

ALERT

1978 graduate of Dan River High School leads NASA program, a 13.5 billion-year look back in cosmic time

John Crane

Mar 12, 2022

As program director of NASA's James Webb Space Telescope, Ringgold native Gregory L. Robinson gets to examine the history of the universe.

Robinson, a 1978 graduate of Dan River High School, has been program director for the \$10 billion project for four years. It is the largest and most powerful space science observatory in history, according to NASA.

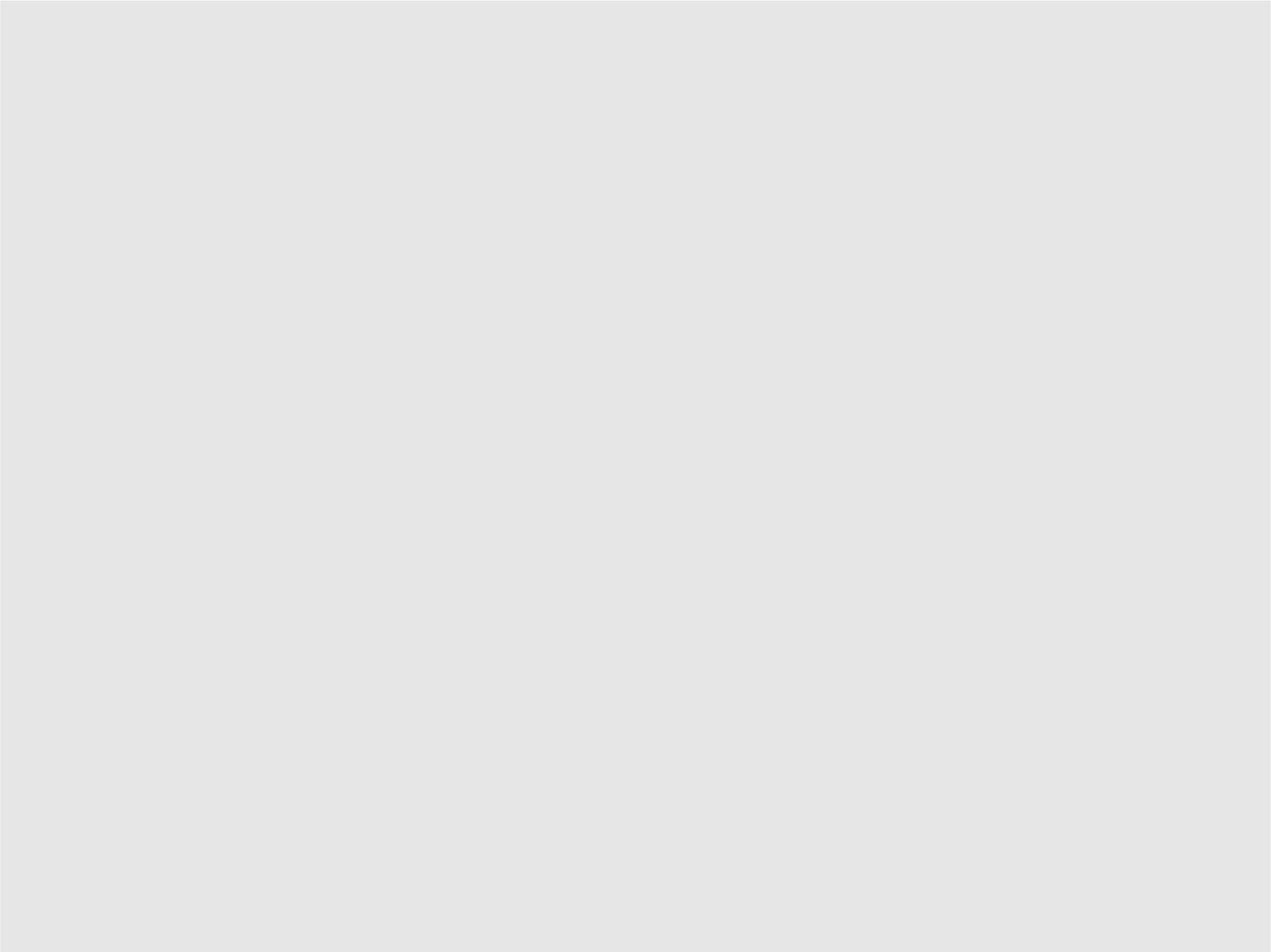
An astrophysics mission that is a follow-up to the Hubble Space Telescope, the Webb Telescope is 100 times more powerful and will allow a 13.5 billion-year look back in cosmic time to see galaxies being formed.

"It will allow us to characterize exoplanets to better understand the habitability of those planets," Robinson said via an audio interview Thursday morning.

Exoplanets are planets outside the solar system that orbit stars other than the sun.

People are also reading...

- 1 **Ford disputes reporting on Pittsylvania County pick for battery project**
 - 2 **Senators push for security upgrades at Danville's federal courthouse**
 - 3 **22-year-old Danville man dies after wreck in Halifax County**
 - 4 **More than just battling flames: As Danville firefighters push for higher wages, a look inside a 24-hour shift on 'constant alert'**
-



Pittsylvania County native Greg Robinson, NASA program director for the James Webb Space Telescope Program, gives an interview Dec. 25 on NASA television as he and the launch team monitor the countdown of the launch of Arianespace's Ariane 5 rocket carrying NASA's James Webb Space Telescope in the Jupiter Center at the Guiana Space Center in Kourou, French Guiana.

Bill Ingalls, NASA

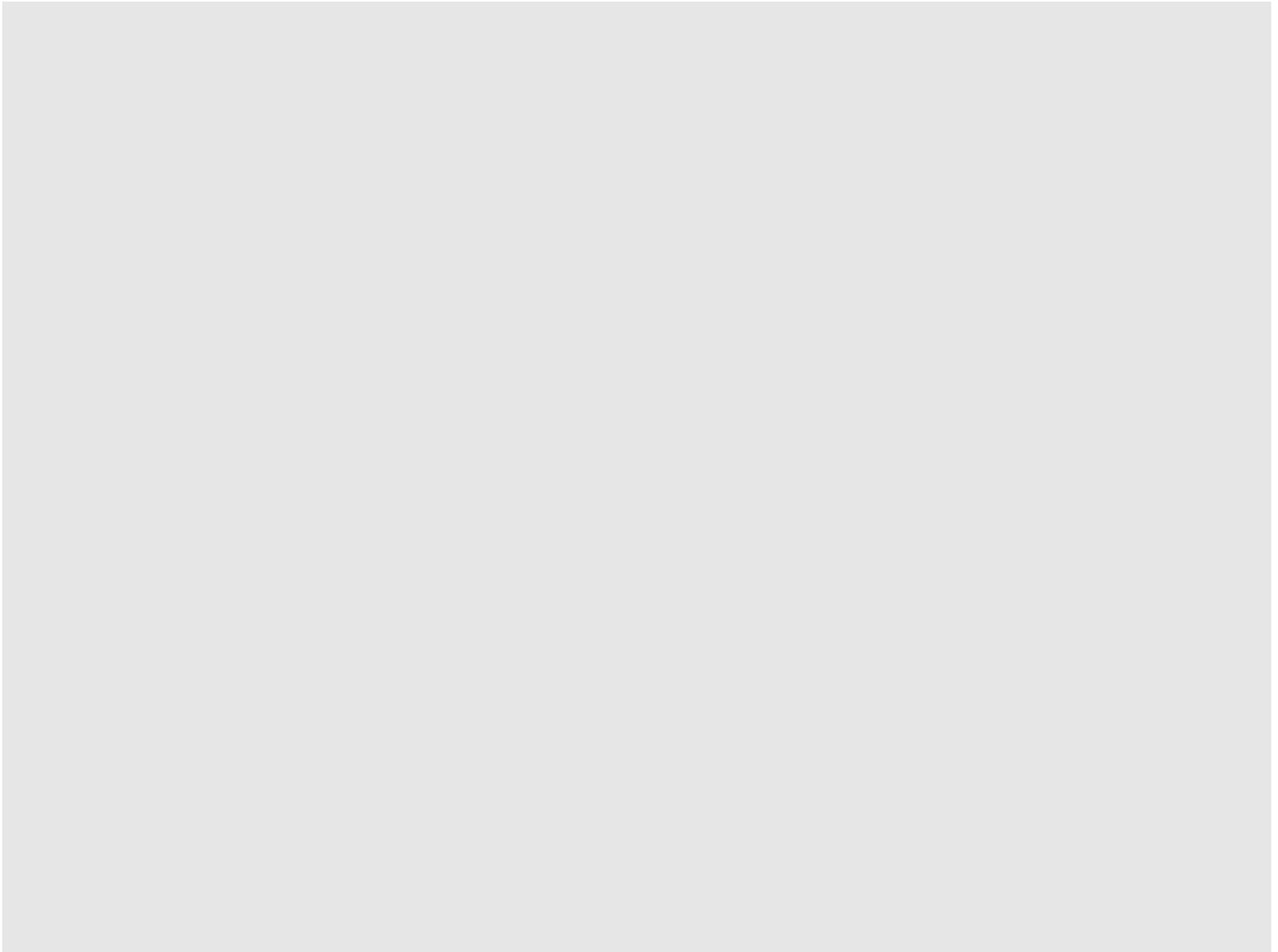
Scientists will use the Webb Telescope to determine the origin and evolution of planets and other bodies in the solar system and compare them to exoplanets, according to NASA.

“There are thousands of exoplanets in nearby galaxies,” Robinson said.

The Webb telescope also enables NASA to better characterize the planets in the solar system, including Mars, by allowing a more detailed look at them.

Growing up in the area, Robinson never dreamed he would one day work for NASA.

“Some people have a grand plan from kindergarten through life,” he said. “I had none of that when I was a youngster.”



Greg Robinson, NASA program director for the James Webb Space Telescope Program, right, looks at an early mirror alignment image from the James Webb Space Telescope on Feb. 7 at the Mary W. Jackson NASA Headquarters building in Washington.

Bill Ingalls, NASA

But he had a knack for math and science, taking advanced math classes in high school.

Growing up Black in Pittsylvania County, Robinson attended a segregated Southside Elementary School through fourth grade. His parents were tobacco sharecroppers.

He later attended Mount Hermon and Glenwood elementary schools, and Blairs Junior High School before entering Dan River High School in the ninth grade.

