

Support sought to restore former slave's farm house

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

A local man is asking for the community's help to save a farmhouse, built by a former slave, that has been in his family for generations.

Ali Shabazz is trying to restore the small, two-story farmhouse on his property on Bethania-Rural Hall Road in Bethania. Shabazz said the house was built in 1900 by his great grandfather, Sanford Conrad, and grandfather, William, on plantation land purchased from Sanford's former slave master. Generations of Shabazz's family lived in the house until 1980. Since then, the house fell into severe disrepair. The City's Neighborhood Services Department found that it doesn't meet the minimal housing code, putting it in a category for possible demolition by the city.

The matter came before the City Council in February. Shabazz appealed to the Council for time to fix the house and was given until August to make improvements before the council reviews the matter again. Shabazz said he is determined to restore the house.

"In order for us to know our future, we have to be able to know our past," said Shabazz.

The damage to the house, which was literally falling apart, was extensive, including ceiling supports that had deteriorated and needed reinforcement, and a large part of the house's wall was missing.

Shabazz hired carpenter John Robertson late last year to repair the farmhouse. There's been a lot of work done, including repairing and painting the metal roof, replacing exterior rafters, bracing ceiling rafters and replacing windows.

Robertson took the job after several local carpenters turned it down, thinking the damage was too extensive. But Robertson said he had no doubts that the house could be restored and was glad to be part of the project.

"It's not a...big structure, but it holds a lot of history," said Robertson.

Assistant City Attorney Al Andrews said the Council makes determines if a structure in the demolition category should be demolished or if the owner should be given more time to bring it up to the housing code. Once repairs are done, then the Neighborhood Services Department can do an inspection to deter-

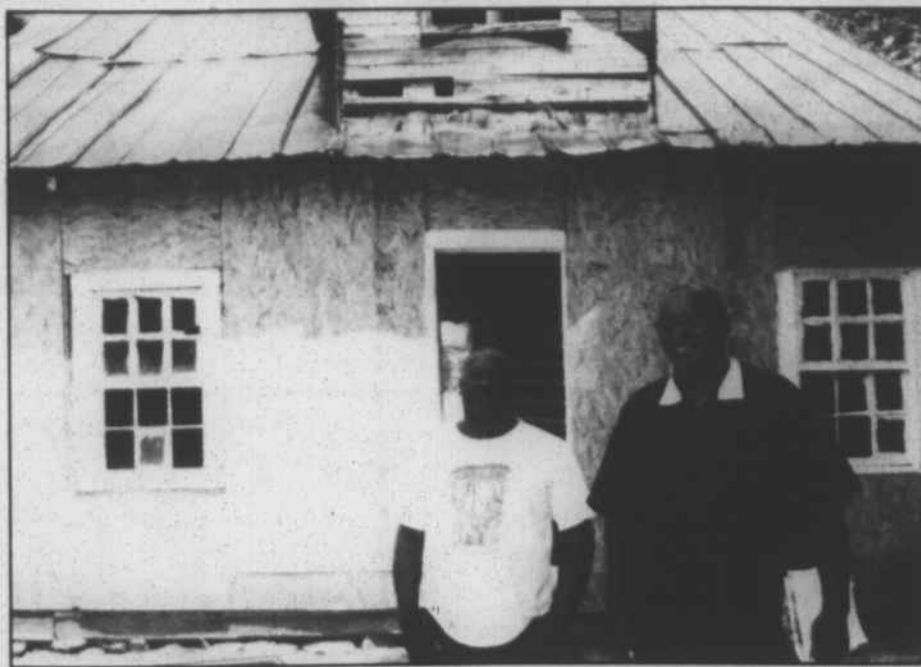


Photo by Todd Luck

Above: John Robertson and Ali Shabazz (right) in front of the house.



Left: A picture of the farmhouse before the restoration efforts.

mine if it meets the housing code so it can be removed from the demolition category, said Andrews.

Shabazz hopes the repairs that are currently underway will buy him enough time to restore the farmhouse to its former glory. He would like to turn the restored house into a community facility that could house meetings and conferences. He also plans to sell homemade jelly and jams out of it.

History is a passion for Shabazz, who founded the Bethania Freedmen's Committee, which champions local historic causes including getting Bethania's freedmen's plots, where former slaves lived, on the National Register of Historic Places.

Shabazz has his own history with the farmhouse. He went to live there as a teenager with his late grandmother, Patsy Lash Conrad, who was in her 90s. Known in the community as "Aunt Patsy," she was a mid-wife and did domestic work.

Herron

from page A1

big thing," he related. "You got to know the officers that were working the beats in the neighborhoods."

William Capers, Herron's campaign manager, retired from the Sheriff's Office after three decades of service. Moving the department back to a more neighborhood-focused model would be an improvement for citizens, he believes.

"We both came at a time when community policing was a very important thing... the officers knew you by name, and I think they've gotten away from that," he commented. "I think Mr. Herron can bring it back to the citizens of this county."

Herron, who once worked under Schatzman, says the sheriff lacks visibility in community. Law enforcement requires a human touch, Herron says.

"He has taken the department forward as far as technology - I will agree with that, but technology does not answer the calls and communicate with the citizens," he said of Schatzman. "It is a tool, but it doesn't beat face-to-face interaction with the public."

If elected, Herron says he would work to strengthen connections between the Sheriff's Office and the community it serves through community forums similar to those the Winston-Salem Police Department has been known to hold.

"I think we have to come outside of our comfort zones and go into the city," he said. "...You have to be more proactive instead of reactive."

If he were to win in November, Herron would be the county's first black sheriff and the first Democrat to serve in that capacity in some time. Countywide elections have not been kind to blacks

in Forsyth. In 2002, while African-American Denise Hartsfield handily won the votes of enough Forsyth County residents to win a seat on the local District Court bench, John Polite, another black former veteran of the of Sheriff's Office, was trounced by Schatzman.

Both Herron and Capers are hoping for a much better outcome this fall.

Capers, also a city native, believes increased interaction with county residents could help bridge the mistrust that exists between law enforcement and some members of the black community.

"Mr. Herron can bring the integrity back to the department that the community is looking for," he said. "...I think this county deserves somebody who has their best interests at heart, somebody who will get out and interact with the community and somebody who they can say they know."

Increasing child support enforcement; sex offender monitoring; and bolstering diversity within the department are among his chief objectives, Herron said.

A graduate of the FBI National Academy, Herron says his proudest accomplishments stem from the many officers he helped to train during his tenure. If elected, Herron hopes to continue the rapport he says he enjoyed with the officers in the past.

"There's two groups of people that are important, that's the citizens and the officers that serve them," he said. "...I want to be a leader that they can trust so that they can go out and do their jobs fully."

For more information about Herron's campaign, contact Capers at 336-462-9501 or wpcapers@gmail.com.



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