

# Shepherd Today

## Friends of Popodicon mobilize to renovate house and gardens

**P**opodicon, the traditional home of Shepherd University's presidents, is getting some much-needed T.L.C. now that current PRESIDENT MARY J.C. HENDRIX '74 has chosen to live in her family home near Shepherdstown and to use Popodicon on Shepherd's West Campus as her business residence.

A new group—the Friends of Popodicon—has formed to help renovate the house and gardens. One committee is focusing on repairing and updating the house and another is working to restore the gardens.

Popodicon is a three-story, 16-room, 9,717 square-foot Colonial Revival house that was built in 1907-1908 by Henry W. Potts, a civil engineer who came to Shepherdstown in 1879 to survey a section of the Norfolk and Western Railroad running between Hagerstown and Shenandoah Junction. Potts met and married a local woman, Eleanor Powell, and the family settled in Jefferson County. Potts eventually bought several parcels of property on the edge of Shepherdstown along Shepherd Grade where he built Popodicon. The house was named in honor of Delaware Indian Chief Popodick, who was said to be buried on the grounds of the Potts ancestral home in Pennsylvania.

Popodicon was designed by architect Stuart H. Edmonds of Winchester, Virginia, and constructed by S.A. Westenhaver of Martinsburg. The gardens were designed by noted Philadelphia landscape architect Oglesby Paul. The state of West Virginia purchased the 126-acre estate for Shepherd in 1964 for \$125,000.

"It's a wonderful house," said John Douglas Miller, owner of Miller Interiors and chair of the friends group. "The house is in structurally very nice condition, totally air conditioned, and has a good heating system. I think it's been brought up to date nicely. It just needs to be loved a little bit, which we're trying to do."

Over the past half century, many campus and community members have seen the first floor of Popodicon when Shepherd



Cecelia Mason

*John Douglas Miller, owner of Miller Interiors and chair of the friends volunteer group, stands by Popodicon's staircase.*

presidents have hosted events there. The front door opens to a wide entry hall with large living rooms on each side. The living room on the left leads to a formal dining room. There's a kitchen beyond the dining room, complete with a butler's pantry. A back staircase goes to second floor rooms that would have been used by household help.

Few members of the public have been on the upper floors, which were traditionally private space for the president's family. A wide staircase winds up the center of the house to the second and third floors, pausing at sizable landings between each floor.

On the second floor there are three large bedrooms and two bathrooms in the main portion of the house, and one bedroom, one bathroom, and a small sitting room in back portion over the kitchen where household help would have lived. The third floor sits under a mansard roof with three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a small sitting room.

The Friends of Popodicon group has already made some minor improvements to the first floor using furniture and art that are already in the house or have been donated or loaned. For example, four committee members volunteered to repaint the dining room, even providing the paint.

"The dining room was red and the committee decided it was more functional to have it a neutral color," Miller said. "That was sort of a gift of love to the house and it went very well. It was very easy to do and everyone enjoyed making a difference."

The walls in the first floor rooms have displayed original work loaned by art professor Sonya Evanisko and her students. Miller has also loaned a few pieces from his personal collection.

"The artwork will change as tastes  
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*Popodicon is shown with updated plantings along the driveway and newly painted dark shutters.*



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## Friends of Popodicon

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change,” he said. “We’d like to develop a nice art collection that will be somewhat permanent. There is a lot of wall space here and it’s a great venue to show off student and faculty artwork and also things the community might want to offer to us, either on a loan or a permanent basis.”

The friends group has compiled a wish list of improvements needed in Popodicon ranging from smaller jobs, like repainting all the walls on the upper two floors and restoring two grandfather clocks, including a circa 1820 Jacob Craft clock (Craft was a famous late 1700s Shepherdstown furniture and clockmaker), to big ticket items like renovating the kitchen and bathrooms.

The kitchen, which recently received plaster work and paint, is large and the cabinets appear to be relatively new, but Miller said it’s not equipped to serve all the catered events that take place in the house.

“We have plans to put an island in the center with a granite top,” Miller said. “The catering staff say that the ovens are not really adequate so we’re putting in a stove with a big oven underneath, a gas cook top, and better dishwashers.”

