



## Preservationist strikes again, buys historic Lowenstein Mansion

**TOM BAILEY**

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Like a hungry kid in a candy shop running from the fudge to the candy apples to the ice cream, William “Bill” Townsend darted room to room inside the historic but rundown Lowenstein Mansion on Tuesday, Oct. 5.

“Come in here into the drawing room and you see this amazing – absolutely amazing – beautiful tilework,” he said during his first visit as the owner of the 128-year-old home in the Medical District.

Just an hour or two before, he had completed his \$750,000 purchase of the home adorned with architecture that blends Italianate and Romanesque Revival styles.

After interpreting the glazed fireplace tilework like a buoyant museum docent, Townsend glided toward one of the home’s many stained-glass windows.

“There’s really three types of stained-glass windows” in the house, Townsend said.

“This is a portrait stained-glass window,” he said, pointing to the glass image of a man in kilts.

Immediately, Townsend pivoted to the half-moon stained-glass window perched over a larger window, and said,

“I believe it was made by the same artisans who made the stained-glass windows at the Clay-born Temple.”

A minute later, he stepped to the stained-glass windows adorning a double-door, saying,

“If you look at these stained-glass windows, they are significantly different... A lot of Memphians went (to the 1893 Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition) and bought items of furniture and household decorative items. I think these may be out of Chicago.”

Then, on his way toward the elaborate woodwork of the staircase banister, Townsend pointed to the top of the arched opening between two rooms.

“See this amazing woodwork up there,” he said, motioning toward



Bill Townsend estimates he will spend more than \$1 million restoring the mansion, including its sunporch. (Tom Bailey/Courtesy of The Daily Memphian)

intricate, hand-carved patterns of fretwork. Townsend struck yet another blow for Memphis preservation on Tuesday, buying the historic but neglected Lowenstein Mansion with plans to restore it.

The same man who recently purchased the ornate Masonic Temple at Court and Fourth and the 81-year-old Luciann Theater building at 2432 Summer Ave. closed on his purchase of the house that department store owner Elias Lowenstein built in the early 1890s.

Erected on the east end of historic Victorian Village, the 12,000-square-foot structure still stands at 756 Jefferson.

The survivor anchors the northwest corner of Jefferson and Manassas.

To the east is the new Shelby County Health Department building.

To the south is demolition that is making way for the coming Orleans Station mixed-use development.

To the north is the 13-story Jefferson Square Apartments.

The plans for the 10-acre Orleans Station, with 372 apartments and 16,000 square feet of commercial space, stirred Townsend’s business instincts. “I said, ‘You know what,

I need to get that Lowenstein Mansion. I want to work with (Orleans Station developers) on resuscitating that part of the Medical District,’” Townsend said.

“I’m the lucky one, who gets to take ownership of these things. It’s exciting for me. I want these all to be here 100 years from now,” he said.

The Lowenstein Mansion seems to be structurally sound, but will need new mechanical systems, electrical wiring and a new roof. The old one is leaking.

Townsend estimates he will spend more than \$1 million in the renovation of the house that has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1979.

Whatever he does to the building’s exterior will require the approval of Memphis Heritage, which was given easement rights to the façade decades ago by an owner who took advantage of tax credits.

But no tension is anticipated by either Townsend or Memphis Heritage executive director Leah Fox-Greenberg. The former is an enthusiastic preservationist and the latter is the city’s leading advocate for preservation. “Memphis Heritage is in partnership with Bill

Townsend in restoring our amazing history, starting with the theater on Summer Avenue, not to mention the Lowenstein House now,” Fox-Greenberg told The Daily Memphian.

“We look forward to more folks like Bill Townsend understanding the importance of preservation and development of assets currently in the city,” she said.

The Lowenstein structure comprises two parts: The original 1892 home in front, and a “new,” dormitory-like addition in the back.

The addition is more than 100 years old, Townsend said.

He envisions turning the Lowenstein Mansion into a boutique hotel, or perhaps a place that wedding parties can use in tandem with the Masonic Temple, which is less than a mile to the west.

Even though the mansion had long been listed for sale, buying it was a challenge.

The previous owner, who bought the house in 2004, lives in Hawaii and often did not respond to inquiries, Townsend said.

Finally, he looked up names on Facebook, found the owner’s son, messaged him, and made a connection that eventually led to the sale.