vestiges of its former glory, despite nearly a quarter-century of neglect and abuse. Vandals have stripped most of the light fixtures and broken the windows; the floors at the rear of the house are bowed sharply downward due to a faulty support; and massive sheets of plastic on the roof keep out the rain.

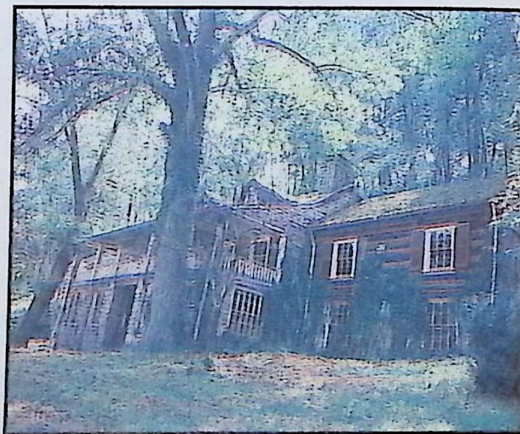
But John Correnti, a former graphic designer who bought the property in 1986, sees nothing but potential for the once-proud structure.

"As a bed and breakfast or a restaurant, it would be perfect. The grounds, once they're landscaped, would have a tremendous impact ... the major structure is solid, but there are about three spots that leak. The shingles need to be replaced, but that could be done reasonably," he said, taking a pause from showing the property to a potential buyer.

"I think the biggest thing going for it is the history associated with the house," he said. "We've applied to the state to have it listed on the Register of Historic Places."

That history dates back to 1932, he explained, when Ruth Eastman, wife of antique collector Irving Eastman, bought the property and began collecting hand-hewn logs and millstones from old mills throughout North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. She had the materials hauled by horse and wagon and dumped in the front yard. Some of the wood is thought to be more than 200 years old.

Mrs. Eastman then commissioned architect Charles Kearfott to design a house based on the materials she had collected. The result was a 9,000-square-foot, 23-room structure unlike anything else in the region. Each room on the second floor is constructed of a different type of wood, from wormy chestnut to cherry, from walnut to pine. The wood is complemented by ornate, textured wallpaper and elegant fireplaces.



Purchased in 1986 by John Correnti, the major structure today, above, is solid.

TEXT:
JIM COX



Massive millstones, above, are inset into the large stone fireplace on the first floor. A warming oven was built-in on one side with a blanket warmer on the other side.



Ruth Eastman commissioned architect Charles Kearfott to design a house based on the materials she had collected. Each room on the second floor is constructed of a different type of wood complemented by ornate wallpaper, left.



Ruth Eastman, wife of antique collector Irving Eastman, bought the property and began collecting hand-hewn logs and millstones from old mills throughout North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. She had the materials hauled by horse and wagon and dumped in the front yard. Some of the wood is thought to be more than 200 years old.

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A huge first-floor fireplace has a built-in warming oven on one side, and a blanket warmer on the other, with massive millstones inset in the hearth.

In its prime the house was exquisitely furnished with a magnificent aggregation of antiques and collectibles. The main dining room and the Early American breakfast room were lined with pewter, silver, and porcelain settings combined with pine, maple, and mahogany furnishings. The Chippendale Room and the main drawing room were virtual mini-museums of 18th- and 19th-century charm. And a small room downstairs, just off the furnace room, was filled to capacity with old brass and copper items.

The antique house was reportedly patronized by prominent citizens from all over the East Coast, including actors and actresses from New York.

Ruth Eastman died in 1961 and Irving Eastman, after remarrying, followed nine years later. The second Mrs. Eastman sold the house and moved to Florida.

The house has languished in decay ever since. But it has not been forgotten.

According to Martha Sizemore, a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker, interest in the house has been "enormous" since the Correntis listed it on the market two years ago.

"We had an open house in November (1992), and we had between 500-600 people. I kept a book and had them sign in as they came in. We even had people call the next day and ask us to have another one, because they said they came by and couldn't find a place to park.

