

Carleton Island Villa has new owner

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Jul 26, 2022



The Carleton Island Villa has a new owner. Ronald Clapp of Florida purchased the historic building last week. Alec Johnson/Watertown Daily Times

CAPE VINCENT — The Carleton Island Villa has a new owner, a man who has a vision to see it restored after 70 years of abandonment.

Charles Millar, who with his brother William, have owned the villa since 1987, finalized the sale to Ronald Clapp on Tuesday.

Mr. Millar said they closed a little after 10 a.m. The sale price has not been disclosed.

Mr. Clapp is a real estate investor who said he has worked on projects as far away as Hawaii from his home in Florida. Last fall he got an email from realtor.com that turned him on to the villa.

“They had an article in regards to haunted houses and spooky houses leading up to Halloween,” he said in June after committing to purchase the property. “I saw the article and really was in love with the house.”

Barry Kukowski, of Howard Hanna Real Estate, represented the sellers.

“This guy has a real vision,” he said. “He is going to succeed. No question about it.”

Mr. Kukowski has had the listing for years, and has shown the villa multiple times to prospective buyers, but until now past deals didn’t make it to the closing for various reasons.

“It has been very enjoyable to work on it all these years,” he said. “I have met a lot of great people from all over the country and the world.”

He said he’s already had people in Cape Vincent asking questions and saying they are in full cooperation for the planned restoration project, offering services to seek grants and other assistance.

“Everyone wants to see it happen,” he said. “I have loved working with this old girl, it will be nice to see her up and going again.”

William O. Wyckoff bought the head of Carleton Island known as Government Point on May 6, 1893, according to the book “Cape Vincent and Its History.” The property includes land between north and south bays, and is near the ruins of Fort Haldimand, which is owned by the Thousand Islands Land Trust.

Mr. Wyckoff, who started out as a court stenographer in Ithaca, made his fortune as president of Wyckoff, Seamans & Benedict Co., New York City, early marketers of Remington typewriters. As was common for many wealthy upstaters in those days, he built a summer mansion in the Thousand Islands.

His Carleton Villa, as he called the palatial 64-room, five-story stone-and-wood structure built to be a fishing camp, was completed in 1895.

Mr. Wyckoff died in 1895, the first night he slept in the villa. His sons Clarence F. and Edward inherited the rambling river estate.

By 1930, General Electric had bought the island as a retreat for its executives. The project was never completed.

In the 1940s, General Electric sold the island to the late Merle L. Youngs, owner of Zenda Farms in Clayton and president of Youngs Rubber Corp., maker of Trojan condoms. Mr. Youngs’ heir, John McFarlane, sold the island in 1986 to Patten Corp. Northeast for \$823,000, which promoted the development of the island into a community of summer homes.

The Millars had the property listed for \$495,000 for more than a decade. That listing made lists online, and in newspapers such as the New York Post, as a haunted house for cheap — for New York City prices, that is. The listing had recently been reduced to \$375,000.

The Millars purchased the property in 1987 for \$140,000. An inflation calculator shows \$140,000 in 1987 would be \$360,223 in 2022. They had purchased the property to keep the area in front of their cottage from becoming developed.