

January 29, 1986

Dexter Town Council to decide fate of Fitzgerald Mansion

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by Kimberly Sawtelle

DEXTER — The fate of the 115-year-old Fitzgerald Mansion at 232 Lower Main St. will be decided by Dexter Town Council at a meeting Feb. 6. The deadline for submitting bids on the property is Jan. 31.

The old house has sparked the interest of many community members since the building was purchased by the council early this month.

Once it was purchased by the council, the building was put up to bid in the hope of attracting a developer to the property. At the Jan. 2 council meeting, abutting property owner Alton Crosby, said he was interested in buying the house and demolishing the structure. The cleared space would provide parking for his business, Crosby Funeral Home.

Town Manager David Holt said at least two persons have indicted an interest in purchasing the manor for restoration purposes.

The history of the Fitzgerald Mansion is a reflection of its first resident, Dr. Orrin Fitzgerald Jr., a spiritualist doctor.

Built in 1890, apparently by the young doctor, the house was one of the finest in the state. The names of the architect and builder remain a mystery today. Despite the structure's current state of disrepair, the estate still exudes a commanding aura of attraction.

Two original sets of ornately carved, mahogany double front entrance doors still swing on their hinges but only one etched door-window remains. Inside, another set of double mahogany doors hang, shutting off the entrance of what once may have been the front parlor. Again, a single window of finely etched glass survives.

When built, the interior walls were painted with murals by an unidentified Boston artist. Chandeliers hung from 12-foot high ceilings of copper and steel. One heavily damaged chandelier still hangs in a first floor room.

Five or six grand marble fireplaces graced the house. At least two brick-ed up hearths remain intact, a gray stone fireplace on the first floor and a more elaborate angle of red and green marble on the second floor. According to a current tenant, other fireplaces were removed in pieces and may be stored in the old stables.

Much of the mahogany woodwork survives, although it is damaged. Many doors have smooth glass handles. The cupola has been sealed

off.

The exterior of the structure bears elaborate gingerbread. Even the underside of the porch roof shows the remains of an artistic finish.

The stables, now converted to a garage, once rivaled the homes of the town's other prominent citizens. Murals were painted on the plaster walls and ceilings. Wainscoting and stall doors, with oval windows, were made of black walnut. The trough was made of hollowed granite.

The estate was described in the Jan. 29, 1897 issue of *The Piscataquis Observer* as "one of the finest stock farms in the country". Housed at the stables were at least two teams of matched milk white and jet black horses. The famous race horse Sen. Blackburn, purchased by Fitzgerald in 1896 for \$7,000, also resided at the stables.

The house and stables as well as Fitzgerald's Hotel Elmwood in Waterville, were staffed entirely by black servants. Fitzgerald was ostentatious and in keeping with his quest for the appearance of grandeur, the doctor had his white coachman blacken his skin when driving a six-hitch team.

Dr. Fitzgerald

Born March 29, 1842 in Canaan, the son of Orrin and Mary Jane (Joy) Fitzgerald, Orrin Fitzgerald Jr. is said to have shown signs of "unusual healing power" before the age of 20.

His father, a carpenter, thinking his son insane, sent him to Garland to live with spiritualist Johnathan Lawrence. Fitzgerald's power to heal apparently came to him through his "control" of the spirit of Indian William Lybush.

As a spiritualist doctor, physician Fitzgerald performed surgery on a great many people by closing his eyes and entering a trance. Dr. Fitzgerald also developed medicines, one of which was Fitzgerald's Improved Invigorator, advertised in 1886.

The 'invigorator' was advertised to prevent paralysis, make blood and flesh and cure everything from neuralgia to heart disease, dropsy, biliousness and hypochondria. The 'invigorator' was manufactured by Fitzgerald and Dodge in the Dexter Laboratory, located on Lower Main St.

A second elixir was developed by the doctor and marketed initially by Fitzgerald and Newton. Fitzgerald's Membrane Cure was advertised to cure lung disease, hay fever and deafness among other ailments. Later the medical labs were moved to Allston, Mass. and there the tonics

were distributed by Fitzgerald and Co.

Fitzgerald's activities prior to 1882 remain sketchy at best. In that year, at the height of his career, he established the Eastern State newspaper, printed out of what he then called the Fitzgerald Building.

Nearly weekly, the doctor's extensive travels and schedule were recorded on the front page of the paper, under the heading of his name. Eventually, as Fitzgerald built his Medical Home in Allston, Mass. and spent more of his time away from Dexter, his name appeared less in the local news column and more in the three weekly advertisements for the home and two tonics. The State was merged with *The Gazette* in 1892 after being moved to the Advent Building, the recently demolished Full Gospel Mission Church.

In February 1886, the Eastern State announced the doctor was inventing a new form of anesthesia. The substitute for chloroform and ether would be in a capsule form and effects would directly reflect the size of the pill.

"Its effects will be to render the system insensible to pain for a greater or less length of time, according to the size of the capsule, and as the pulsation is in no way affected more than by a sound sleep, the patient experiences no inconvenience whatever

Rainbow installs officers

MILO — The International Order of Rainbow for Girls held a public installation on Sunday, Jan. 19, at the Milo Masonic Hall. Kerri Hayes, daughter of Robert and Marie Hayes of Milo, was installed as Worthy Advisor.

Miss Hayes' motto is "The most wasted day of all is that one which you have not laughed." Her flower is the pink rose, mascot is the seal, colors are shades of pink and white. Her scripture is John 3:16, and her stations honored are Love, Hope and patriotism.

During her reign the Rainbow Assembly will have a "Shop and Save" supper at the Milo Masonic Hall as a fund raiser; they will attend a play at Penobscot Theatre; and for service they will do a program for the Little Red Schoolhouse in Dover-Foxcroft.

The Installation Program started with the entrance of the retiring of-

after recovering consciousness."

In 1890 the first advertisement for the Massachusetts Medical Home appeared in the Eastern State. Described, "by no means a hospital," the home was "for the reception and permanent cure of all cases of chronic and organic diseases. No cases admitted unless a cure can be effected."

The home itself was elaborate with hot and cold water, electric bells, baths and modern appliances. The lawns were expansive and the rooms elegant.

Dr. Fitzgerald retained personal supervision over all cases, despite an extensive medical staff.

On January 28, 1897, the *Piscataquis Observer* reported the doctor would spend "the next few years dividing his time between Dexter and his medical home in Allston."

Ten months later, nearly to the day, on Nov. 26, 1897, Dr. Orring Fitzgerald Jr. died in Allston of paralysis of the spine and multiple neuritis (the simultaneous inflammation of many nerves). Ironically the physical conditions were among those claimed to be cured by the Invigorator elixir.

Dr. Fitzgerald is buried in Elmwood Cemetery, on Liberty Street in Dexter. The stone also marks his father's and stepmother, Sarah Ann Joy's grave sites. A brother and sister are also buried in the plot.



FITZGERALD MANSION — now 115-years old, the house above once was home to Dr. Orrin Fitzgerald Jr. and his wife. It was also a hospital, medical laboratory and newspaper office. The doctor spent much of his time travelling and the final two days of every month at this house. Research failed to reveal the mention of Mrs. Fitzgerald's full name or the existence of any children. (Sawtelle)

Dexter accepts registrations for Adult Ed. courses

MILO — David Walker, director of Adult and Community Education for SAD 41 in Milo has announced the spring semester registration figures.

tion will be accepted in these areas

There is limited space still available in English, sewing, stained glass, investing in real estate, knitting and crocheting, round dancing, govern-