"Just think of the atmosphere this would lend to fine dining," she continued. "People have wanted to have a party house, a place where they could have weddings outside. I could see a gazebo outside; it already has a water fountain, a fish pond, and a wishing well."

"I can see possibilities," said a potential buyer, who asked not to be identified. "I have a backer who's interested. I've been looking at this place since I was this big," she added, holding her hand at knee level, "but this is the first time I've ever been inside it."

Correnti and his wife, Sandra, had plans to renovate the property themselves when they first bought it, but "a bad bout of cancer set me back a bit," he says now. "Then, when we put it up for sale, people started talking about a bed and breakfast, and I could handle that. This is one of the few beautiful places left in Bristol." He indicated that if they are unable to find a buyer, they may still try to renovate it themselves.

The Correntis were living in northern Virginia when they first bought the property. "We drove by it going to a little auction. A friend of mine pointed it out to me and I just fell in love with it. ... I could see and

TEXT:
JIM COX



is constructed of a different type of wood complemented by ornate wallpaper, left.

visualize this little restaurant."

After purchasing the property, however, they ran into opposition from the neighbors.

"We talked to the neighbors and told them what we wanted to do, and they all said they thought it was wonderful. We told them to get together and have a meeting and write down their concerns. Not long after that, we got a letter back (from a group of neighbors) that said there would be no restaurant."

In 1992, at the request of the Correntis, the Bristol Virginia City Council voted to rezone the property from R1A (residential) to B1 (business), with restrictions proposed by the Correntis themselves. Included among those restrictions were stipulations that the house may only be converted into a restaurant, bed and breakfast, banquet and conference facility, or professional office building; and that if the house is ever torn down, the property would revert to residential zoning.

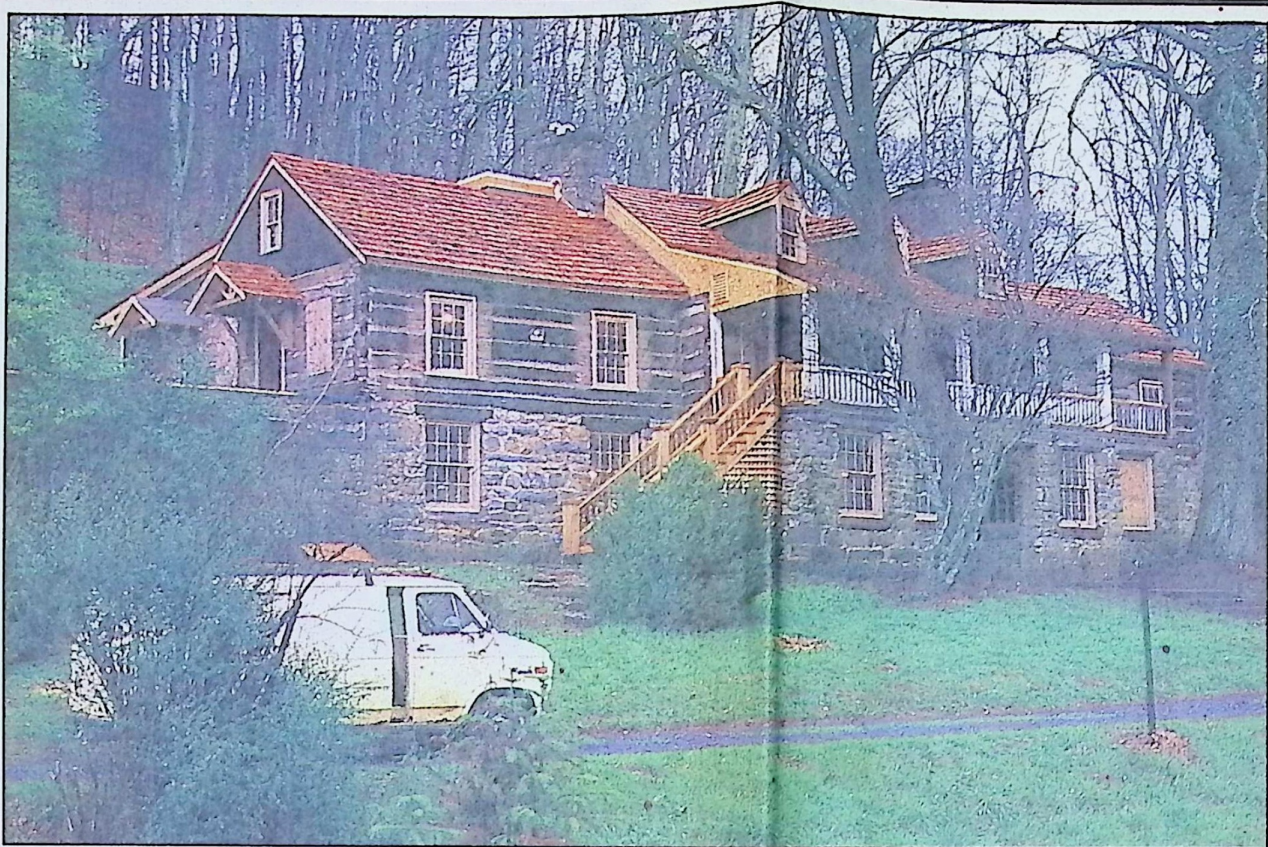
The Correntis now live in Bristol, next to the historic home. John Correnti said the neighbors have since warmed to the idea of putting a business in the house, having seen what he and his wife have done with the property where they live.