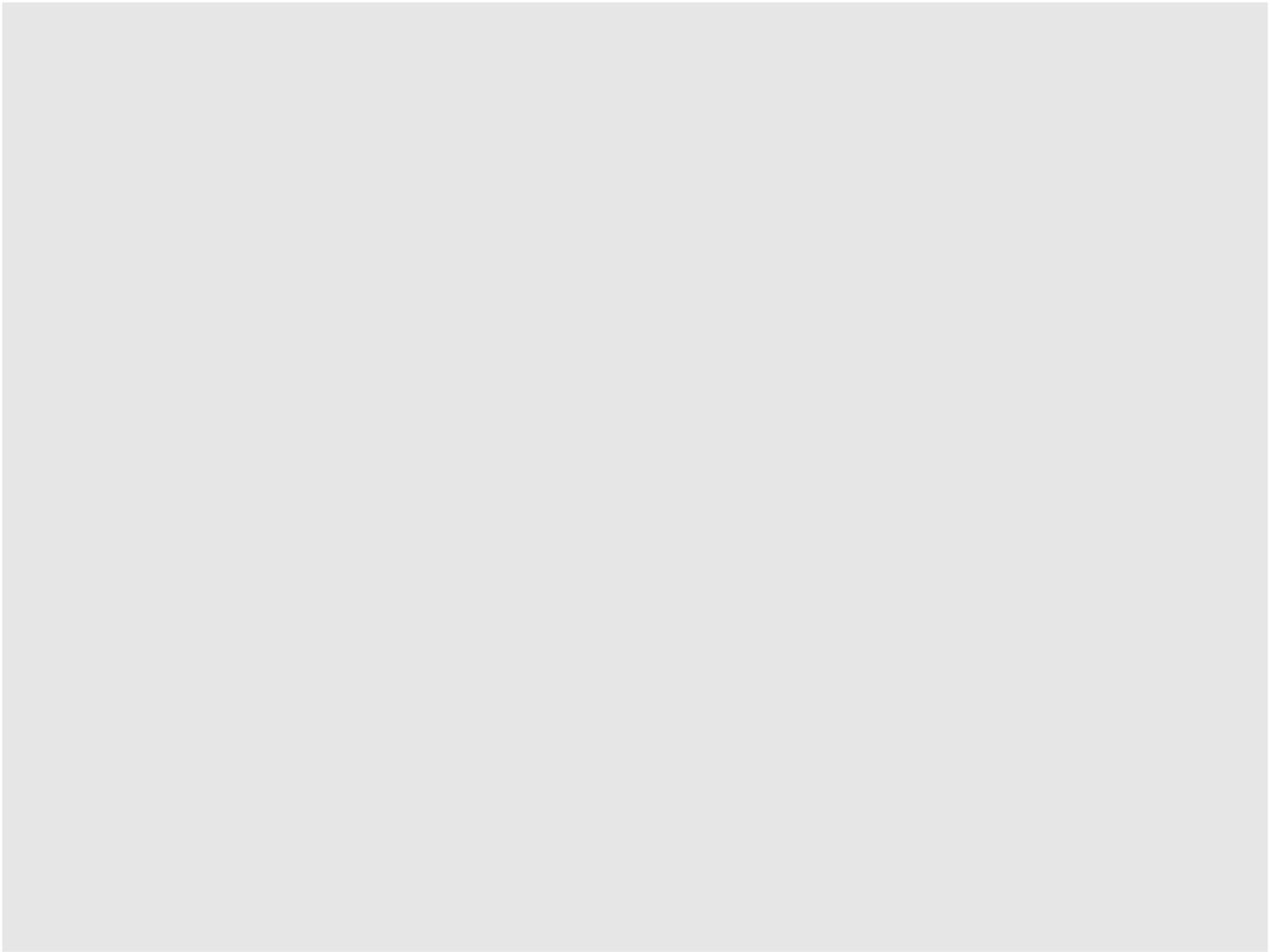
He went on to earn a dual degree in math and electrical engineering, studying at Virginia Union University in Richmond and Howard University in Washington, D.C.

In spite of the challenges posed by segregation during Robinson's childhood, "I still say those were the best school years of my life," he said. It helped that he had quality teachers who nourished students' minds.

"We had really tough teachers who were incredibly smart and great teachers," he said. "They brought that wealth of knowledge to the classroom. They also brought a wealth of discipline."

Robinson also earned a master's of business administration degree in 1993 from Averett College (now Averett University) and attended Harvard University's Senior Executive Fellows Program at the Kennedy School of Government.

After a stint at AT&T, Robinson entered the space industry in 1988 and has worked full-time for NASA since 1989. He worked in a variety of leadership positions for NASA before leading the Webb project, including NASA-level deputy chief engineer and deputy center director at the John H. Glenn Research Center in Cleveland.



NASA James Webb Space Telescope Program scientist Eric Smith, from left, NASA James Webb Space Telescope program manager Jeanne Davis, NASA program director for the James Webb Space Telescope Greg Robinson and Arianespace's vice president for French Guiana Bruno Gérard talk as they wait for Arianespace's Ariane 5 rocket with NASA's James Webb Space Telescope onboard to rollout to the launch pad Dec. 23 at Europe's Spaceport, the Guiana Space Center in Kourou, French Guiana.

Bill Ingalls photos, NASA

Launched

Webb had been in development for more than 20 years and was launched Christmas Day and deployed in early January. It was almost canceled in 2010 and 2011, Robinson said.

“They were going through some major technical, programmatic problems,” he said.

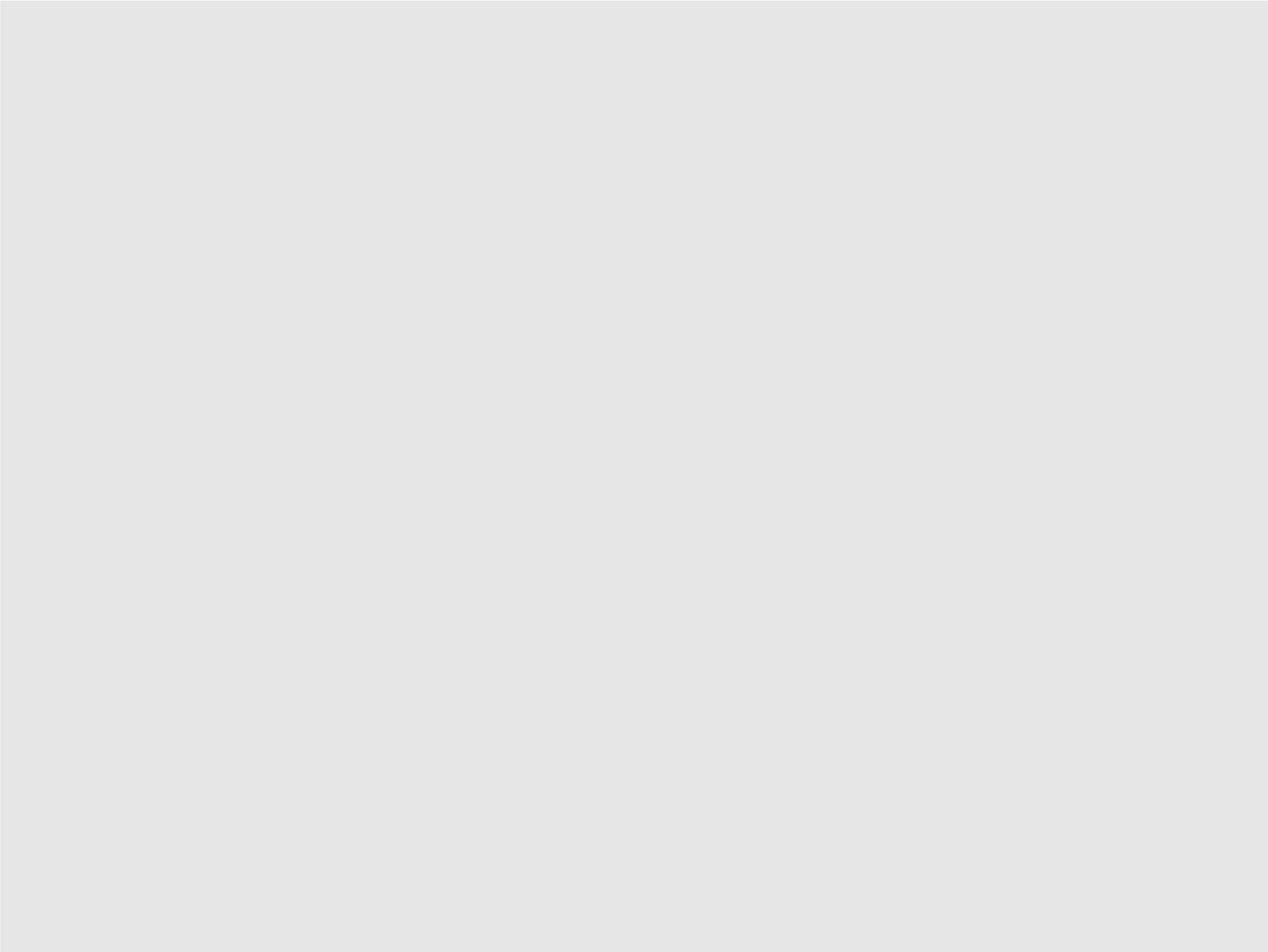
“A lot of the new technology was still immature.”

The Webb Telescope is NASA's largest and most powerful space science telescope ever built, according to NASA. The plan is for the telescope to travel to an orbit about a million miles away from Earth to undergo six months of commissioning in space.

“Astronomers worldwide will then be able to conduct scientific observations to broaden our understanding of the universe,” NASA states. “Webb will also complement the science achieved by other NASA missions.”

The telescope is an international project among NASA and its partners including the European Space Agency and the Canadian Space Agency. Thousands of engineers and hundreds of scientists — along with more than 300 universities, organizations and companies from 29 states and 14 countries — worked to develop Webb, according to NASA.

A typical day for Robinson is a lot less hectic than it was before the launch of Webb. He spends a lot of time at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, where the observatory is being operated. He also spends time on the phone with members of the Webb team and keeps NASA administration informed of the project.



Gregory L. Robinson, center, holds his recently received Roy L. Clay Sr. Technology Pinnacle Award. The Pittsylvania County native leads NASA's James Webb Space Telescope, which launched in December. With Robinson are his wife, Cynthia, and John Templeton.

Contributed photo

Top honor

He recently received the Roy L. Clay Sr. Technology Pinnacle Award, which recognizes African Americans across the country who are tech pioneers.

Known as the “Godfather of Silicon Valley,” Clay is most known for developing new software for Hewlett-Packard computers and paving the way for other African Americans in the tech industry.

“The software we see in ‘Hidden Figures,’ they were using his programming,” said Clay, referring to the 2016 movie about a team of Black women who played a large role at NASA during its space program’s early years. “He’s done many other things in pioneering the computer industry in Silicon Valley and the whole Bay Area.”

Robinson's endeavors seem to have inspired his daughters. Two of them have science-related careers, while the third works in business, he said.

Robinson lives in Manassas with his wife, Cynthia Robinson.

Around The Web



This Botox Alternative Sold out at Target (Again!)

