



From left, Lebanon Mayor Bernie Ash, Castle Heights Military Academy archivist Rob Hosier, mayoral assistant Debbie Jessen and architect Mike Manous stand in front of the century-old Mitchell House, an architectural gem that will be the City of Lebanon’s executive office come November. The residence, which was built circa 1906-1912 by David Earle Mitchell, the fifth president of Cumberland University and co-founder of Castle Heights, has changed hands four times.

KEN BECK

THE HOUSE THAT DAVID MITCHELL BUILT

Twice abandoned, magnificent mansion fits the bill for City of Lebanon offices

First of a two-part series
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Should you live in Lebanon, you are now part owner of what likely is the most palatial residence ever built inside the city limits.

The Mitchell House was built in the first decade of the 20th century by “the boy educator,” David Earle Mitchell. He became president of Cumberland University at the age of 26, on or near the same day he graduated from the school in June 1902 and who partnered with I.W.P. Buchanan to open Castle Heights Training School in September the same year.

How magnificent was the appearance of the two-story, eight-bay Neo-Classical Revival mansion when its doors were thrown open to prominent local citizens for a first good gander during a gala event?

The headline of a review of that big night in the Aug. 4, 1913, edition of The Tennessean proclaimed “City of Cedars Site of One of the Country’s Most Beautiful and Unique Residences.”

If that was not enough to pique readers’ curiosity, a second headline read “Home of David E. Mitchell, Popular President of Cumberland University, Cost \$100,000 — Stately in Appearance and Gorgeous in All Its Appointments.”

Another headline rhapsodized “Built of Monterey Stone — Its Interior a Veritable Vision of Fairyland — Located in Grove of Forest Trees and Is Reached by Pretty Drive.”

The cost to build in 1910 dollars was approximately a whopping 100 grand, the equivalent of more than \$2.7 million today.

Mansion changes hands four times

Hard to believe then or now, but about 10 years after the Mitchell family took possession, they abandoned their dream house, and it remained empty for the most part until 1936 when it would become home of the Castle Heights Junior School for the next 50 years.

Also known as Macfadden Hall and the “goober school,” it housed boys from the ages of 6 to 12 until they moved up to the senior school. The downstairs of the mansion also would serve as the administrative offices and reception hall for Heights.

With the demise of the military academy in 1986, the house found itself deserted once more for another 10 years until Cracker Barrel Old Country Store, under the hand of Heights alumnus Danny Evins, bought the site. The restaurant chain restored the mansion, and it served as the office for Evins and his assistant, Evalena Bennett, and was also used by the director of Cracker Barrel’s Charitable Foundation.

In November 2013, Cracker Barrel sold the 10,600 square-foot house to the national Sigma Pi Fraternity, which used it as its executive office. Three-and-a-half months ago the city of Lebanon purchased the house from Sigma Pi for \$1.15 million. Plans are to spend about \$250,000 for improvements.

“The city has been looking for space because we’ve run out of space here,” Lebanon Mayor Ber-

nie Ash, announced in mid-May, adding the engineering and planning departments were packed in City Hall “like sardines.”

More recently he shared, “The purchase of the Mitchell House was such a great opportunity for the city of Lebanon. The city has been looking to expand City Hall for several years. When this opportunity presented itself, we saw a chance to solve our overcrowding at City Hall and save at least \$1.4 million over other planned solutions. Above all we will be able to preserve the historic Mitchell House as a part of our heritage.

“After we all sorted through the details, the Council and I agreed this was a good financial move for the City and the opportunity to preserve and utilize this amazing structure will benefit the City for many years.”

Mayor moves in November

As for what offices will be located in historic manor, Mayoral Assistant Debbie Jessen said, “The first floor of the Mitchell House will hold the mayor’s office, the receptionist, economic development and my office. Upstairs we will have our human resources and legal departments.

“Depending upon weather and contractor schedules, we hope to be moved into the building by the first part of November,” she added. “It is exciting to play a part in preserving Lebanon’s crown jewel, and we are anxious to show off this piece of Lebanon’s history. The holidays will be a great time to invite the public to stop by for a tour.”