Correnti was reluctant to discuss his asking price, but added, "We'll listen to any reasonable offer."

The glory is evident inside the 9,000-square-foot, 23-room structure. Once exquisitely furnished with antiques and collectibles, The Eastman Antique House resembled a mini-museum of 18th and 19th century charm.

PHOTOS:
BILL McKEE

Thursday, March 20, 1997



Herald Courier/Andre Teague

This exterior view shows the former Eastman Antique House on Lee Highway in Bristol Virginia. The house, which has languished in decay for more than two decades, is getting a serious facelift.

Contractor gets dream restoration work to do

By JIM COX

Bristol Herald Courier

For many people, living in a restored showplace like the former Eastman Antique House on Lee Highway would be a dream come true, but for contractor Craig Griffin, the dream is doing the actual hands-on restoration.

Designed by noted architect C.B. Kearfott Sr., the house was built in the mid-1930s by Irving and Ruth Eastman, who collected hand-hewn logs and millstones from former mills in Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee. Some of the wood is said to be more than 200 years old.

Now the house, which has languished in decay for more than two decades, is getting a serious facelift, which includes completely removing about 3,000 square feet of later additions.

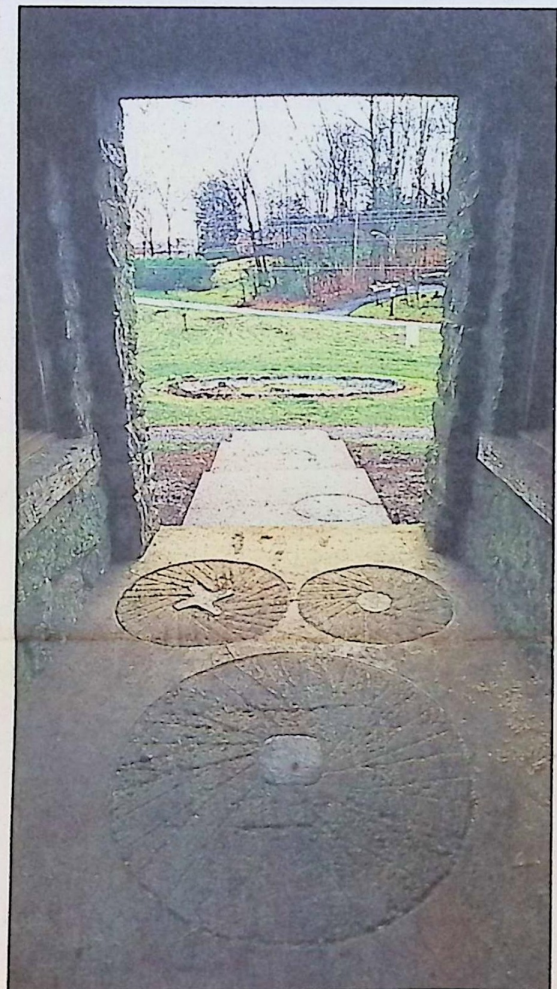
"I've looked at (the former Eastman Antique House) all my adult life, thinking I'd be the contractor that would do it. I've tried to hit on people to do this for years."

