

# Observer-Tribune

## Investor giving a makeover to historic home

MARIA VOGEL-SHORT

MARCH 10, 2005

**MENDHAM - It was 1936 and the very first Democrat to be elected mayor of the borough got the largest vote ever received in a town that was considered solely Republican.**

The incumbent and defeated mayor, Republican William W. Cordingley, watched, fuming, from his West Main Street home as fire engines, ridden by cavorting citizens, celebrated the Democrat's victory. He boiled as he watched a Republican state committeewoman pass by along with them, according to local historian Charles Topping.

He immediately resigned.

Cordingley survived and went on to serve another term as Mendham's mayor almost five years later. He was even appointed by the Morris County Freeholders to the committee for the 200th anniversary of Morris County.



More than five decades after his death, his Tudor, now in a state of disrepair, still shows signs of faded beauty.

The circa 1915 house where Cordingley lived, on 88 West Main St., is being renovated by Mendham resident Brian Graham, an Ironia Road investment Realtor who bought the house in June 2004.

### Transformation Plans

Graham plans to transform the multi-family dwelling into a five or six bedroom home with, among other things, a dramatic two and a half story theater and entertainment room with a side balcony and a third level mezzanine.

The house has been gutted; new diamond-lead glass windows have been installed and carpenters are refurbishing the inside rooms of the cedar-shake and stucco homestead.

"I think it has an enchanting appeal and when it's done, will add an unusual charm and historic streetscape to Main Street," said Graham.

Cordingley's former home, known as Chapel Hill Manor, and historically as St. Hilda's Lodge, was built for the Sisters of St. John Baptist by Cordingley, an architect who owned the property until he died in 1965.

With secret entrances behind bookshelves, and trap door ways into hidden attics, the 7,000 square-foot dwelling, when refurbished properly, will hold a majestic spell over anyone who passes through, Graham said.

On Graham's wall is a framed 1918 edition of The Evening Sun that he found under the

floorboards of the library of the Cordingley property.

Graham said it's possible that the cathedral room that he is converting to an entertainment room dates back to the 1800's, but he has no proof other than age of the wood on the roof.

"It's very different," said Graham, saying it is neoclassical with colonial influences. "But then, so was its owner."

Cordingley butted heads with many of the politicians of his time, but helped to make some fine innovations. He donated the first ambulance to the First Aid Squad. He was instrumental in getting Martha Brookes Hutcheson, a famed female landscape architect, to design the gardens at Phoenix House after Mrs. Arthur Whitney donated it to the town.



After fighting so hard to have a traffic light removed at the center of town, he was killed in front of it in November 1965, when he crossed the road to St. Joseph's Church with a prayer book.

Cordingley designed Daytop Village and Saint John Baptist School, and the chapel steeple is a major landmark along Route 510 on the way to Chester, said Graham.

The house was originally a three-family dwelling, which was originally used as a residence for the landlord, Cordingley, the chaplain of the convent and his family, and another section for faculty members of the school. It remained so until its closing and pending sale in September of 2000.

Graham said he is seeking to historically preserve the property, with its six fireplaces and numerous floors, and ignite the character of the magnificent structure.

In the wainscoted library, a fireplace and a false front of books hide an escape. With 18 rooms, an open foyer and more than three levels, it is quite imposing, said Graham.

"I think somebody will really enjoy its history and make it a part of their own," said Graham.

Anyone who has information about the dwelling can contact Graham at (908) 930-9344.