

## Historic home's future uncertain



Lynn Hyde stands in front of the Haller House on Front Street in Coupeville. She is part of Historic Whidbey, a nonprofit group that has been working to raise \$250,000 to acquire the historic home. The home was once the grand residence of Col. Granville Haller, who fought in the Civil War and in battles against Native Americans in the Northwest. — Image Credit: Ron Newberry

- by [RON NEWBERRY](#), Whidbey News-Times Staff Reporter
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The sleek new sign placed at the corner of Front and Main streets in Coupeville last spring was intended to pose as a classy introduction to a historically significant 19th century grand residence and bring attention to a cause.

Lynn Hyde now wonders if the fancy sign might've given a false impression about her group's progress. "I think there's a misperception with the public," Hyde said.

Hyde, one of the founders of a Whidbey Island nonprofit group aimed at helping protect and promote historic sites, is increasingly worried about the fate of the Haller House.

Her group, Historic Whidbey, has campaigned for more than two years to try to acquire the property and turn it into a unique territorial-era interpretive center that she believes would have broad public appeal.

For the past 17 months, the group has raised enough money to pay a lease and keep the home off the market but is finding it difficult to keep asking donors to give to a cause that is not leading to the property's purchase.

Faced with that situation, Hyde said her group is making one final bold push to acquire the Haller House outright and is starting a new campaign to illustrate what that would mean for the public.

The group is looking to raise \$250,000 by May 15 to acquire the property, which is owned by the McPherson family of Coupeville. The timing is linked to a deadline for a state matching grant that is offered only every two years, Hyde said.

The Heritage Capital Projects Fund grant is a two-to-one match, meaning Historic Whidbey must raise two-thirds of the amount. To qualify for the grant, the group would need \$180,000 in cash donations in hand and \$70,000 in pledges by May 15.

"It's a Legislature program that comes up every two years and 2016 is the year," Hyde said. "We weren't able to apply in 2014. We weren't ready. It's a matching grant, which is why we weren't ready."

The fear that the Haller House could be lost is what prompted Historic Whidbey to start up informally in November of 2012 when the house went on the market.

The group got its nonprofit status in May of 2014 and entered a lease agreement with the McPhersons a month later, taking on the mission to protect and preserve the house as its inaugural project.

As a historian and preservationist, Hyde views the Haller House as an invaluable property to not only early Whidbey Island history but to Washington state as well.

The home, built in 1866, was once the grand residence of Col. Granville Haller and his wife Henrietta. Haller was a well-known U.S. Army officer who served in the Civil War and led groups of militia in regional wars against Native Americans in the Northwest. Henrietta Haller was known for her elaborate gardens on the property.

During construction, the home was connected to the Raphael Brunn House, which was built in 1859.

Hyde envisions the Haller House as a public showcase and interpretative center for the early territorial period in Washington that separates Central Whidbey from any other place in the state.

Coupeville, the state's second-oldest town, is currently home to two dozen structures that were built between the 1850s and 1870s, more than double any other town in Washington, according to Hyde. Washington didn't become a state until 1889.

As part of their campaign over the next six months, Hyde said she and other Historic Whidbey members will emphasize what acquiring the house would mean for the community.

Calling it a heritage campus, the house would serve as an interactive interpretive center that would focus on life on Whidbey from when white settlers first landed in 1850 until 1873 when the railroad arrived in the Northwest.

Hyde said she could write a book about the first quarter century of white settlement on Whidbey and probably will, calling the territorial era "by far the most fascinating but also the least known."

She called it a wild time when many men joined forces to help fight against Native Americans east of the Cascades, while leaving their families stranded on an island where thousands of local Indians lived and tribes from the north would invade.

"Talk about a crazy time to be alive on Whidbey Island in the 1850s and nobody's heard of it," she said.

"So with this house, there isn't conceivably a better house to talk about this period and to make it come alive."

The group also wants to showcase the home's unique architecture of that time and continue talks with the Town of Coupeville to consider using the lot behind the house as part of a demonstrative interpretive garden, illustrating some of the gardening practices used by Henrietta Haller and in other town gardens during that period.

Another wish for that back lot is amphitheater space for public programs such as ranger talks or music performances.

Lastly, Historic Whidbey wants to use part of the house to create a gift shop in the appearance of a mercantile store that would raise money to help support maintenance of the property.

"It would be like walking into a 19th century mercantile store," Hyde said.

Hyde, who hails from the east coast, said it's important for people from Central Whidbey to know the stories of their origin.

"It's good for all of our mental health to have an emotional connection to where we live," she said. "When you live in a place where everyone comes from somewhere else, it's a disadvantage for the community because the emotional investment isn't there. Having these kinds of places where people can develop that emotional connection to where they live, it's huge. It's huge for the direction our regional culture will take in the coming century."

To learn more about how to help preserve the Haller House, go to [www.historicwhidbey.org](http://www.historicwhidbey.org).