— contractor Craig Griffin

New owners Steve and Zanna Blankenbecker of B&B Printing are refurbishing it as a private residence, but Griffin, owner of C. Griffin General Contractors, has long wanted the job.

"I've looked at it all my adult life, thinking I'd be the contractor that would do it. I've tried to hit

Please see DREAM, Page 2B



Herald Courier/Andre Teague

A walkway to the house is built with old millstones inlaid in cement.

DREAM

From Page 1B

on people to do this for years," Griffin said. "I like renovation a lot more than new construction. And when you can restore and keep a structure like this, make it viable for another hundred years, hey, it doesn't get much better than that."

Restoring it has been quite a task thus far, with almost as much demolition as construction.

"We've gutted pretty much everything except the main log structure. It wasn't in bad shape. Then the rear part of the next floor, we tore off a couple of thousand square feet there, as well as major roof area," Griffin said. Indicating an area on the main floor, he said, "We took from there back completely off, down to the original footers. ... we redid it all completely, all plumbing, all wiring, completely redone in the house."

Kearfott's original design has worked well, Griffin said. The problem areas have been numerous additions made over the years, most of which have been ripped away and replaced.

"Bo Kearfott drew the plans originally; I've stayed to his original plans except for a bump out here in the kitchen; they had a very small kitchen. We added some additional attic area for the kids' rooms and a couple of additional baths, things like that, to make it more family-friendly, I guess is the word.

"The original log structure was in good shape. It was all the additions back here that had crushed the house in neglect. We had to tear off an easy 40 percent, plus they had a room added on here that was Mrs. Eastman's brother's room, and that balcony area they'd added a library back there. ... everything that Bo did on his design, everything he had was just right, for everything to fit nicely."

In its heyday, the house was a 9,000-square-foot, 23-room structure lavishly decorated with antiques. Every room on the second floor is detailed with a different type of wood, including wormy chestnut, cherry, walnut and pine, with huge ceiling beams and paneled ceilings. An old brochure proclaims it "truly a treasure house for the buyer of exquisite antiques." Rooms carried names befitting the items they featured, such as the Chippendale Room or the Old Brass and Copper Room.

Today the house is swarming with contractors reworking it toward its former glory. The kitchen has been rebuilt with a cathedral ceiling over what will be the stove and sink area, with a breakfast nook to one side.

"I'm having hand-hewn beams made up to put back like it was originally; a little breakfast room with nice divided light bays, little herb garden going (outside). This'll be a nice balcony with railings that all match the balance of the house," Griffin said. "This is a rock patio; the balcony'll be out there."

Old stone barbecue grills outside the house represent later renovations, Griffin said, and are not part of the current reworking. The main entrance off Lee Highway will have a rock column with what he called "Elvis Presley gates," he said, while a new fountain is planned for the front yard.

"We're taking that (fountain) out and we'll be reworking a new design. Everybody wants the foun-

tain back. Who knows, we could copy something from Italy. You never know about this bunch."

The embossed wallpaper on the second floor, which looks like tool-worked copper in one room and hand-tooled leather in another, can't be saved because of moisture damage over the years, Griffin said. It will be taken down and replaced with new patterns over new plaster.

What was once the formal dining room will become a family room. A new dining room is being built next to the new kitchen at the back of the house.

The formal living room, which includes the main entrance, has a spartan staircase leading up to the children's bedrooms and a massive fireplace at the end opposite the entrance from the formal dining room. Griffin estimates the room is close to 900 square feet.

According to the brochure, the room once contained an Early Philadelphia Spinnet. When the house is restored, a set of doors will lead off into a small hallway with a powder room and a half bath for guests, then lead into the new dining area. A master bedroom next to the living room completes a suite which includes the living and family rooms and dining room.

