

# History's Caretakers

*Carol and JB Powell open their home to Frederick—again and again*

**W**hat might compel the wives of 50 U.S. senators and congressmen to pile into a bus and travel from Capitol Hill to Frederick's historic district? A handsome, well-tended home that's more than a quarter of a millennium old, that's what.

The Julia Etchison-Hanna House certainly has much to admire. For starters, there's its stunning garden of pink-hued flowers set amid the oldest ginko tree in the nation. Inside the circa 1750 manse, visitors find 6,000 square feet of architectural refinements accented by dazzling chandeliers, tea services, and dozens of prized antiques. But the capstone may be local artist Virginia Jacobs McLaughlin's magnificent center hall mural, a monochromatic celebration of Frederick County life during the Civil War.

Admittedly, most any colonial-era home is going to have an interesting story to tell. But at a time when mid-Maryland's landmarks are going the way of the buggy whip, the home of Carol and JB Powell has never seen a rosier future.

Since moving in just three years ago, the Powells have poured money, time, and TLC into making this three-story, five-bedroom, five-bath landmark shine. They refinished the hardwood floors, added heating and air conditioning, updated the downstairs and upstairs kitchens, and installed new garden walkways and stone walls. Wanting to do things just right, they splurged and clad the back porch with \$80,000 of prime mahogany.

Located at both No. 11 and No. 13 Second Street, the Julia Etchison-Hanna House has become a favorite of garden

clubs, senior citizen groups, Christmas tours, and curious pedestrians.

Oh, about those pedestrians. Whether day or night, they can be found peeking through the big, uncurtained windows and into the Powells' stately living room. Most homeowners would be unnerved by all the gawking. But Carol and JB wouldn't think of shooing them off.

"People look into our house every single day and it doesn't bother me a bit," Carol says. "Sometimes, if I'm walking through the house and see people looking in, I'll wave to them. If you're blessed to own a historic house, I think there's an obligation to share it with others." In December 2004, the Powells did just that, opening their house to some 1,300 people on the Candlelight House Tour. Participants today recall an evening of much oohing and ahing.

Harking back, Carol recalls a funny incident from early 2005. "I had just taken our Christmas tree down and was focused on cleaning our living room. When I looked out the window, I saw a whole gallery of people watching me while I was cleaning. Next thing you know, a lady knocks on the window and says, 'Now *that's* what I call a living room!'"

And then there's those dazzling chandeliers. Motioning toward the living room's "extremely heavy" Swarovski centerpiece—a North Carolina purchase—Carol says, "We wanted something really striking, so that people walking up and down the street could really admire the view." When the lights are turned on, the Austrian crystals sparkle like fiery diamonds, lending the room just that much more elegance and drama.

## YANKEE INGENUITY

To say that Virginia McLaughlin's mural ably captures Frederick County during the Civil War is to damn with faint praise. The mural is quite magnificent, providing a sweeping panorama of the great landmarks, moments, and key players. In monochromatic green, the sprawling art captures the rolling hills and clustered spires that once so moved John Greenleaf Whittier.

As Carol strolls down the hall, she notes that Virginia personalized the mural for the Powell family. "This is our house over here," she says, pointing to the then 113-year old dwelling on the wall. The scene includes all of the extended Powell tribe, even Rosie the poodle. Elsewhere, Virginia has

"The dining room chandelier," Carol notes, "was one of the first crystal chandeliers in Frederick." On special occasions, Carol retrofits the arms to hold candlesticks.

Upstairs, the second floor hall bath certainly merits close inspection. Motioning toward a 1920s era chandelier, Carol says, "We built the entire bathroom around that fixture. We got some of our chandeliers from a run-down, condemned house here in Frederick. The chandeliers were either covered with grime or had so many broken or missing parts that they were likely headed for the dumpster. We thought the [circa 1850] "rose brass" chandelier in the second floor bedroom was amber. But when we started cleaning it up, it turned out to be clear—that's how dirty they were." Carol credits Don Reedy of Frederick's Brass & Copper Shop with a superb restoration.

included nearby Ross House, Mathias House, City Hall, the Hessian barracks, and Mount Olivet.

Pausing, Carol adds, "And this is the Tyler-Spite House." Gesturing to a nearby figure, she adds, "This is Andrea Myers, who died last June of cancer." Pictured next to the willowy figure is her daughter, Annalee.

Carol was especially close to Andrea. Out in the garden, Carol has commemorated the passing of her friend—the former owner of the Tyler-Spite House—with a stirring poem etched in stone. The tribute rests at the foot of the massive ginko tree, said to be planted by a young bride more than two centuries ago.

Farther down the interior hall, Carol reaches the mural's Civil War scene.

"Many people have done murals of Frederick," she says. "We decided to add the Battle of the Monocacy to ours." The scene even depicts President Abraham Lincoln giving a speech in Frederick, following the disastrous Battle of Antietam.

Grinning devilishly, Carol says, "My husband just loves this mural. But if he knew what I'm about to tell you, he would have a fit. You see, JB is from the South. My great-grandfather fought for the North at Gettysburg. It was JB's idea to put the

Civil War in this mural. He insisted on it showing Southern soldiers at the Battle of the Monocacy.

"Well," she chuckles, "if you look carefully, these are all Northern soldiers. The only Southern soldiers are shown retreating."

JB Powell—a powerhouse realtor for Remax—works crushing hours, she says. He's been so busy working that he hasn't yet noticed the mural's details.

"When I tell people this story," Carol says with twinkling eyes, "I

always ask them not to tell him, because JB is so proud of that scene."

Fortunately for us, the great granddaughter of a Union soldier has allowed *Frederick* magazine to finally break the news. Gently. Sorry, JB.

But the last laugh may actually be JB Powell's. We anticipate Virginia McLaughlin's telephone ringing any day now. We can hear JB making one request: Bring some gray paint over to our house—now.

The way we see it, the Second Battle of the Monocacy has just begun. †