Miller estimates the kitchen renovation will cost around \$12,000. An even bigger expense will be the upstairs bathrooms, which he said are completely inadequate by today’s standards. He thinks each bathroom could cost around \$20,000 to upgrade. Miller envisions giving each of the bathrooms a makeover using nice tile and all-new fixtures. Fundraising efforts will allow for the future improvements.

“We certainly want to be true to the architecture of the house and I don’t think any structural changes are needed other than in the bathrooms, and that’s minor,” he said. “We would probably mostly stay within the same framework of the present bathrooms but just modernize.”

There are also plans to paint and fully furnish all the bedrooms on the upper floors and possibly convert a sitting room off the master bedroom into a kitchenette, with a goal of creating suites where guests of the university could stay.

While Miller has been busy focusing on improvements to the house, Elisabeth Staro has been leading the charge to restore Popodicon’s gardens and grounds.

The gardens have great historic value because they were designed by Oglesby Paul (1876-1915), a noted Philadelphia landscape architect who, after graduating from

Harvard, served as a teaching assistant to Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. Paul came to Shepherdstown in 1906 to meet with the Pottses and to see the property. He subsequently drew up detailed plans for the formal garden, vegetable garden, and landscaping surrounding the house.

The gardens came alive under the leadership of Margaret Ikenberry, wife of Shepherd President Oliver S. Ikenberry, who served from 1947-1968. It was President Ikenberry who recommended that Shepherd purchase the Popodicon property to provide crucial room for the expansion.

Mrs. Ikenberry greatly prized the beautiful gardens surrounding Popodicon. After her death, the Ikenberry family endowed the Margaret Ikenberry Memorial Fund for Popodicon Gardens and placed a bronze plaque on the pergola that is engraved with one of her poems written to celebrate her love of the gardens. This endowment continues to provide important funds for the maintenance and beautification of Popodicon and its surrounding gardens.

Staro hopes efforts by her committee will once again make the gardens something Mrs. Ikenberry would be proud of.

“Over the years, they’ve been restored many times and then somehow they always seem to fall into neglect again,” Staro said. “Hopefully, we’ll be able to prevent that this time and keep it an ongoing place for people to visit and have events.”

Volunteers were busy throughout last summer and fall cleaning out the flower beds, which had become overgrown with weeds, mulching, and removing some trees and other unwanted vegetation. Staro said the wisteria that grows on the pergola was in need of major trimming.

Volunteers from several local landscaping companies and student and community groups have done some of the work. The next step is to replant the flower beds.

“We do have pictures from when the Pottses lived here in the ’50s and ’60s when the gardens were in excellent condition,” she said. “Over the years you can see that many different ideas had been tried.”

Staro said one problem her group faces today that wasn’t an issue in the past is the increased number of vegetation-nibbling deer.

“We need to be mindful of maintenance expenses, deer issues, native plants, and coming up with something that’s workable in today’s landscape concepts,” she said.

Members of the Friends of Popodicon include Louise Hafer Corderman, Jim and Barbara Gibson, Connie Hoxton, Marty

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Cecelia Mason

*Elisabeth Staro, pictured above decorating Popodicon for the holidays, heads the volunteer effort to restore the gardens at Popodicon.*



Cecelia Mason

*Popodicon’s staircase is viewed from the third floor.*

# Friends of Popodicon

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and Carol Kable, ERIC '95 and JOY '91 LEWIS, SARA LUECK '67, Tia McMillan, Liz Oates, Ed Ringoot, ANNE SMALL '67, LEE SNYDER '72, JIM '68 and MARY (PEACHY) '70 STALEY, Mary Stanley, Terry Wills, and PAUL '74 and PATTIE '73 WILMOTH. The garden committee includes Marellen Aherne, Alice Barkus, LEE SNYDER '72, Dave Swanberry, Tim Valerio, and Terry Wills. ✦ *Cecelia Mason*

## *Popodicon to be available for event rentals in late spring*

After receiving requests from alumni about holding weddings and other formal events on campus, Shepherd is offering Popodicon, the loveliest building on campus with a beautifully restored garden, for event rentals beginning later this spring.

Contact Sonya Sholley at [ssholley@shepherd.edu](mailto:ssholley@shepherd.edu) for more information about rental rates.