

The Suffolk Times.

Serving Long Island's North Fork since 1857

Yesterday's farm is today's B&B

Original home once occupied by Bug Light keeper Charles Fenton

BY JULIE LANE | STAFF WRITER

When Patricia Thompson-Muchewicz was growing up in the 1886 farmhouse just east of the Hellenic Snack Bar in East Marion, she and her family used an outhouse. Some 70 years later, the newly expanded Coffey House B&B sports five full bathrooms and two half-baths.

"It's changed, but it's changed for the good," Ms. Thompson-Muchewicz, now of Nevada, said this month after visiting her childhood home and seeing its startling transformation. "It was always meant to be."

What's really striking about the bed-and-breakfast on the two-acre lot is that, thanks to owners Rick and Ellie Coffey and the work of contractor Jason Leonard and his crew, a visitor would be challenged to determine which is the original house and which is the addition.

That's because Mr. Leonard took a "waste not, want not" approach to his work, taking material from the original house to use in the new construction. For example, a fireplace in one of the bedrooms of the B&B was built with bricks from a chimney in the original structure. A mantel over the living room fireplace was found by Mr. Leonard and brought for use at Coffey House. He gave it to the owners for the same price he paid -- nothing.



RANDEE DADDONA PHOTO Patricia Thompson-Muchewicz visits the house in which she grew up, which has now been converted into the Coffey House B&B.



RANDEE DADDONA PHOTO Ellie and Rick Coffey, on the porch of their renovated and expanded Coffey House B&B in East Marion, have always wanted to run a bed-and-breakfast.

Ms. Thompson-Muchewicz remembers sliding down the banister in the original part of the house. The Coffeys can attest to the fact that much sliding occurred, as they discovered cracked black and white floor tiles at the bottom. But under those tiles, they were pleased to find beautiful hardwood floors that have since been uncovered and restored. Other hardwood floors were found under carpeting.

Walk from the original part of the house on the west to the B&B built in the last year on the eastern end and you'll find similar looking floor boards, which Mr. Leonard was able to recreate. Kitchen cabinets from the original house can also be found in a guest snack kitchen in the furnished basement.

The occupants of the original house were Charles Fenton -- third lighthouse keeper of Long Beach Bar "Bug" Light -- and his wife, Ruth, who also had been an assistant lighthouse keeper. They made their home at Bug Light, located off the western tip of Orient Beach State Park, until Ms. Fenton's frequent illnesses forced them to move to the house at 5705 Main Road.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELLIE AND RICK COFFEY
The original house on Main Road in East Marion as it looked in the mid 1930s.

Ms. Thompson-Muchewicz' grandmother, Clementina Rutkowski, came to live at the house to as a health aide for Ms. Fenton and eventually bought the house in 1935. Ms. Rutkowski became one of the first female farmers on the North Fork, growing potatoes, cauliflower, lima beans, strawberries and corn.

Ironically, Ms. Thompson-Muchewicz met her husband, Stanley, while she was living with her mother and grandmother on that farm. She was only 6, she recalled, she kicked the then-teenaged Mr. Muchewicz, a farm worker. He chuckles today when describing how he then took her over his knee and walloped her. Both went on to marry others, but by 2003, their respective mates had died and they met again and married.

The Coffeys bought the house for \$319,000 and have invested in its conversion, saying only that the work came in on time and on budget.

They both work in New York City -- he is retired from the New York City Police Department and is now working as a compliance officer for Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp. Ms. Coffey is an analyst for a government agency she wouldn't name.

But they also like the simple life; they'll operate the B&B on weekends, eagerly counting down the six years, seven months and about nine days until Ms. Coffey can retire and they can move to the North Fork permanently.

Both say they always wanted to operate a B&B, and have taken an innkeeping course on Cape Cod and subsequent cooking classes. While Ms. Coffey does the baking, it's her husband who prepares specialty omelets using locally grown fresh vegetables.

The home is furnished with family heirlooms and antiques bought at various shops on the North Fork and elsewhere. Each of the four guest rooms has its own bathroom and the Coffeys also have space in their part of the house for personal friends and family.

"Our goal from the beginning was to make it look like it was always here," Mr. Coffey said of the B&B.