Vibrance



Finally Legal "The Best Pain Reliever" Now Available In Virginia

Healthline News



Urologist: 90% of Men Don't Know This Way to Shrink Your Prostate (Watch)

Health



Doctors Stunned: This Melts belly fat Like Crazy! (Do This)

American Center of Cardiology



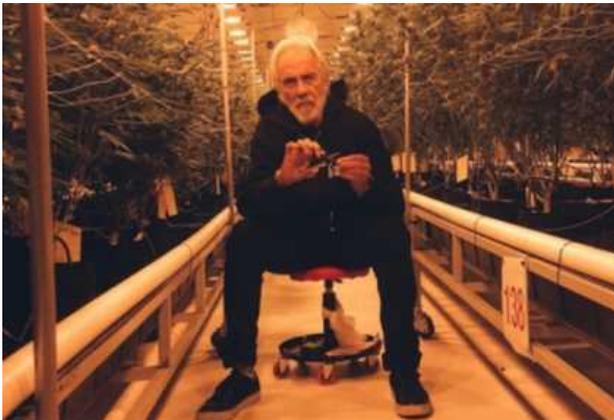
Photos Proving You Can't Fix Stupid

Endeared



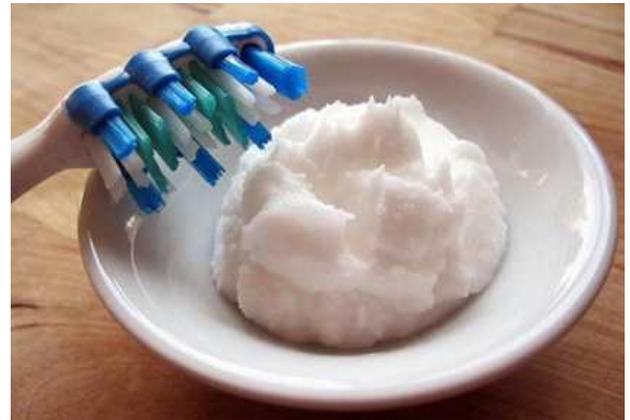
The Greatest "When You See It" Photos

Endeared



Tommy Chong Reveals for the First Time; Why I Went Cold Turkey

Tommy Chong



Mix Vaseline and Toothpaste and Watch What Happens

Health Review



Danville: These Unsold Volvos Now Almost Being Given Away (See Deals)

Volvo Deals | Search Ads

By John Crane

https://godanriver.com/news/local/a-county-native-bought-a-10-acre-property-in-gretna-he-later-learned-it-was/article_4cca833e-8072-11ec-85b0-b768d2c856c0.html

ALERT

A county native bought a 10-acre property in Gretna. He later learned it was where his ancestors had been enslaved.

John Crane

Jan 29, 2022



Sharswood, a 10-5-acre property on Riceville Road in Gretna, was once the heart of a plantation in the years before the Civil War. Fredrick Miller, who grew up a half-mile from the property, had no idea his ancestors were enslaved on the plantation until after he bought the site in 2020.

John R. Crane photos, Register & Bee

John Crane

GRETNA — To Fredrick Miller, the elegant, gabled house he saw every day while growing up in the Riceville Road area was just part of the background scenery of his youth.

Coming of age in Mount Airy, just a half-mile from the 1850-built structure during the 1970s and early 1980s, Miller had no idea of the property's history.

"I took the school bus back and forth there every day," Miller, 56, told the Danville Register & Bee during a telephone interview Friday from California, where he now lives.

Unbeknownst to him and his family, Miller had purchased what they would determine was once the heart of a plantation where their ancestors had been enslaved.

A 1984 graduate of Gretna High School, Miller would go on to join the U.S. Air Force and end up in Fairfield, in the northern Bay Area of California, where he now works as a civil servant.

People are also reading...

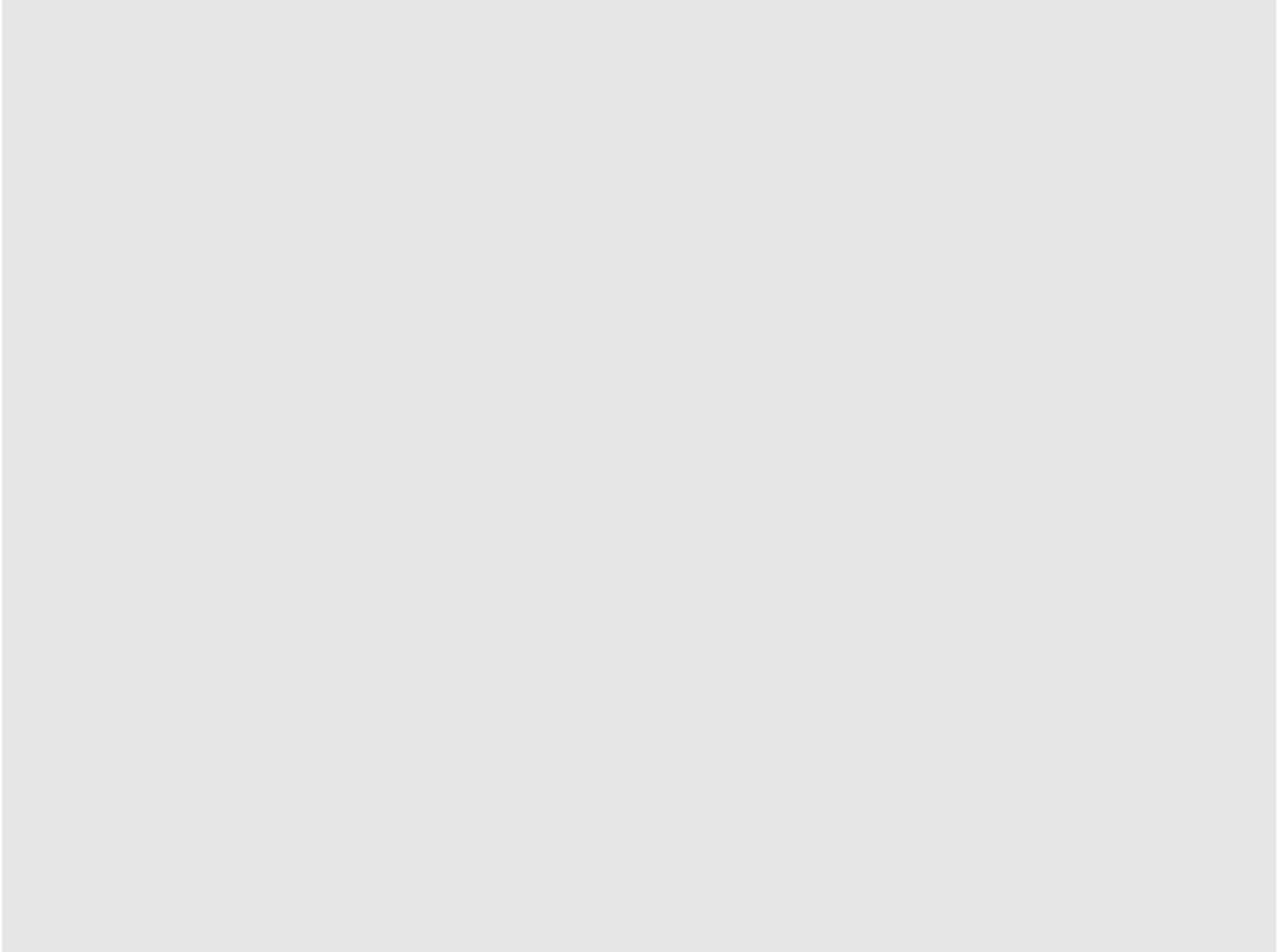
- 1 Danville nurse honored with award**
- 2 Ford says it had not made Virginia site selection decision on battery plant**
- 3 Ford says it had not made Virginia site selection decision on battery plant**
- 4 Senators push for security upgrades at Danville's federal courthouse**

He would return home to visit from time to time for family gatherings in his mother's backyard a half-mile from the property or at a spot in Cody. But over the last decade, he had been trying to find a better location for such events.

"It was in the middle of nowhere [Cody]," Miller recalled. "I wanted to find somewhere we could have family gatherings that was more feasible."

He bought a piece of property by his mother's place, a wooded area where he wanted to build but the land was not compatible, he said.

"I had to think of a different idea," he said.



The slave quarters are behind the main house on Sharswood, a 10.5-acre property on Riceville Road in Gretna.

John Crane

It just so happened the 10.5-acre property with the beautiful gabled home and other structures, the one Miller remembered from his youth, became available.

His sister informed him of the property — named Sharswood — and he bought it nearly two years ago for \$225,000.

"That's pretty much a steal, I think," Miller said.

At that point, he still had no clue of the home's story that would change his and his relatives' lives forever.

"My knowledge of history was extremely limited," Miller said. "I didn't know anything about it."

Plantation

The 2,000-acre plantation was owned by Charles Miller and Nathaniel Crenshaw Miller before and during the Civil War.

"He [Fred] had no clue that this was going to turn into something different than what it was," said Fredrick Miller's cousin, Dexter Miller, who lives in Pittsylvania County.

Fredrick bought the 10.5-acre property from the Thompsons, a white family who had owned it since 1917. The latter family had purchased the land from a nephew of Charles and Nathaniel.

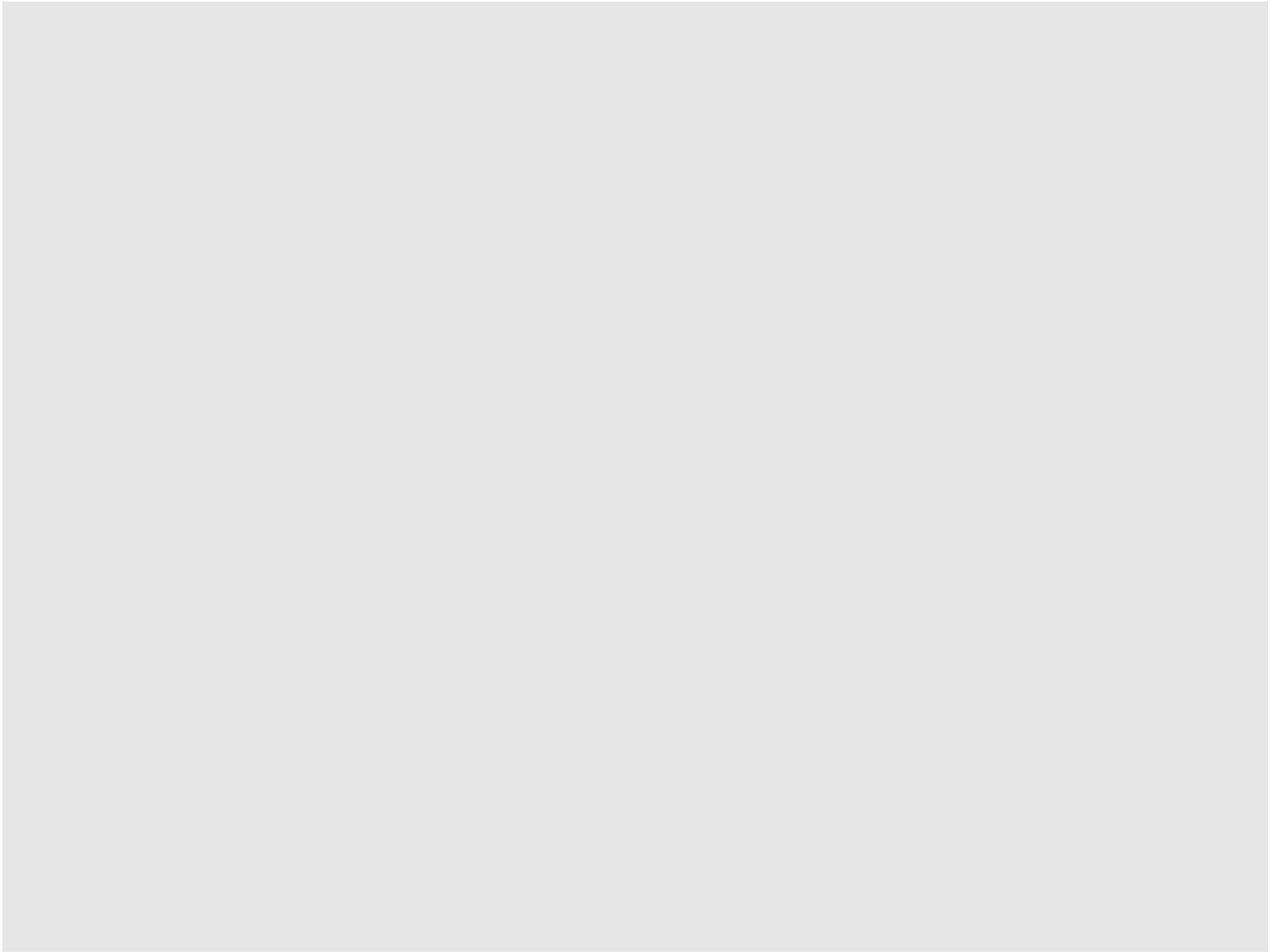
Two years ago when Fredrick planned to buy the property, he almost didn't get it, Dexter Miller said. Someone else had out-bid Fredrick, but for some reason, the owners chose him as the purchaser, Dexter said.