Landscaping outside the master bedroom will include a rocked garden with a waterfall and a pond. "We found some natural stone out there, we're going to clean it off and incorporate it in with the waterfall. That's going to be nice." Hemlock trees and boxwood hedges will be planted around the perimeter of the triangular property.

The roof has been replaced with Blue Label hand-split cedar shake shingles, but Griffin said it was not in as bad a shape as it appeared from the highway.

"The plastic was misleading. I've of course replaced or resheeted the entire roof, but the only real damage was the front porch area, which looked really bad, and of course the rear part, which we took off anyway."

The sidewalks leading to the house and the hearth of the basement fireplace are lined with old millstones.

The project is probably another three to four months from completion, Griffin said.

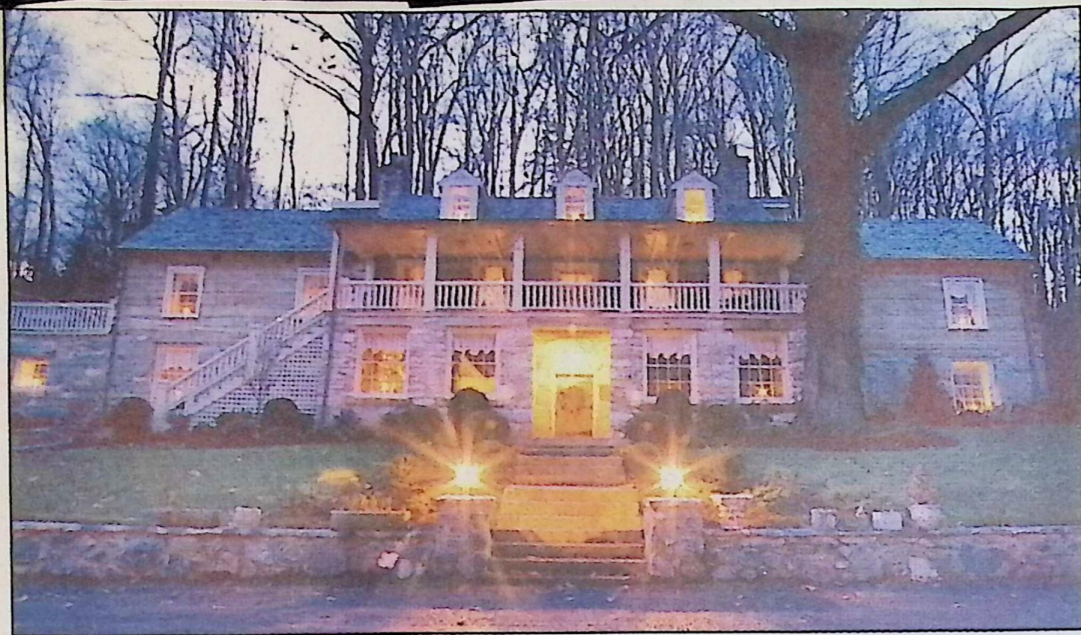
The house stands below a wooded hillside with what appear to be walking trails. Griffin said the Eastmans used to allow Boy Scouts to camp out on the property. "People come by and tell me memories all the time," he said.

Griffin makes no secret of his desire to get his crack at restoring the house.

"I don't guess it was a year ago I was driving by here with my boys and I said, 'I hope to be doing that one someday.'"

The Blankenbecklers bought the 2.93-acre property from John and Sandra Correnti in November 1996. A deed in the Bristol Virginia Circuit Court Clerk's office lists it as a replat of lots 7-11 of the Read Farm Addition made by W.B. Addington on April 6, 1934. No purchase price is given, but the "actual consideration for this transfer, or value of the property transferred" is given as \$100,000, "which amount is equal to or greater than the amount which the property transferred would command at a fair and voluntary sale."

Once cold and dreary, the Eastman House on Lee Highway now glows with warmth. A major renovation that saved the long vacant landmark structure from certain ruin is now finished, and Steve and Zanna Blankenbeckler are looking forward to their first Christmas in their new home. The kitchen is shown below.



