

# Woman salvages fragments of the past

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Until last summer, the MacKenzie house, at 4735 Cass on the Wayne State University campus in Detroit, was better known as the Campus Treasure Shop. At least to junkers and antique

collectors, it was better known. To those not oriented to the past, it looked like an old brick house, full of junk from basement to rafters. But junk to some is treasure to others. And one of those others is Marguerite Hague of Birmingham who has resided over the treasure shop from its

inception.

With the MacKenzie house now eligible for the National Register, which is part of national historic preservation effort, the treasure shop has moved north to a storefront at 5704 Cass.

THE FIRST TIME visitor to the treasure shop in the MacKenzie house could no way conceive what was in store behind the beveled glass door which led into the front hall.

Much of the treasure was (and still is) fragments from buildings and homes that later met with the wrecking cranes—doors, hundreds of them, pieces of formerly elegant banisters, chipped newel posts, door hinges, door knobs, hardware of all kinds, paneling, cupboards, fragments of cornices, carved wood panels and glass.

Anything that Mrs. Hague could see some potential in was brought back and offered for sale—and all of the proceeds went to campus beautification.

And the question many visitors wanted to ask—and many did—was what a nice Birmingham homemaker like Marguerite Hague doing climbing around over such a wild assortment of building materials, dodging rusty nails, broken glass and moving loose debris?

Mrs. Hague has been donating her time and talents to what certainly is a grubby endeavor because she sees beyond the dirt and debris. To her, these things are beautiful and every lovely fragment she saves and brings back for someone to enjoy is a victory.

The lady—small, energetic and often fearless—is living proof of what it's all about.

After Wayne State President George Colten asked her to conduct an auction to sell off some of the leftovers the university had from its buildings, she began thinking beyond the initial project—why not find more?

SHE SEARCHED out old buildings that were slated for destruction. If she couldn't save the whole structure, she would save some of it.

"When I first started, I went to the wrecking yards," she said. "They got so they would all know me and save stuff for me."

Sometimes she would buy right on the spot where the wrecking crews had gathered.

"You can't get in their way; they have deadlines. You have to find the guy that drives the crane and you wait until it's turned off."

Before the treasure shop when she was hunting on her own she would find things for her own home which in itself is a treasure house of early Detroit.

Some of the rooms are paneled with wood from the old Bevelue school in Detroit. The lovely green wall tile in

the utility room is from Children's Hospital. A favorite family piece—a butcher block—was from the Alwater Bar, which was located where Renaissance Center now stands.

Brick on the utility room floor was once on Detroit streets, the loveseats in front of the family room fireplace were from the D&C boats as were the twin beds upstairs.

Part of the floor in the master bedroom is paved with Monroe Street brick.

Mrs. Hague is adamant about documentation and keeping records of where the materials came from, although much of it was in pieces which she brought it home to fix and refinish.

NOW, SHE IS ready to advise treasure shop visitors how to do as she has done, decorate innovatively with fragments of the past.

In fact, she has taught courses at The Community House and the Oakland Y on do-it-yourself decorating.

Yet, all the time she had held the treasure shop open in the MacKenzie house, Mrs. Hague had a deep appreciation for the structure itself, but still

had no idea of what it would look like restored.

"We were very careful of it," she said, "and we saved every piece of molding or anything that might fall off. When we moved everything out, to my great amazement, it really looked good. The kids cleaned up up and scrubbed it and it's just elegant."

The kids she spoke of are members of the Preservation Wayne group who have long been friends of hers. They were the ones who helped her move to the new location, and who pressured the university board of governors into keeping the historic house rather than razing it.

For Mrs. Hague has watched heart-breaking destruction in her years of following the wrecking crews. She recalls with deep regret the smashing of churches and lovely old homes.

SHE REMEMBERS seeing a marble baptismal font and religious statues in cement. She tried to find someone who would take them, but when she went back the next day all had been smashed. Sometimes she beats the vandals to things by only a few hours and the wrecking crews by minutes.

To see a structure like the MacKenzie house saved gives her a sense of victory although she denies any active part in the preservation effort.

The university provided the house and utilities for her to use and she is most grateful for the cooperation.

In addition to the Campus Treasure Shop, open noon to 10 p.m. on Wednesdays, there is a warehouse on the east side which is opened periodically. Mrs. Hague sends notices to her customers about when the warehouse is open.

The Hague children, Philip, Tim, Jon and Vicki, have all gone with their mother over the years as she covered the city trying to stay ahead of the wreckers. Philip and Tim, still living at home, know almost as much about the interesting things in their home as their mother. They, too, can document the condition the things were found in, how they were fixed and saved and where they were found. Through this they have a knowledge of the metropolitan area, its history and people.

With all of these experiences behind her, Mrs. Hague said positively, "The fear of the inner city is so unfounded. I have really learned to love the folks there and they are very protective of me."



Jon Hague did this watercolor of the MacKenzie House as a gift for his mother when he was a student at Roper school last year. He is now attending the University of Michigan. The frame was made from the door of an apartment building at Cass and Forest.



Marguerite Hague of Birmingham sits in a rocker given to her by a neighbor, who sat in it as a child and wanted it to belong to someone who would treasure it.

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