"It was just strange how everything came about," said Dexter, 60, who grew up in Java.

Dexter had been working on their family's genealogy since 2018, as well as his cousins, Sonya Womack-Miranda and Fredrick's sister Karen Dixon-Rexroth.

They talked to family elders, researched real estate records at the Pittsylvania County Courthouse, visited online genealogy sites, combed the U.S. Census database and got in touch with Karice Luck-Brimmer, founding president of the Danville/Pittsylvania County Chapter of the Afro-American Historical & Genealogical Society and a member of the Virginia Board of Historic Resources.

The Miller family elders had always suspected the property was once part of a plantation where their ancestors had been enslaved, but they had no solid evidence.



The overseer's office is part of Sharswood, a 10-5-acre property on Riceville Road in Gretna.

John R. Crane, Register & Bee

“It’s not the best topic, it’s not a beautiful topic,” Womack-Miranda, 53, told the Danville Register & Bee. “Our elders always have told us, ‘That’s the Miller plantation,’ but you couldn’t prove it.”

Emotionally overwhelming

Confirming what the Miller family knew in their hearts about Sharswood was emotionally overwhelming for the descendants of enslaved people at the plantation.

“I wanted to scream inside of the courthouse,” Womack-Miranda said of the moment she saw evidence of her ancestors’ history.

Another relative, Alberta Miller-Womack, was the key to the whole process of researching the family's history, Dexter Miller said.

"She wanted to know her family," Dexter said. "That started the whole thing, when she told us she wanted to know who her great-grandparents were. I told her I would start the research. When I did, I did not know that Sonya was working on it as well."

After piecing the fragments together, the family discovered that Sarah Miller — Fredrick's, Karen's and Dexter's great-grandmother, and Sonya's great-great grandmother — was the daughter of Violet and David Miller. The couple was enslaved at the Miller plantation.

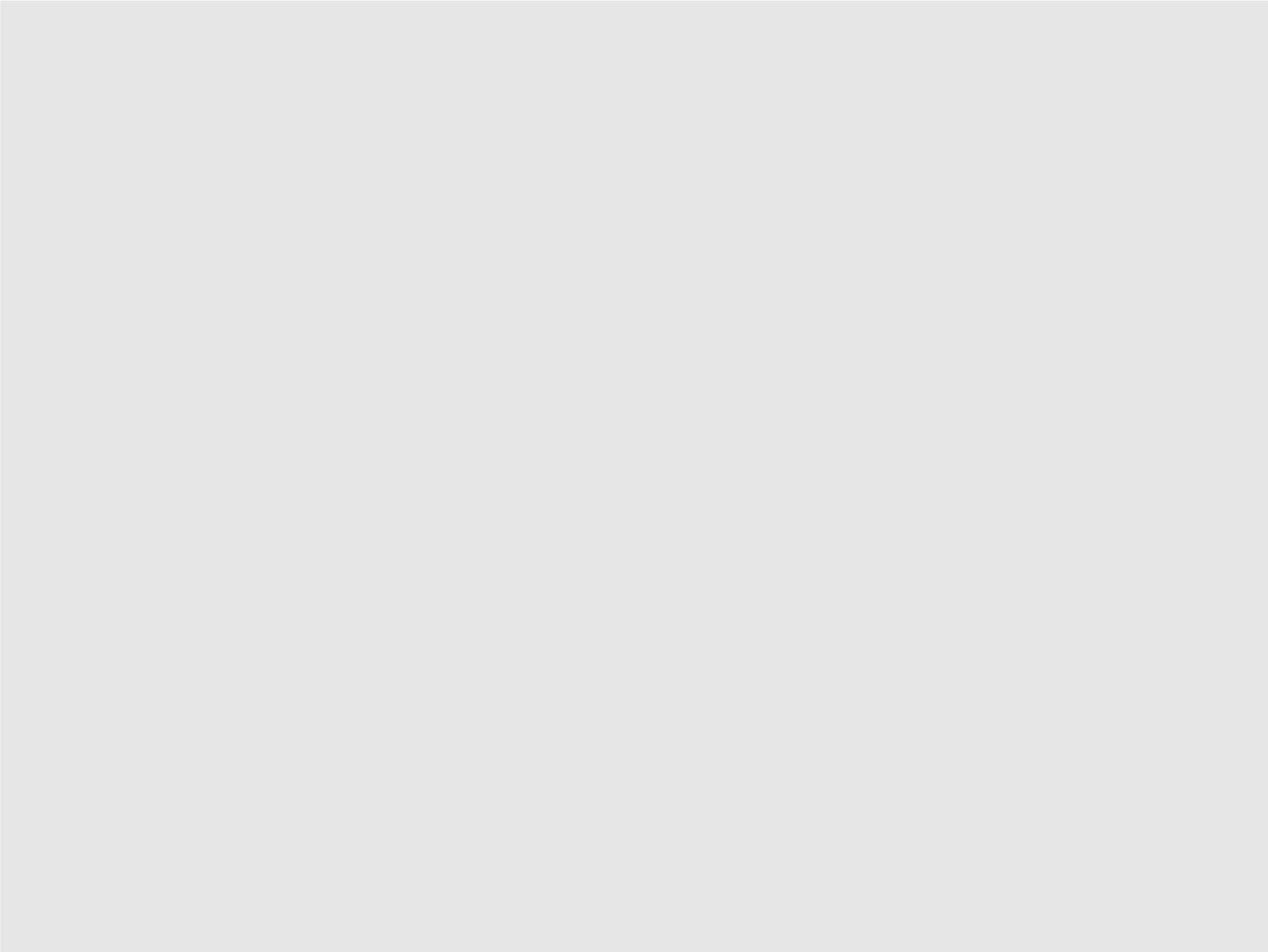
"It's a disconnected puzzle," Womack-Miranda said of the many elements of the history that ultimately were fused together. "You start wanting to connect the pieces in order for you to become whole."

Slavery was not talked about in the Black community, Dexter said. As a result, "you don't know where you came from. You just don't have that connection. Once you found out that connection, you felt whole."

For Black people, the topic is "very sensitive" and hurtful, Dexter said.

"It was pain," Womack-Miranda said.

However, her mother, Joan Miller-Womack, was not afraid to talk about it.



Sharswood, a 10-5-acre property on Riceville Road in Gretna, was once the heart of a plantation in the years before the Civil War. Fredrick Miller, who grew up a half-mile from the property, had no idea his ancestors were enslaved on the plantation until after he bought the site in 2020.

John Crane

“My mom was different,” she said. “She was born and raised in Pittsylvania County, poor as red gully dirt.”

She recalled her mother pulling out a National Geographic when Sonya was 10 showing it to her.

‘This is who we are’

“She said, ‘we’re not from here. This is not who we are. We are from Africa. This is who we are,’” Sonya recalled. “She wasn’t afraid to touch on it.”

That compelled Sonya to explore her roots as a Black person. She, as well as Dexter, read African American literature — Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou and James Baldwin.

She wanted to attend a historically Black college or university, and enrolled at one: Norfolk State University.

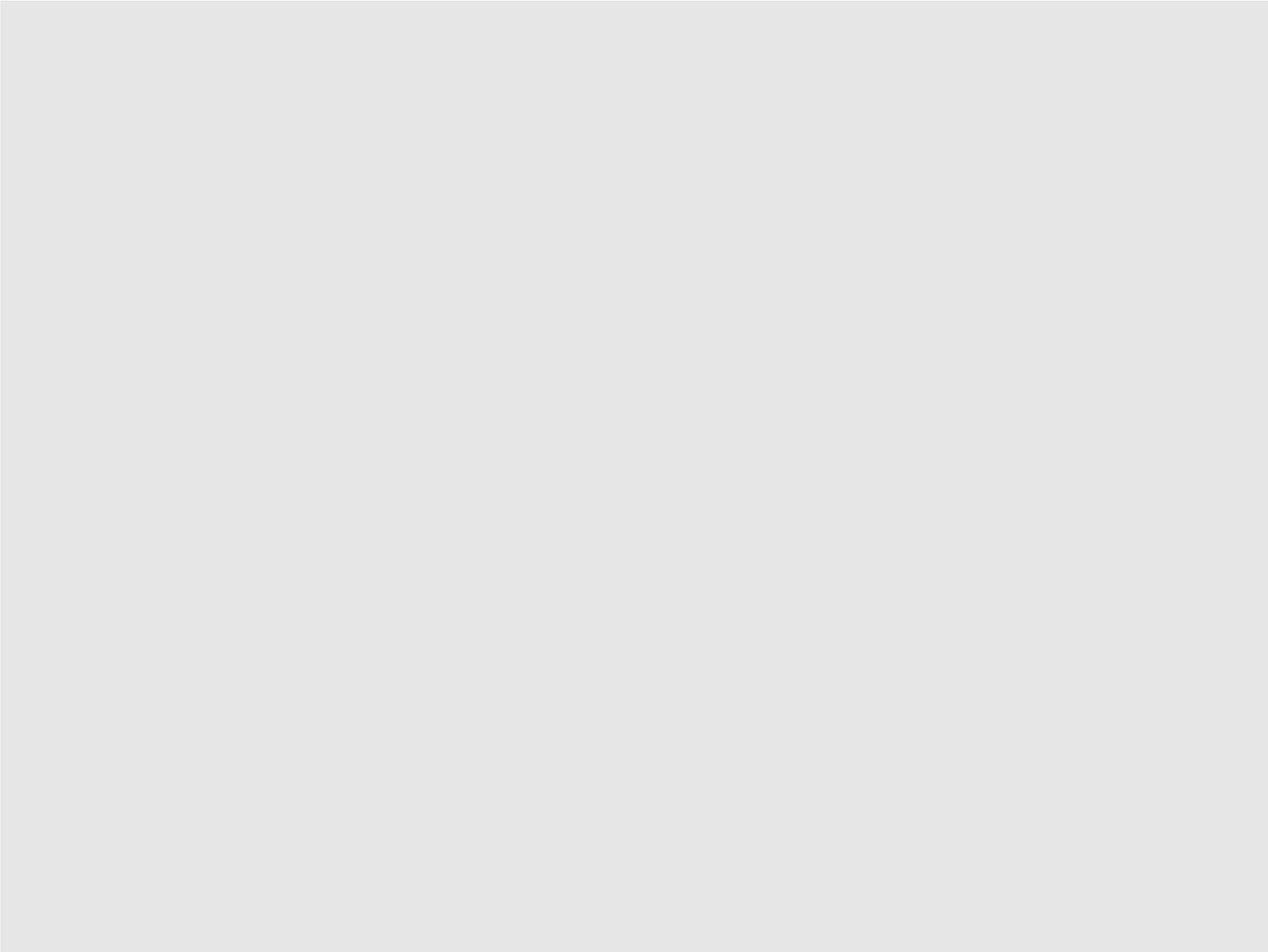
Learning your heritage, “makes you proud of who you are and not ashamed,” she said. Sonya expanded beyond the United States and learned about Black people from the Caribbean and other places. She traveled to Africa, and experienced the Door of No Return at the Elmina slave castle in Ghana — a site where enslaved people were held before they were shipped to the Caribbean, Brazil and North America.