More than 100 years after the house was designed and erected by the Nashville architectural firm of George W. Thompson, Henry Gibel and Christian Asmus, it manifests itself as an impressive fusion of brick, mortar, timber and stone. The trio also designed what became the Main Building of Castle Heights School, today’s City Hall.

Mitchell bought 450 acres of land from A.W. Hooker and work began on the house in 1906. Early in the process the businessman hired four stonemasons from his home state of Pennsylvania to cut and lay who knows how many tons of sandstone and limestone. One of the stonecutters, Robert Wolfenden, later opened a monument company in Lebanon and would craft many a handsome grave marker.

The house was constructed of Monterey stone and trimmed with Bowling Green stone, which cover two layers of brick, and sits on a rusticated limestone foundation. A century earlier a two-story log cabin believed to have been built by the Seawell family stood on this site at the bottom of the gently sloping Seawell Hill.

While the exterior dazzles the eye, the inside ain’t too shabby itself. The ground floor boasts a handsome reception area with hardwood floors, a double winding staircase, high ceilings, multiple chandeliers and six sets of pocket doors. The library at right features mahogany paneling, leaded-glass cabinets and a marvelous white marble fireplace. A center hallway, which runs the width of the house, calls at-



David E. Mitchell, “the boy educator,” was named fifth president of Cumberland University in 1902 on or near the same day he earned his bachelor degree at the school. This photo from 1904 shows him in his office. SUBMITTED

tention to its tiger-eye oak wainscoting and numerous fluted columns.

A dining room-training center and a commercial kitchen take up the back right side, and the upstairs, which originally had seven bedrooms, provides ample space for offices.

‘Tennessean’ brags on new home

Some histories state the Mitchell family moved into the house in 1910, but *Nashville Tennessean* articles from late 1912 and early 1913 seem to point to a later date.

The June 3, 1913, *Tennessean* review of the house read “This evening between 8 and 11 o’clock the handsome new home of Mr. and Mrs. David E. Mitchell on West Main boulevard was the scene of a brilliant assemblage on the occasion of the annual reception by the faculty and trustees of Cumberland University to the graduates of the various departments of the university.

“An Italian stringed orchestra from Nashville behind a screen of palms furnished delightful music during the evening. Additional pleasure and interest was lent to the occasion by the fact of this being the first time that the doors of the handsome new Mitchell home, which has just been completed at a cost of over \$100,000 had been thrown open to the public. It is one of the handsomest and

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most artistically designed private homes in Tennessee.”

Two months later the Aug. 3, 1913, *Tennessean*, which presented the bodacious headlines near the beginning of this story, gave kudos to prominent Lebanon contractor and designer Robert L. White, who was in charge of the interior designing, wood-work and interior finishing.

In further describing the house, the *Tennessean* reporter wrote, “This handsome residence stands in all its colonial beauty and grandeur in the center of a large blue grass lawn of some 30 odd acres surrounded by the towering forest trees about a mile from the city on the terminus of the West Main boulevard and is approached in front by a circular driveway of macadam and on the east side by concreted walks leading from the Castle Heights driveway.

“The building is two-story and is colonial in design and is built out of Monterey cut-stone. As one views it from in front with four large massive colonial columns, its only ornamentation, one is impressed with its extreme simplicity, but grandeur of architecture and what is true of the architecture as regards the exterior of the dwelling is also carried out on in the interior. (Note: At some time, the front of the house was fortified with six columns.)

As one enters the large reception hall, 40X50 feet, on the first floor, one’s attention is immediately drawn to the winding staircase with two approaches, which end in a landing on the second floor. The entire stairway, together with all of the woodwork of the main hall, is made out of quartered oak, paneled, with all of the brackets hand-carved and with the beam effect ceiling.

The main hall is lighted with a handsome hand-wrought brass chandelier combined with genuine cut glass and containing nearly a hundred lights. This electric fixture, together with those through the entire house, were designed especially from original blue print designs for Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell and made according to designs in one of the largest factories in the north.