Herald Courier/Jason Davis

Landmark Bristol house begins new life as home

Renovation complete, family moves in for Christmas



By JIM COX
Bristol Herald Courier

The current occupants may be Blankenbecklers, but to many people in Bristol the stately log home on Lee Highway will always be the Eastman House — and that suits Steve and Zanna Blankenbeckler just fine.

"It's become our identity," Steve Blankenbeckler said recently, of the home he and his family moved into just over a week ago after a major renovation project.

"People come up to us and say, 'Hey, you're doing the Eastman House.' Craig's crew has probably taken 20 percent longer to do it because people want to stop and see it."

Craig is Craig Griffin, the contractor who has done the bulk of the restoration, which included stripping away more than 2,500 square feet on the back of the once-decaying structure. Along with interior designer David

Please see HOUSE, Page 7B

HOUSE

From Page 1B

Lyons, Griffin has turned a shambling shell on the verge of condemnation into a showplace once again.

The Eastman Antique House, as it was known, was built in the 1930s from a design by well-known architect C.B. Kearfott. Irving and Ruth Eastman wanted a special home to showcase their antique business. The rooms had names like the Chippendale Room and the Brass Room, depending on what items were displayed in them.

The Blankenbecklers bought the house in late 1996, after it had been allowed to sit vacant for more than a decade, slowly giving way to neglect and abuse. Griffin, who for years had dreamed of doing the restoration, finally got his chance.

"The home needed it," Griffin said, while giving a *Bristol Herald Courier* reporter and photographer a tour of the newly restored digs. "The building inspector said it was about a year away from demolition, it had gotten that bad."

Now the Blankenbecklers and their two children, Torey and Clay, are preparing to spend their first Christmas in the 7,600-square-foot landmark. As of mid-week they were not finished unpacking; boxes sat on the floor of what will be the dining room, but the Christmas tree was already decorated in the downstairs den.

One of Lyons' touches is an Aga stove in the kitchen. Of European design, the gas stove is on all the time. Two large burners on top of the stove have hinged metal covers for when they are not in use, and a series of compartmental ovens burn at different temperatures.

Because the stove constantly puts out heat, Lyons recommended an arched ceiling to help vent some of it.

"I just wanted more height and more length. I wanted the kitchen larger to bring more light in. I wanted the ceiling to be higher,"

Lyons said.

The kitchen is styled after that of a French farmhouse. "I tried to keep the flavor of the original home," Lyons said. Just off the kitchen is a small breakfast nook.

Lyons and Griffin retained much of the existing wood, including using the original doors whenever possible. The house includes several different kinds of wood, such as pine, oak, cherry and wormy chestnut.

The original dining room, with its built-in bookcases, is now the library. The living room, at approximately 1,000-square-feet, is the size of many small ranch-style houses. The sparse furnishings there include a pair of facing couches and a grand piano by the staircase.

The Blankenbecklers spend their private time in a master bedroom off the living room. Behind the bedroom is a private bath and dressing room, which opens into a small hallway behind the living room. The dressing area includes an outside entrance that opens out into what will be a rock garden.

The children have their own rooms upstairs, and each has a private bath and walk-in closet. Torey, 8, has two dormers in her room where the roof arches downward, with a blue ribbon painted across the ceiling. Clay, 2, has a single dormer and a private playroom off the attic.

In the downstairs den, Pennsylvania blue slate covers what just months ago was a bare concrete floor. A gas-log fire burns softly in the large fireplace, where stockings are hung with care over a built-in bread oven.

Blankenbeckler would not say how much the restoration cost, only that it was more than he paid for the home itself.

"The conversation came up about this house and stone and log structures. David said he could do the design and Craig said he could restore it," Blankenbeckler said. "We trusted David and Craig to

the point where we believed it could be done. We had worked with Craig on several other projects ... I would say not many people besides Craig would have tackled it."

"A house this size tends to feel uncomfortably large," Mrs. Blankenbeckler said. "Instead, every room feels very comfortable. Everything came out better than we expected."