There were 58 people enslaved at Sharswood in Gretna during its day before the Civil War, Womack-Miranda said.

“To find out our great-great grandparents were enslaved there just came full circle,” said Dixon-Rexroth, 49, who lives about a half-mile from the property.

During an interview with the Danville Register & Bee, Dixon-Rexroth recalled, like her brother Fredrick, being unaware of the property’s history while growing up.

“We just thought it was just a big old house,” she said. “To a lot of people, it looked scary because it was dark inside. We never saw anybody there.”



Sharswood, a 10-5-acre property on Riceville Road in Gretna, was once the heart of a plantation in the years before the Civil War. Fredrick Miller, who grew up a half-mile from the property, had no idea his ancestors were enslaved on the plantation until after he bought the site in 2020.

John R. Crane, Register & Bee

Besides the main house, Sharswood includes a smoke house, garden shed, an overseer's office off to the side and slave quarters in the back.

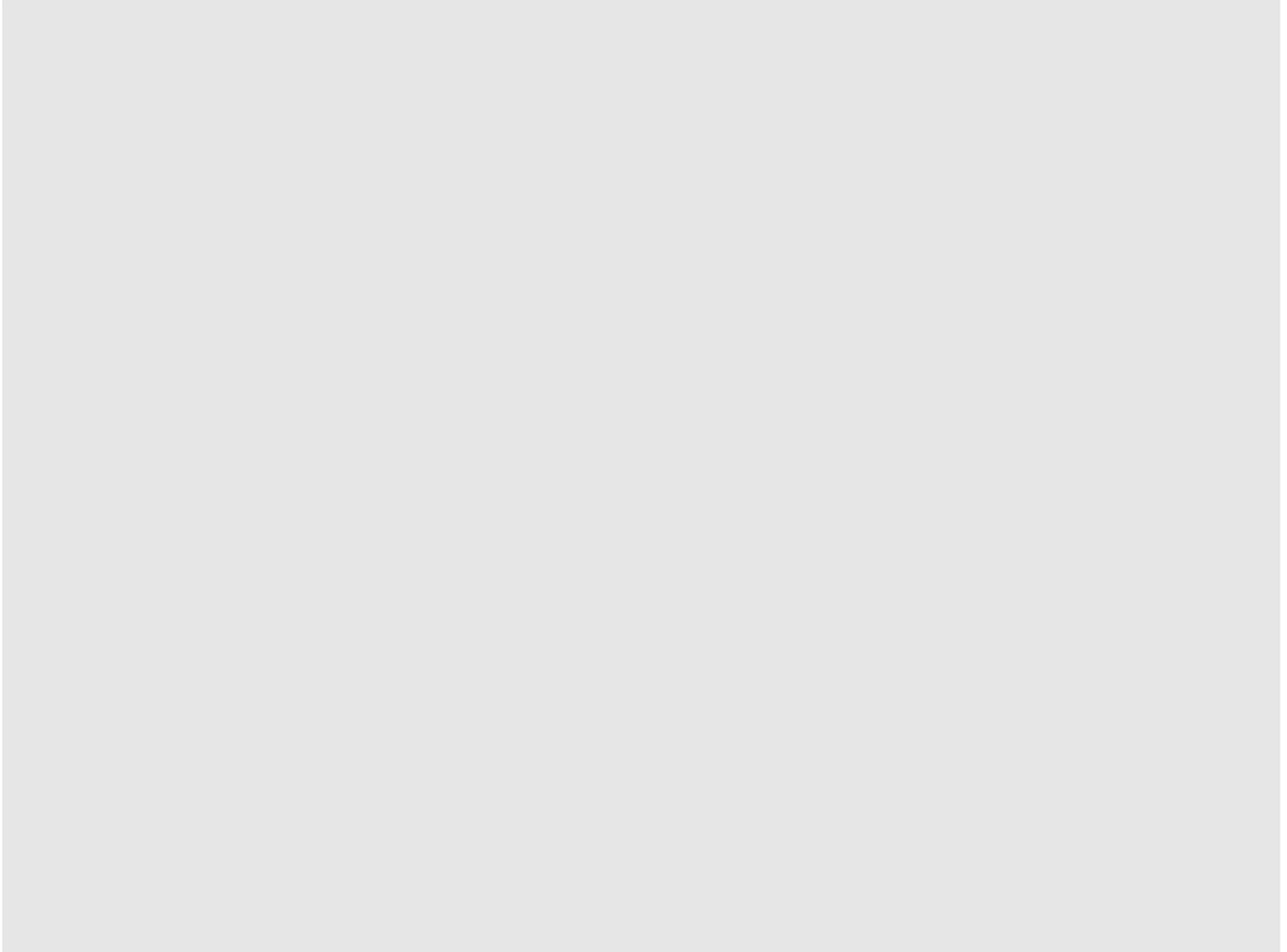
Besides the enslaved Millers, the family also is sure they are descended from the enslavers, as well. Sonya's great-grandfather is listed as mulatto, Sonya said.

Drawn back

Long before the Milers found out the truth about the property, they were always compelled to go back to the area where they grew up nearby.

“Something always drew us back, even when we lived away,” Dixon-Rexroth said. “We were so sad to leave and so happy to come back every chance we got. God put everything in place for us to get to this place.”

As for Fredrick Miller, he is still trying to wrap his head around the history of the place where his ancestors were enslaved — a site he now owns.



Sharswood, a 10-5-acre property on Riceville Road in Gretna, was once the heart of a plantation in the years before the Civil War. Fredrick Miller, who grew up a half-mile from the property, had no idea his ancestors were enslaved on the plantation until after he bought the site in 2020.

John Crane

He recalls a story that when the enslaved cooks brought the food into the main house, they came up from the basement.

“The stairs are worn,” Fredrick said. “Every time I walk down to the stairs, I envision that.”

Becoming the owner of Sharswood was something the Millers' enslaved ancestors could never have dreamed.

"If there is a heaven above, I think they're looking down at us, smiling," Fredrick said.

Around The Web



This Botox Alternative Sold out at Target (Again!)

Vibrance



Finally Legal "The Best Pain Reliever" Now Available In Virginia

Healthline News



Urologist: 90% of Men Don't Know This Way to Shrink Your Prostate (Watch)

Health



A Doctor from Virginia Shared How to Remove a Hanging belly!

American Center of Cardiology



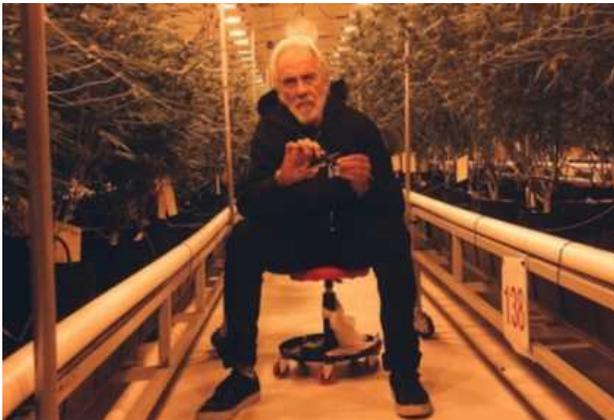
Photos Proving You Can't Fix Stupid

Endeared



The Greatest "When You See It" Photos

Endeared



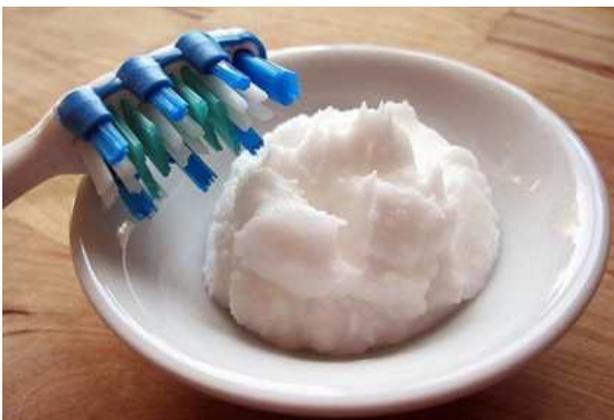
Tommy Chong Reveals for the First Time; Why I Went Cold Turkey

Tommy Chong



Danville: These Unsold Volvos Now Almost Being Given Away (See Deals)

Volvo Deals | Search Ads



Mix Vaseline and Toothpaste and Watch What Happens

Health Review

By John Crane

ALERT

Watch now: After finding their dream Victorian home in Danville, couple 'marries' wedding with 1889-built house

John Crane

Apr 5, 2022



Couple weds at historic Danville home they bought.

For one couple in Danville, fairy tales do come true after all.

Chris and Zenaida Herbon, who met while Zenaida was performing as a fairy during a Renaissance Fair, exchanged wedding vows during a ceremony at an 1889-built Queen Anne Victorian home on Chestnut Street in Danville on Tuesday afternoon.

The couple, who moved to Danville from outside the area, had always dreamed of restoring a historic home.

