

Historic Mansion in Manchester Selling Cheap, But Much Work Needed

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The grand old home needs a new owner with money and a love of Gilded Age elegance



Jesse Leavenworth **Contact Reporter**

Tom Ferguson says it's painful to witness the decay of his former home, a Gilded Age mansion that sits vacant and in need of extensive repairs.

The Horace Bushnell Cheney house is on the market for \$200,000, a bargain for a 6,800-square-foot Victorian on 3.5 acres if not for the scope of needed work, including repair and replacement of roofing, siding, interior walls, ceilings, floors, fixtures and utilities.

"I went through the house about a year ago, and it was extremely upsetting," said Ferguson, 59, who lived in the home at 78 Forest St. for 51 years. "It's vacant and unheated and the cold weather has caused a lot of damage to the interior. It's very disturbing that it's turned into the project that it has turned into."

The "bones" of the home are solid, but there's a lot of crumbling plaster and peeling paint, said Paula Viscogliosi, who owns the mansion with her husband, Anthony Viscogliosi. Cracked and missing cedar shingles and loose and buckled roofing were obvious in a recent walk around the

place. There's been some interest from potential buyers, Paula Viscogliosi said, but no one has been willing to close a deal.

The couple, who live nearby in another Cheney mansion, bought the historic house to save it from demolition, Paula Viscogliosi said. They are holding out for a buyer with the right combination of love and money to restore the place to its former elegance.



The Horace Bushnell Cheney Mansion on Forest Street is for sale for \$200,000. The historic home needs a lot of work to restore its former elegance.

Finished in 1896 after four years of construction, the 17-room house was built for Horace Bushnell Cheney, an executive in the family's silk making business and grandson of the Rev. Horace Bushnell of Hartford, who lobbied for the city park that bears his name. The Cheney family raised four children in the home, which is perched atop the Great Lawn, a sweep of park-like grounds that rises gently from Hartford Road to Forest Street.

Ferguson's parents bought the house in 1958. His mother, Vivian Ferguson, 91, is the town historian; his father, Thomas Ferguson, was the owner of the former Manchester Evening Herald newspaper. The Fergusons hosted many events and parties at their hilltop home. Guests included Gov. Thomas Meskill, U.S. Sen. Lowell Weicker and the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Manchester, England.

Tom Ferguson the younger said the house had nine bedrooms, four full bathrooms and two half-baths when his family lived there. He and his two sisters each had a bedroom, sitting room and bathroom, but as a young boy, Ferguson said he didn't realize the house was special.

"I thought everyone had that," he said.

Visiting friends who lived in nearby multifamily housing were amazed by the place, he said, and told him later that their parents quizzed them on details about the house.

Vivian Ferguson sold the house to the Viscogliosis, who then sold it in 2009 for \$315,000 to a local home restoration specialist, Earl J. Parent. In an interview with The Courant in 2011, Parent said he planned a thorough renovation of the mansion over the next several years.

He said three attributes of house attracted him: the excellent condition of the frame; the quality of interior craftsmanship, including marble sinks and a mahogany bannister; and the hilltop location. His company, Manchester-based Parent Building Co., had done a lot of work in the

Northeast, Parent said, "and rarely do you ever see a house like this that sits in a park-like setting that is so close to Main Street."

Parent could not be reached Tuesday, but Ferguson and local historic preservationist Susan Barlow said he fell ill in the midst of the renovations and could not continue. Town records show a loan servicing company took ownership in 2014, and the Viscogliosis bought the property back last year for \$190,000.

The couple has funded complete renovations of the historic house at 131 Hartford Road, which the current owners plan to open as a bed-and-breakfast, and the Viscogliosis' current home, the Philip Cheney Mansion at 50 Forest St. They do not, however, have the means to renovate the Horace B. Cheney mansion, Paula Viscogliosi said.

Tom Ferguson said he has "great hopes that the right buyer will come along and restore that house to its former grandeur." With the proper fixes and maintenance, the mansion will survive for many years.