But the work isn't finished. There are plans to build a three-car garage and guest house, and Lyons said the interior design of the house will continue to evolve.

The small fountain is gone from in front of the house, but it will eventually be replaced by a small pond or lake. John Correnti, who owned the house just before the Blankenbecklers, is doing the landscaping.

"A lot of people said to us, 'Aren't you overwhelmed?' We just felt it was up to the contractors," Mrs. Blankenbeckler said.

It's been a long road back to prominence for the English tavern-styled home. But is it the family's dream house?

"I don't know what a dream home is," Mrs. Blankenbeckler said. "It's a far more wonderful home than I ever thought I'd have ... to me, a dream house is who I inhabit it with. We loved the house we were in, but we were drawn to this by what it could be and the joy of actually doing it."

Sunday, December 14, 1997

Bristol Herald Courier/Virginia-Tennessean



Herald Courier/Jason Davis

From left in the living room are Steve and Zanna Blankenbeckler, David Lyons and Craig Griffin.

Virginia's top Democrat responds to former Gov. Wilder's criticism

Bristol - Historic Bldg - Eastman House BHC 14 Dec 1997



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"Serving the Citizens of 2 States"

March 13, 1986

Dear Mrs. Correnti,

This letter is in reply to one written by you to Mr. L.C. Angle regarding the Eastman House, located on U.S. Highway 11 in Bristol, Virginia. The information I am sending to you was obtained from directories for the cities of Bristol, Virginia-Tennessee. Also I am writing my recollections of the house and the original owners, Irving H. Eastman and his wife, Ruth H. Eastman.

Mr. and Mrs. Eastman, according to the city directory for 1923-24, were living in Bristol. I have always been told that they were natives of New York State who came to Bristol as a young couple. Mr. Eastman was employed as a piano tuner. In the 1930's Mrs. Eastman went into the business of buying and selling antiques. The 1934 city directory shows that her business was at 939 Shelby Street, Bristol, Tennessee. I remember being at this address with my mother. Mr. and Mrs. Eastman also lived at this address.

Not long after 1934 Mr. and Mrs. Eastman bought land on U.S. Highway 11, also known as the Abingdon Highway or Lee Highway, and had the Eastman House built. It is my understanding that the house was built as an antique shop. Mr. and Mrs. Eastman's living quarters were also included in the plans for the building. The place was referred to as the Eastman Antique House and also as the Eastman Antique Shoppe. Mrs. Eastman built up a good business, and eventually Mr. Eastman became her assistant. The land on which the Antique House was built was located just outside the corporate limits of Bristol, Virginia. It was incorporated by 1940.

When the Eastman House was constructed in the 1930's, there were two architects in Bristol. They were Reginald V. Arnold and Clarence B. Kearfott, Sr. One of these may have been the architect for the house. Mr. Arnold and his wife are deceased. They had no children. They moved to Bristol as a young couple, and in so far as I know, neither had relatives in the Bristol area. Mr. Kearfott is also deceased. His son, Clarence B. Kearfott, Jr., is a local architect, and he may be able to tell you some facts about the place. His business address is:

Clarence B. Kearfott, Jr.
Kearfott and Jones, Architects
1465 Lee Highway
Bristol, Virginia 24201

Ruth Eastman died around 1961. She and Mr. Eastman had no children. In so far as I know, they had no relatives in the Bristol area. By 1960 the Eastman House had a street address: 1500 Lee Highway. Mr. Eastman remarried, and the second Mrs. Eastman's name was Mrs. Anne L. Eastman. They ran the

business as long as Mr. Eastman lived; he died around 1970. It is my understanding that Anne Eastman did not continue the business after Mr. Eastman's death. The 1971 directory shows the property as vacant, and Anne Eastman's name is not listed in this directory.

It is possible that some senior citizens of Bristol may have more information about Irving and Ruth Eastman, their business, and their families. I hope the information in this letter will be helpful to you.

Very sincerely

Charles Henritze

Charles Henritze
Reference Librarian