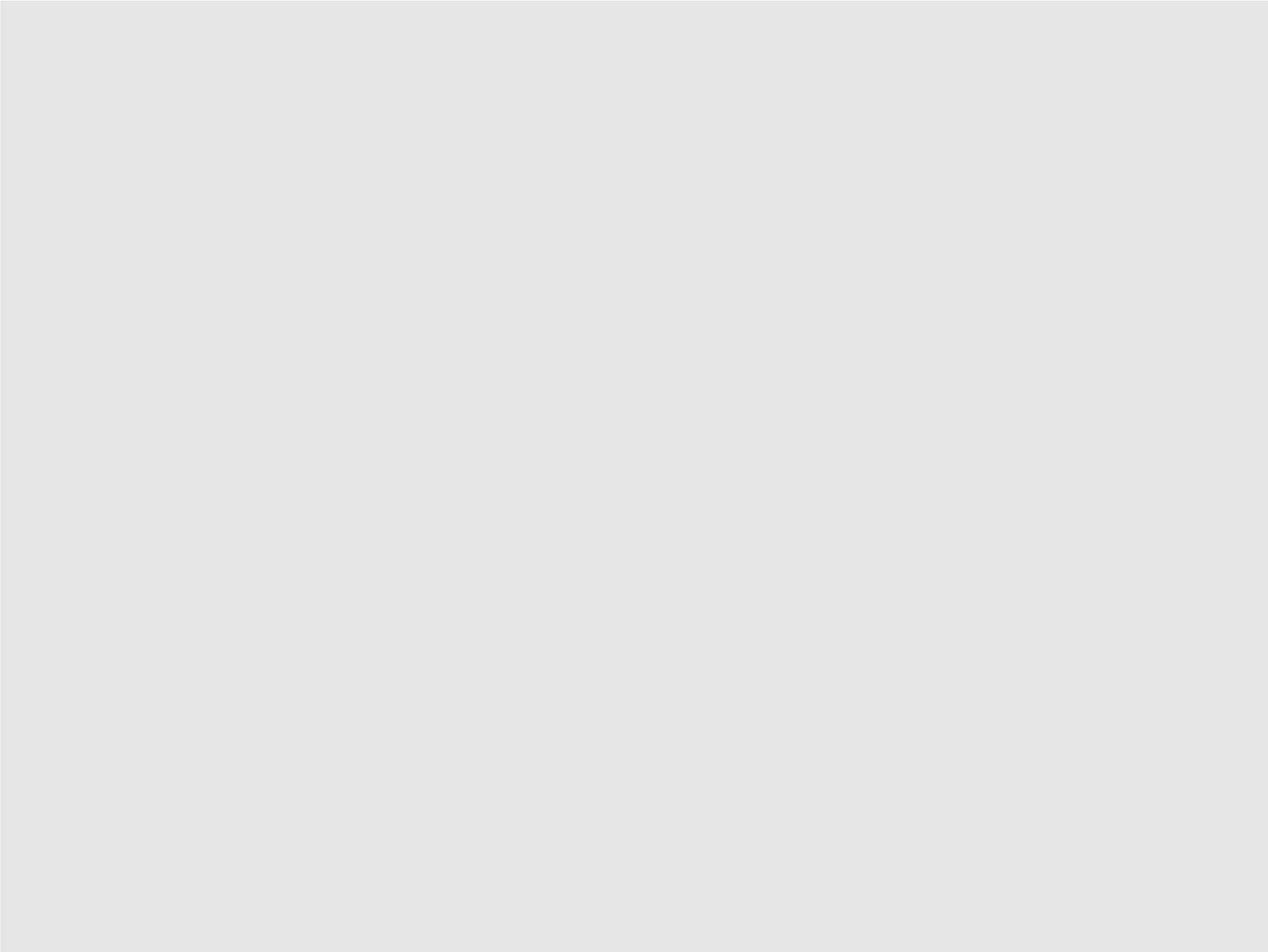
"Unbeknownst to each other, Chris and I both always had the same dream," Zenaida, 39, told the Danville Register & Bee via email last week. "When it came time to go house shopping, we knew we wanted a Queen Anne Victorian, but did not know where."

After doing research, the couple fell in love with Danville's selection of Victorian homes and the convenience of being close to family, she said.

People are also reading...

- 1 Danville nurse honored with award**
 - 2 Dan River Region real estate transfers**
 - 3 29-year-old South Carolina man reported missing found dead in Danville crash**
 - 4 More than just battling flames: As Danville firefighters push for higher wages, a look inside a 24-hour shift on 'constant alert'**
-

In the late 1800s, the property at 126 Chestnut St. was gifted to Mae Talley, a niece of William T. Sutherlin and his wife.



Chris and Zenaida Herbon celebrate their wedding Tuesday afternoon at the home of their dreams, the Talley House at 126 Chestnut Street in Danville. The Queen Anne Victorian home was built in 1889.

photos by John R. Crane, Register & Bee

"The home she [Talley] designed is considered one of the town's most architecturally significant houses and is considered of the most striking houses in the downtown area," the couple said in the email. "While we had read this, we did not realize at the time the impact this house had, but since purchasing it, nearly everyone who finds out we bought it has a story of how they always wanted to live there or wished they could buy it because they grew up driving or walking past it, loved it so much."

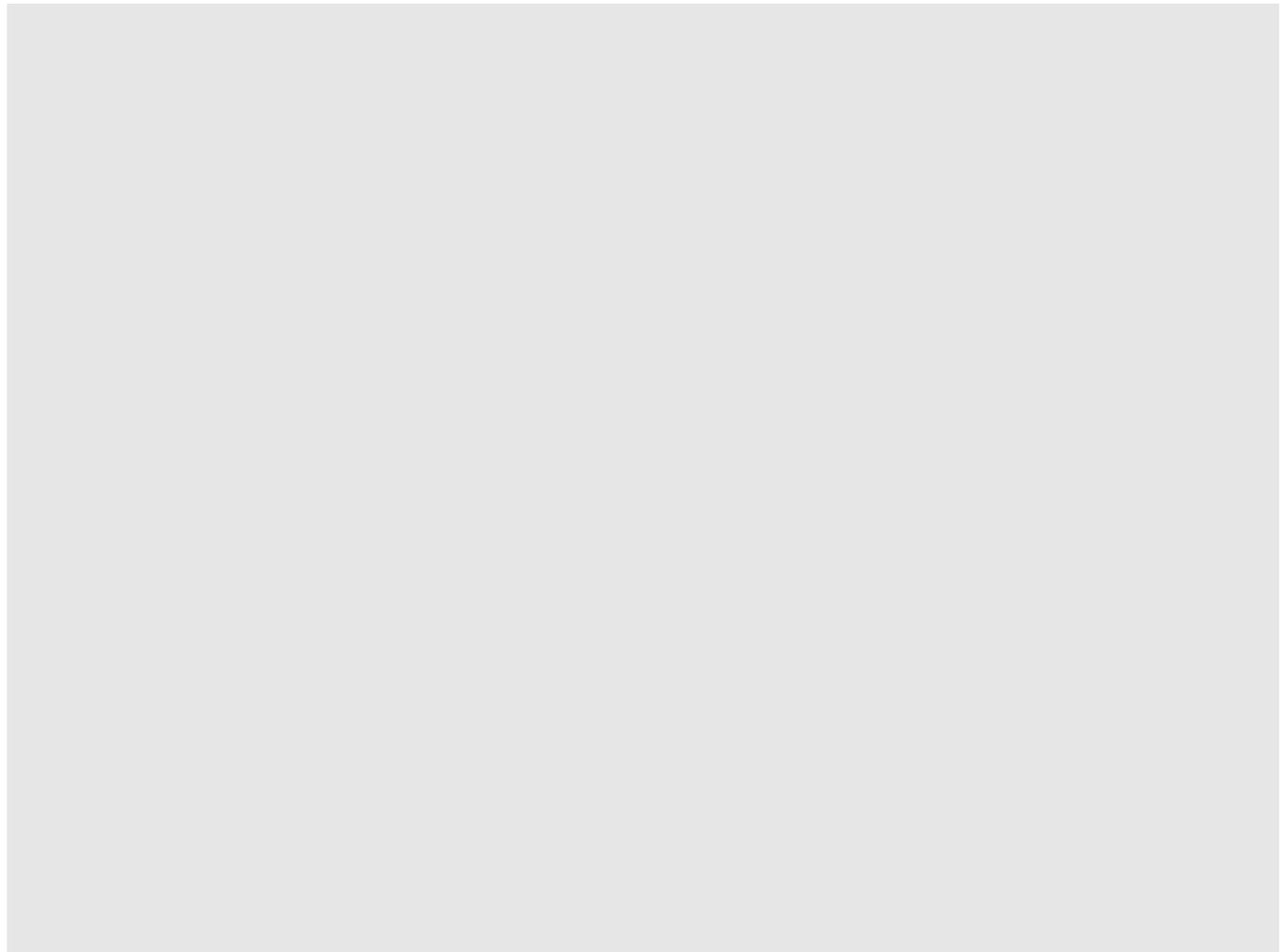
Sutherlin, who was both an alderman and mayor in Danville, had made his fortune from tobacco, banking, textiles, real estate and railroad development.

During the Civil War, he served the Confederacy as quartermaster of the district, with poor health preventing him from serving actively. The Sutherlin Mansion, built in 1859, is named after him and currently houses the Danville Museum of Fine Arts & History.

While researching the Talley House, the couple discovered there had been a wedding at the home 100 years ago. They were supposed to tie the knot at another location, but they couldn't pass up a chance to "'marry' everything together by involving the house on such a fantastic occasion and anniversary," Zenaida said.

"So we canceled our other wedding venue and moved everything local," she said.

The couple married legally last year during a small, private ceremony during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Zenaida Herbon, center, arrives by trolley bus and is escorted to her wedding Tuesday afternoon at the home of her and her husband's dreams, the Talley House at 126 Chestnut St. in Danville.

Restoring the home

With Zenaida's background in art and design, and Chris' experience as a finish carpenter, the couple will be ready to get to work restoring the home.

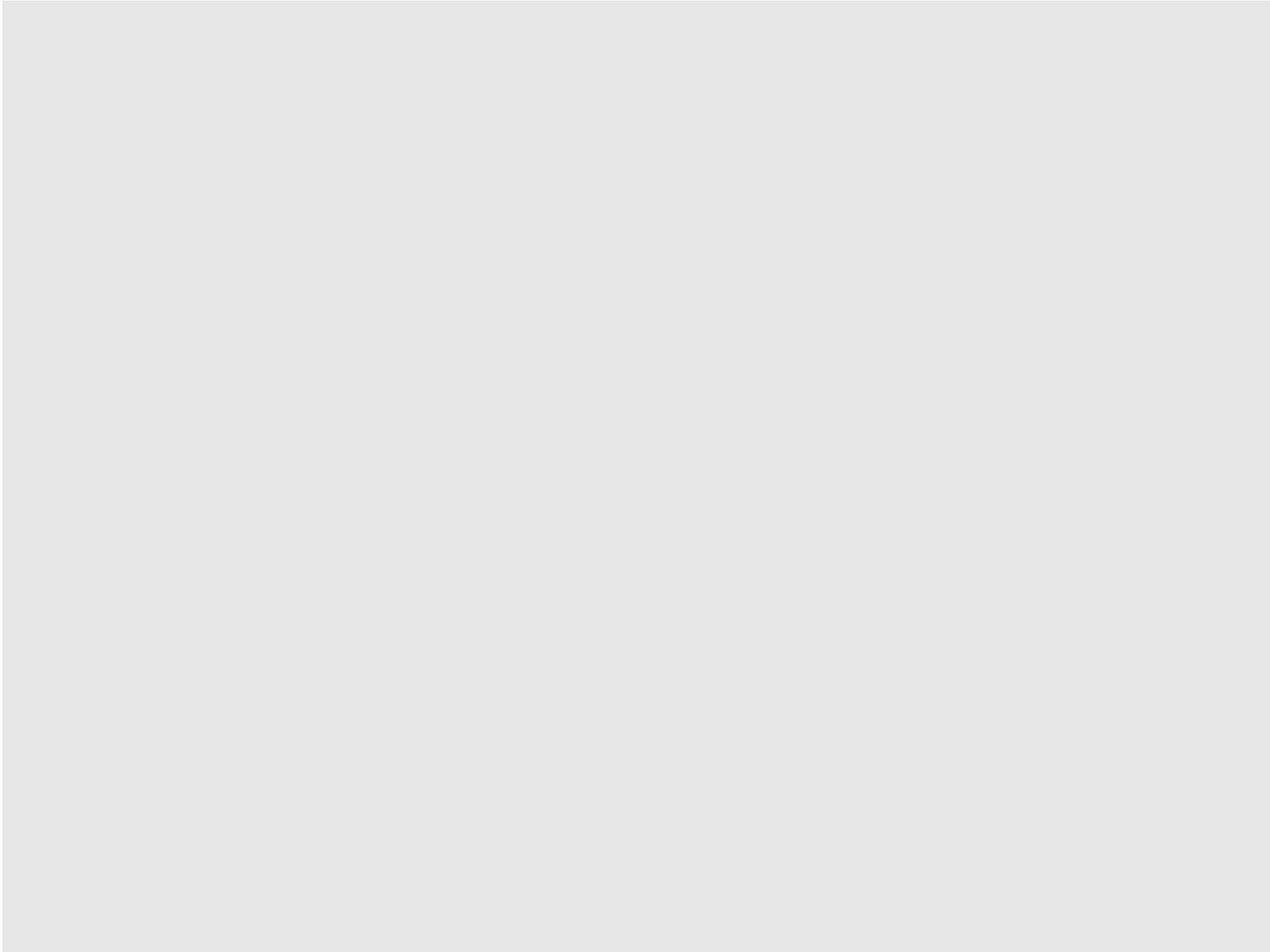
"We looked at many [homes], including some that were already move-in ready, but upon seeing the Talley, we absolutely fell in love with all the potential she has," Zenaida said.