"The way the Cheneys built those homes — they're built like fortresses," he said.

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MANCHESTER

A PIECE OF HISTORY

Historic Mansion Selling Cheap, But Much Work Needed

By JESSE LEAVENWORTH
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MANCHESTER — Tom Ferguson says it's painful to witness the decay of his former home, a Gilded Age mansion that sits vacant and in need of extensive repairs. The Horace Bradford Cheney Estate is on the market for \$200,000, a bargain for a 6,000-square-foot Victorian on 2.5 acres if not for the scope of needed work, including repair and replacement of roofing, siding, interior walls, ceilings, floors, fixtures and railings.

"I went through the house about a year ago, and it was extremely upsetting," said Ferguson, 55, who lived in the home at 75 Forest St. for 21 years. "It's vacant and deteriorated and the cold weather has caused a lot of damage to the interior. It's very disturbing that it's turned into the project that it has turned into."

The "bones" of the home are solid, but there's a lot of crumbling plaster and peeling paint, said Paula Viscogliosi, who owns the mansion with her husband, Anthony Viscogliosi. Cracked and missing cedar shingles and loose and boarded roofing were obvious in a recent walk around the place. There's been some damage from potential buyers. Paula Viscogliosi said, but no one has been willing to close a deal.

The couple, who live nearby in another Cheney mansion, bought the historic home to save it from demolition, Paula Viscogliosi said. They are holding out for a buyer with the right combination of love and money to

restore the place to its former splendor.

Finished in 1880, after four years of construction, the Cheney home was built for Horace Bradford Cheney, an executive in the family's silk-making business and grandson of the Rev. Horace Bradford of Hartford, who lobbied for the city park that bears his name. The Cheneys raised four children in the home, which is perched atop the Great Lawn, a sweep of park-like grounds that runs gently from Hartford Road to Forest Street.

Ferguson's parents bought the home in 2014. His mother, Virginia Ferguson, 81, is the town historian, his father, Thomas Ferguson, was the owner of the former Manchester Evening Herald newspaper. The Ferguson house hosted many events and parties at their 1830s home. Guests included Gov. Thomas Mottill, U.S. Sen. Lowell Weicker and the Lovell Maynard and Lady Maynard of Massachusetts England.

Tom Ferguson the younger said the house had nine bedrooms, four full bathrooms and two half-baths when his family lived there. He and his two sisters each had a bedroom, sitting room and bathroom, but as a young boy, Ferguson said, he didn't realize the house was special.

"I thought everyone had that," he said.

Viscogliosi, 66, who, like, is nearly unanimously housing were amazed by the place, he said, and told his later that their parents updated them on details about the home.

When Ferguson sold the home to the Viscogliosis, who then sold it in 2009 for \$225,000 to a local home restorer

speculator, Bud J. Parent. In an interview with The Courant in 2014, Parent said he planned a thorough renovation of the mansion over the next several years.

He said three attributes of home attracted him: the excellent condition of the frame; the quality of interior craftsmanship, including marble stairs and a wall-to-wall banister; and the location. His company, Manchester-based Parent Building Co., had done a lot of work in the Northeast, Parent said, "and rarely do you see one house like this that sits in a park-like setting that is so close to Main Street."

Parent could not be reached Tuesday, but Ferguson said local historic preservationist Susan Barlow said he fell ill in the midst of the renovations and could not continue. Town records show a loan servicing company took ownership in 2014, and the Viscogliosis bought the property back last year for \$190,000.

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Tom Ferguson said he has "great hopes that the right buyer will come along and restore that house to its former grandeur."

With the proper fixes and maintenance, the mansion will survive for many years. "The way the Cheneys built those homes — they're built like fortresses," he said.

THE HORACE B. CHENEY MANSION, AT 75 FOREST ST., IN MANCHESTER, HAS BEEN ON THE MARKET FOR ABOUT \$200,000. PHOTO BY TOM FERGUSON