



By the end of the summer, Kenmure will be fully restored to its mid-19th century splendor. The 9,000 square-foot house is considered the finest example of Greek Revival architecture on Norfolk's historic Freemason Street.

Kenmure also has historical significance.

According to the National Register of Historic Places, merchant-banker William Lamb had the house built in 1845 on a piece of land known in those days as The Point. He chose the location so he could keep a watchful eye over the merchant ships in Norfolk harbor. Lamb named his creation Kenmure after a home his family owned in Scotland. In 1858, Lamb became the mayor of Norfolk. During the Civil War, Lamb, as mayor, surrender Norfolk to Union forces on May 10, 1862, but he buried the historic silver Norfolk Mace – the city's symbol of power – under a hearth on the second floor of Kenmure to prevent the Union from possessing it.

Through the years, Kenmure has seen changes. In more recent times it has been sectioned into apartments and office space.

The restoration of Kenmure was a task given to Clay Dills, president of Virginia Beach architectural firm Dills, Ainscough, Duff. The process of reviving the building began in March of this year.

"What's really cool about what we're doing now is that the whole house is going to be a single-family residence," said Dills, "back to almost its original form."

As a pure example of Greek Revival, the main footprint of Kenmure is a perfect square – 40 feet by 40 feet. It features a brick exterior with very simple Greek Revival architectural details such as the twin white columns that support the front entry porch roof. Its interior timber framing and 20-inch-thick exterior walls make it an impressively stout structure.

Dills believes the original master carpenter must have been

a boat builder. The joints used to bolster the house structure are identical to the methods used by boat builders in the 19th century.

In 1855, a third floor of solid masonry was added. The addition amazes Dills.

"Who knows how they did it?" he said. "There's not a crack in the place. It's unbelievable."

Much of the scroll work and fluting on the columns were hand-carved from the Civil War era. The handcraft work remains in excellent structural condition. They are being retooled and repainted.

Transforming the interior back into a single family home presented challenges for Dills. All of the plumbing and electrical had to be extracted and rerouted.

Every aspect of the restoration must be approved to maintain its standing as a historic place.

The English basement at street level has a front entrance under the stairway to the first floor. The basement will be transformed into a wine cellar and game room with a billiards table.

The grand entry hall on the raised first floor is flanked by two parlors. Most of the original decorative hardware on the doors and windows that was repeatedly painted over the years has been stripped down.

"Bringing that back has been a feat," said Dills.

All 14 rooms in Kenmure have working fireplaces. Houses in the past were designed for heating.

"What you end up with is a house full of little rooms," said Dills, "which is not how we live today."

Some of the most important restorations in Kenmure include



the two hand-carved circular grand staircase, wooden flooring, and guaranteeing all modernized duct work, plumbing, lighting and electrical will have minimal impact on the historic integrity of the house.

The first floor of Kenmure, with its 13-foot ceilings, will serve the function of daily living and entertainment. Two original black marble mantles on the first floor are Greek Revival highlights.

The second floor is being gloriously transformed into one enormous master bedroom suite. The rooms will compartmentalized into a living area, laundry, bedroom and bathroom. One entire room will be used as a master closet with a grand marble fireplace. The decorative battered-casing molding around the doorways is an original design gem.

Kenmure's third floor will have individual bedrooms should the new owners, who wished to remain anonymous, have children.

A narrow climb to Kenmure's window's peak provides a panoramic view of the Historic Freemason District.

Clay Dills said the two additions on the back will be completed in mid-winter. It will contain a large kitchen on the first floor and a master bath on the second. The original house had outbuildings for each need.

After nearly 150 years, Kenmure will be restored to its original glory.