Zenaida, 39, was born in New York but moved around growing up because her father was a U.S. Marine.

"We eventually settled just outside of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, which I consider my hometown and love that I am still close to," she said.

Chris, 40, grew up just outside of Detroit and looks forward to experiencing Southside Virginia's more moderate climate.

"I didn't appreciate the harsh winters any longer and am excited to be further south where the climate is much more mild and we can enjoy all four seasons," Chris said.



Chris and Zenaida Herbon are married Tuesday afternoon at the home of their dreams, the Talley House at 126 Chestnut St. in Danville. The Queen Anne Victorian home was built in 1889.

John Crane

The Herbons' Talley House project will include wiring and plumbing work, and repair and replacement of gutters and water-damaged areas.

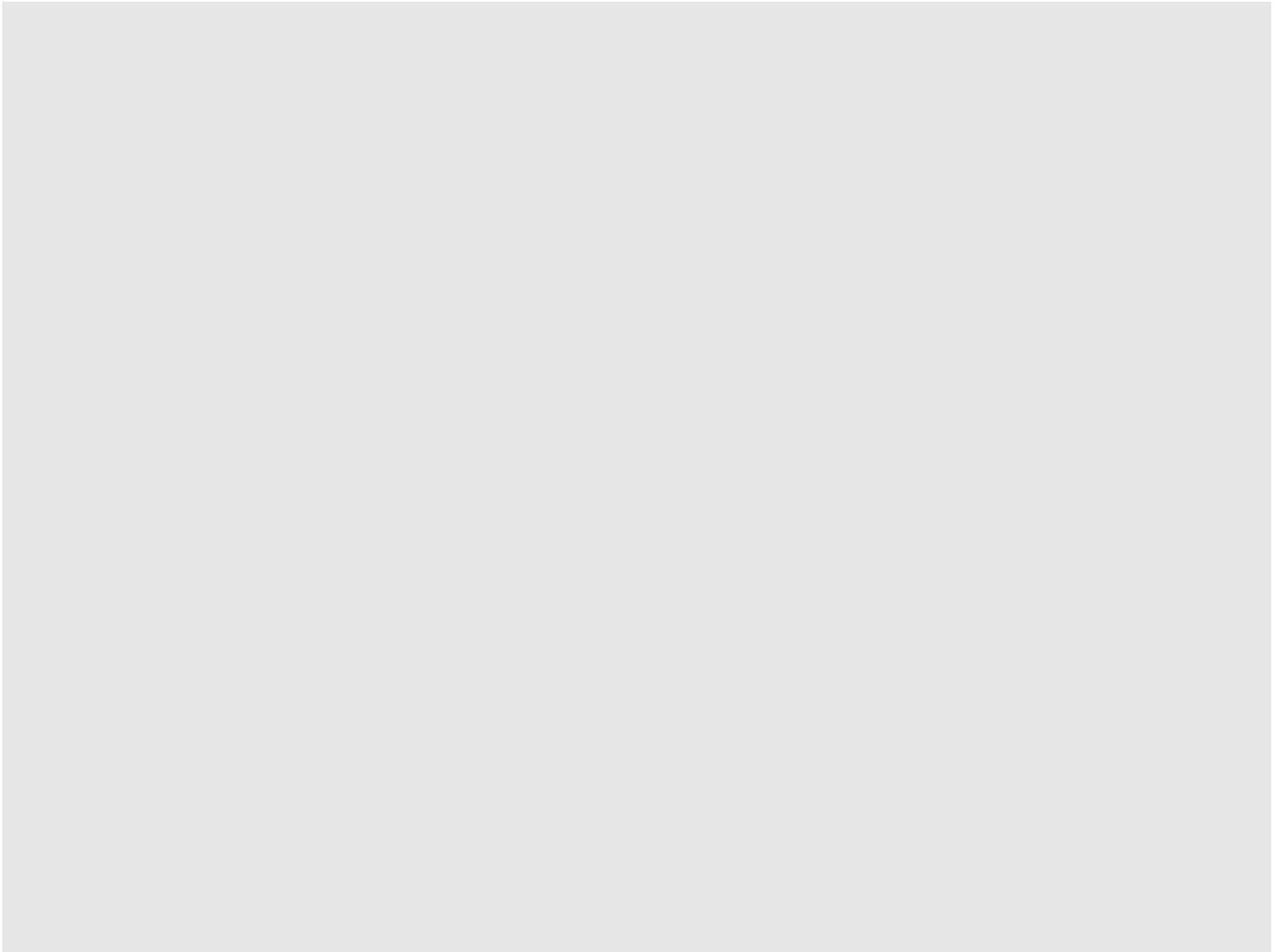
"Upon completion of that, the entire first floor will be a full, Victorian-style restoration," Zenaida said. "We are hoping to find some original photos of the house interior from back then so we can retain as much of the original beauty the home once had."

The Herbons will design the second- and third-floor rooms to reflect other decades the house has withstood, she said.

"We will bring back such themes as art deco, 40s vintage, and the glamour of the Hollywood regency design era," she said. "A treat on the third floor will be the train room, in which Chris is designing a miniature-scale model of Danville and the wreck of the Old '97, as well as incorporating other train details to accent throughout the house."

The rear of the home and a carriage house behind the home will be restored.

Mae Talley, who was openly divorced during a time when such situations were rare, lived in the home for several years with her son, Herbert. She taught music lessons out of the conservatory to support herself and her son.



Chris and Zenaida Herbon exchange wedding vows Tuesday afternoon at the home of their dreams, the Talley House at 126 Chestnut St. in Danville.

John Crane

"Many families have since owned the home, including a partner in the Danville Hardware Company and a gentleman who worked with Reynolds Tobacco Company," Zenaida said.

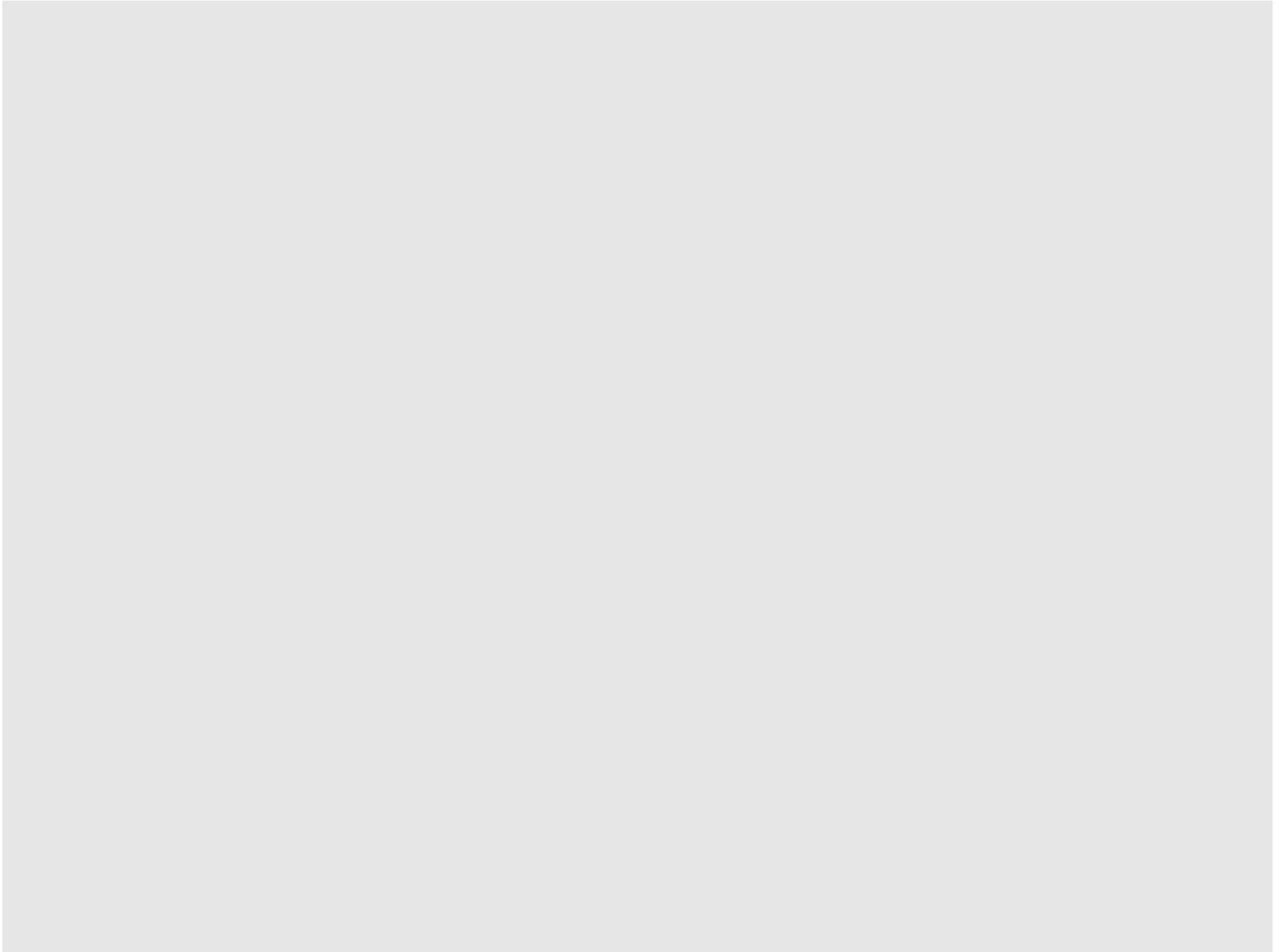
The house had been empty since 1984 — nearly 40 years — until Chris and Zenaida bought it, she said.

"From what we can find, it did change hands a few times during its empty period, but everyone gave up on the project and moved on, leaving it subsequently in the hands of the city, which is how we came to acquire it," she said.

The ceremony

As for the ceremony Tuesday, it included a combination of themes blending Zenaida's and Chris' respective heritages. The bride's outfit included a Taino Native American headdress and the groom wore a kilt to reflect his Scottish background.

A handfasting with a golden coin attached was wrapped around the couple's arms during the ceremony on the front porch of the home.



Chris and Zenaida Herbon kiss after a wedding ceremony Tuesday afternoon at the home of their dreams, the Talley House at 126 Chestnut Street in Danville. The Queen Anne Victorian home was built in 1889.