To the right of the main reception hall and opening into it is the library, which is done in genuine Philippine mahogany, imported especially for this job, all of which is hand-carved. The walls of the entire room are made solid with the hand-carved mahogany and the library table and chairs to match are of the same material, and mission in design. The mantel in the east end of the library occupies almost that entire end, and is of white Georgia marble, hand carved.

To the left of the main reception hall as one enters, and opening into it, is the drawing room, which is a dream of exquisite beauty and daintiness of architecture. The room is done in solid white and old rose, with the heavy pilasters in the four corners. All the woodwork in the drawing room is paneled and all of the panels are done in handsome white embroidered silk in the daintiest of designs. The frescoing of the ceiling is of an exquisite and dainty design, harmonizing beautifully with the architecture and color scheme of the old rose and white, which is carried out in the carpets, tapestries and furniture.

The dining room, which is to the right of the circling stairway, and opening into the main hall, which is 80 feet long, is done in cathedral finish oak, and is wainscoted to a height of eight feet. The dining room furniture is of the same wood. The kitchen, the glass-enclosed breakfast room, and rear hall to the left of the main hall, are all done in natural pine. All of the floors on the first floor are of first quality quarter-sawed oak.

There are seven bedrooms on the second floor, three bathrooms and a main and rear hall. The entire second floor is in the eggshell white color and finish, and the floors are all of hardwood.

All of the carpets and rugs throughout the entire house are imported from the old country, and among them are to be found the very finest of the Persian makes. All of the tapestries are also imported and of very rich design.



The Mitchell House, circa 1930, was abandoned by David E. Mitchell in about 1923 and for the most part remained empty until Castle Heights purchased the house in 1936 and made it the home of its Junior School.

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Where did wealth come from?

This opulence begs the questions how 30-year-old educator Mitchell could afford such a splendid-erous palace and what brought him from the Keystone State to Cumberland University?

To answer the second question first, Mitchell, a strong Cumberland Presbyterian, came to the Presbyterian-affiliated school with the notion of entering the ministry. Perhaps more noteworthy, he already

could to take care of their needs. At 14 he went to Southwestern State Normal School at California, Penn., where he graduated with honors three years later and promptly was elected principal of Roscoe Public Schools where four teachers served under him.

In 1895, he became editor of The Peoples Tribune, the leading prohibition paper in the western part of the state, in Uniontown, Pa. It was there he became a broker in coal and iron properties and handled transactions over thousands of acres of land. It was said he made a profit of \$5,000 on one farm in three days and by the age of 24 he reportedly had amassed a small fortune of \$200,000.

On Aug. 15, 1900, he married Elizabeth Smith, a native of Derbyshire, England, in Coal Centre, Pa., where the ceremony was performed by the bride’s father, Rev. Arthur Smith, pastor of the local Methodist Episcopal Church. That same night the newlyweds departed for Lebanon, Tenn.

While a student at Cumberland, the entrepreneur donated \$3,000 for a heating plant in Memorial Hall and gave \$3,000 worth of new books and furnishings to the Reference Library of the College of Arts, which then carried the name Mitchell Library for nine decades. The well-heeled student also was said to own the first automobile in Lebanon, an Oldsmobile.

Mitchell steers Cumberland

He became the fifth head of the university in June 1902 on or near the day he was awarded his bachelor’s degree as he succeeded Chancellor Nathan Green Jr. It was believed at the time that the 5-foot-1 Mitchell was the youngest college president in the U.S.

In “A History of Cumberland University 1842-1935”, Winstead Paine Bone, the sixth president of Cumberland, wrote that Mitchell gave \$3,000 to help pay for the interior of the unfinished College Chapel in 1903 and the same year donated \$8,000 of \$50,000 needed to erect the Men’s Dormitory.

Bone reckoned that Mitchell contributed about \$50,000 to the school. While declining his own salary, for several years he furnished the salary of the Dean of the Theological School, the principal part of the salary of a professor in the College of Arts and the salary of Registrar Paris Marion Simms.