John Crane

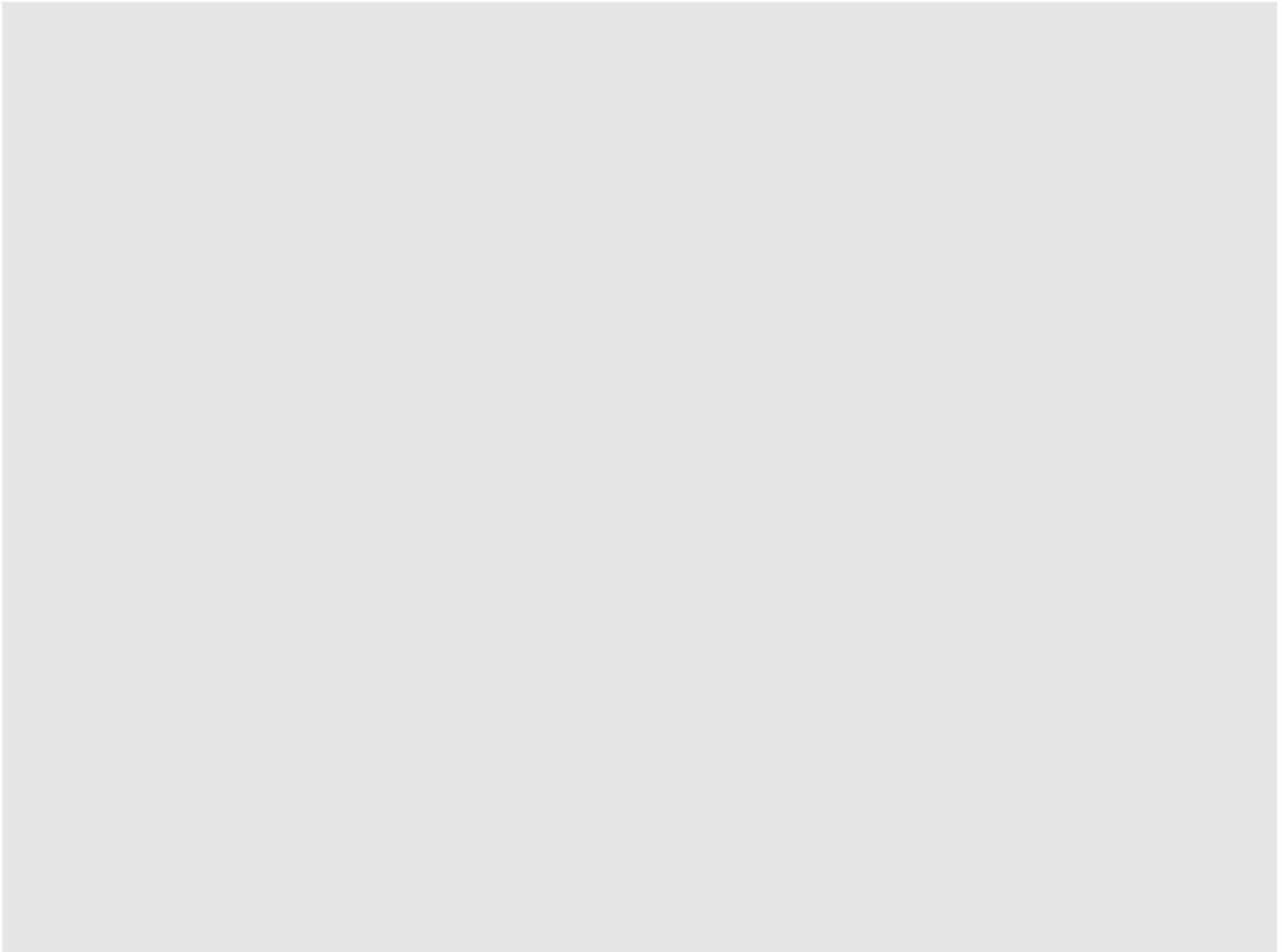
"This was Chris and Zen's way of combining the Taino and Scottish cultures to bring their union together because not only where they're going but where they have come from are important to these two people," the man who officiated the ceremony told attendees.

Some guests dressed up in Renaissance-themed outfits and the event included, for a whimsy, two participants dressed as dinosaurs.

Chris and Zenaida met while she was on tour as Spark the Fairy during a Renaissance Fair event just outside of Atlanta. Chris was managing a rose company, for which he is now a consultant.

The couple bought a cottage in Pittsylvania County on the outskirts of Danville and has been living there since June. They will live there while they restore the pastel yellow, sky blue and purple Chestnut Street home, which they expect to take about a year or two.

Everything about the home, including its towering turret, wrap-around porch, original features and the story of Mae Talley attracted the couple, Zenaida said.

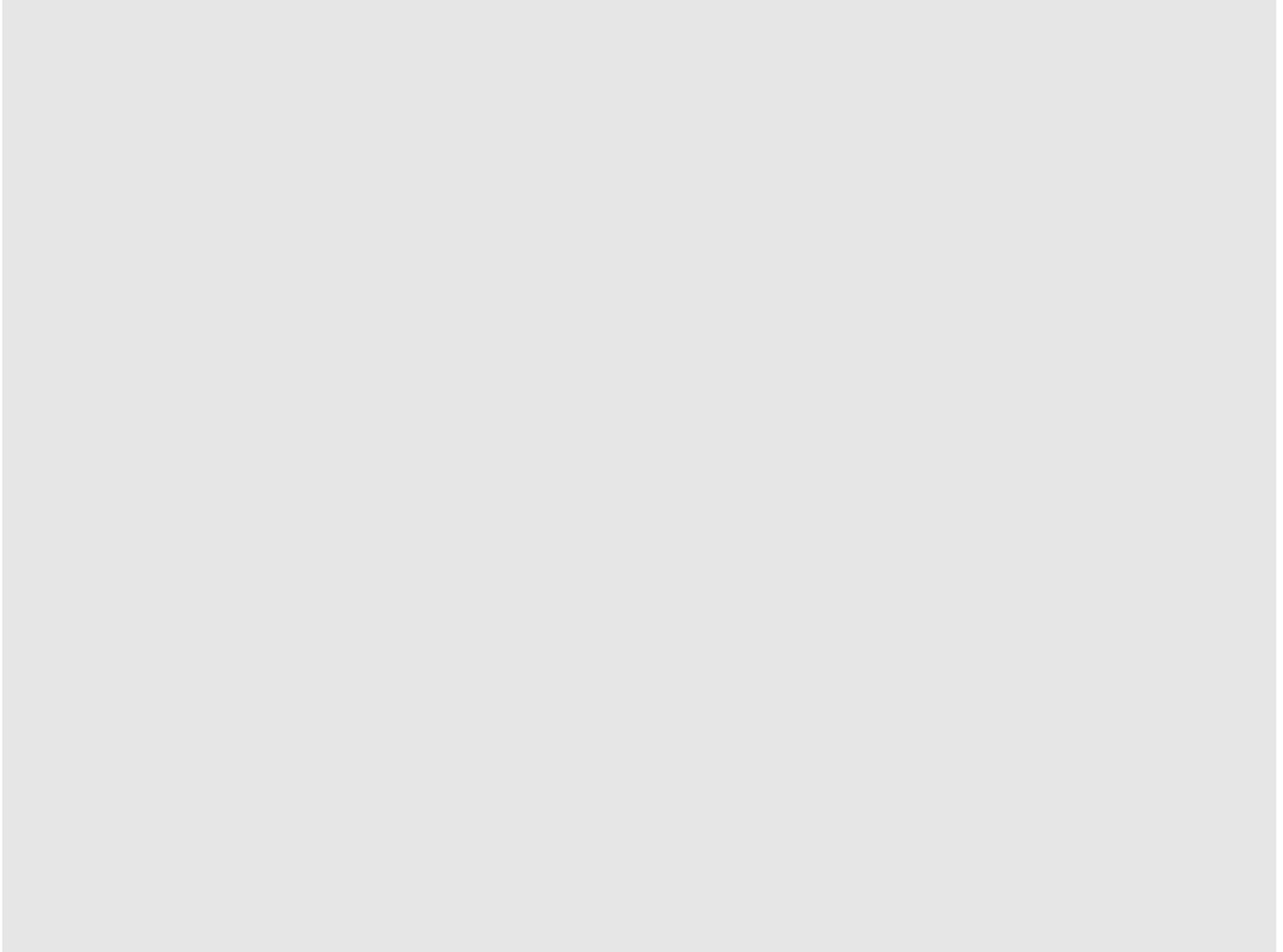


Chris and Zenaida Herbon walk down the steps at the Talley House at 126 Chestnut St. in Danville.

John Crane

The original fireplaces are still intact and include tiles from the late 1800s "with fleur-de-lis details that remind us of our time in New Orleans and the ribbon and bow design in the conservatory tiles, which adds the perfect feminine touch," she said.

"The house also has both sets of its original pocket doors intact, which we were shocked and elated to discover," she said. "We also appreciated that the demo had already been done on the interior, so there was no disaster to clean up before we could get started with the restoration."



A crowd gathers Tuesday afternoon for the wedding of Chris and Zenaida Herbon.

John Crane

The Herbons hope that another couple will exchange vows at the home a century from now.

"We can only hope that one day, 100 years from now, some other couple will want to do something similar," they said.



"Botox in a Bottle" Sold out at Target (in 2 Days)

Vibrance



Finally Legal "The Best Pain Reliever" Now Available In Virginia

Healthline News



Urologist: 90% of Men Don't Know This Way to Shrink Your Prostate (Watch)

Health



1 Cup (Before Bed) Burns Belly fat Like Crazy!

American Center of Cardiology



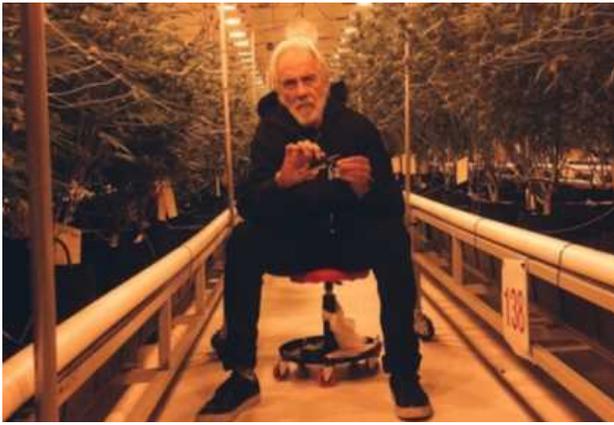
Photos Proving You Can't Fix Stupid

Endeared



The Greatest "When You See It" Photos

Endeared



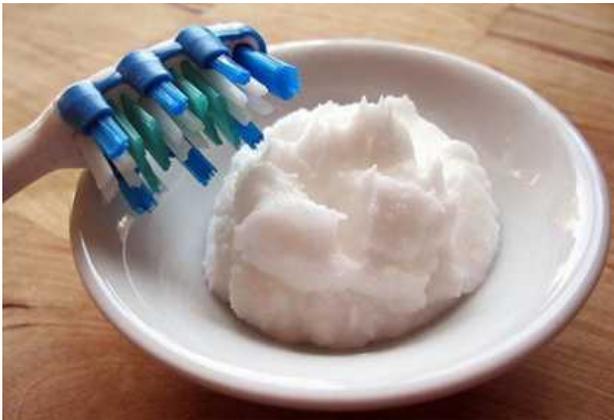
Tommy Chong Reveals for the First Time; Why I Went Cold Turkey

Tommy Chong



Danville: These Unsold Volvos Now Almost Being Given Away (See Deals)

Volvo Deals | Search Ads



Mix Vaseline and Toothpaste and Watch What Happens

Health Review

By John Crane