He helped bring aboard new professors to the Theological School, led the charge to establish a School of Music, and during his tenure Cumberland produced its most famous football team. (The 1903 Bulldogs defeated Vanderbilt, Alabama, LSU and Tulane.) He also taught the men’s Bible class at Lebanon Presbyterian Church and was involved in daily college chapel services.

Were that not enough, H. Rogers Thomson, who wrote “Guardian of the Legacy: The Mitchell House”, reported that Mitchell was the man primarily responsible for shutting down nine taverns on the Lebanon Public Square.

Due to business obligations that took him away from Lebanon much of the time, he resigned as university president in June 1906.

As for family life, David and Elizabeth Mitchell produced a daughter, also named Elizabeth, in 1901, and a son, David Earle Mitchell Jr., was born in their mansion on Sept. 18, 1916.

The couple’s opulent residence served as a beehive of activity for children in the neighborhood and the youth of the Presbyterian Church. And after taking a trip the Isle of Jersey in the British Isles in 1912, Mitchell fancied the Jersey milk cows and bought 300 cows and several bulls and had them shipped to Lebanon where some of the lucky ones munched the bluegrass on the Mitchell House front lawn. The entrepreneur also gave some of the cattle to local farmers, allowing them to start their own dairy herds.

NEXT WEEK: Tragedy strikes Mitchell family

Sources for this story include: “A History of Cumberland University 1842-1935” by Winstead Paine Bone, 1935; “Guardian of the Legacy: The Mitchell House Story,” by H. Rogers Thomson; “Phoenix Rising! Cumberland University 150 Years, 1842-1992,” by G. Frank Burns; “The Tennessean” (June 4, 1902; Dec. 18, 1912; June 4, 1913; Aug. 3, 1913; March 4, 1980); “The Lebanon Democrat” (Oct. 6, 1960; July 28, 1960); “The (Monongahela, Pa.) Daily Republican” (Aug. 1, 1945); “The (Connellsville, Pa.) Courier” (July 11, 1902); “New York Daily News” (April 29, 1930); “The Wilson Post.”



Lebanon Mayor Bernie Ash and his assistant, Debbie Jessen, pose in front of the white marble fireplace in the Mitchell House library.

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had made a fortune buying and selling iron and oil interests in his home state.

David Earle Mitchell was born the son of Dr. Gibson P. Mitchell and Annie Scott Mitchell on Feb. 7, 1876, in Monongahela, Pa. When he was 12, his father died of tuberculosis, leaving the boy, his sister, Nelle, and mother practically destitute.

The lad immediately began doing everything he



OFFICE OF PRESIDENT D. E. MITCHELL
P. M. Simms, Registrar. G. W. Martin, Endowment Agent. W. F. Poe, Private Secretary to the President. President Mitchell

This 1902 photo depicts the office of Cumberland University president David E. Mitchell. From left are registrar Paris Marion Simms, endowment agent G.W. Martin, presidential secretary W.F. Poe and Mitchell.



This recent photo of the Mitchell House shows four massive columns in front but at one time there were six columns. The 10,600-square foot house cost \$100,000 to build with rock brought in from the Monterey-Crossville area and Bowling Green, Ky.

KEN BECK

THE HOUSE THAT MITCHELL BUILT

Lebanon educator loses wife, mansion; Castle Heights Junior School moves in

Second of a two-part series

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In the fall of 1919, the world of one of Lebanon’s most popular citizens came crashing down.

While picnicking, the children of David and Elizabeth Mitchell sipped water from a local spring and came down with typhoid fever. Their mother tended to their health, and they recovered but Elizabeth contacted the fever and succumbed three days later on Sept. 13. She was 42.

The evening she died, Mitchell telephoned undertaker Claude Seagraves and asked him to come to the house and embalm the body. Mitchell greeted Seagraves at the door and told him to remove his shoes, thus the mortician did his job in his socks.



At some point in the 1920s, David E. Mitchell had the Lebanon firm of Seagraves & Smithwick order a mammoth monument to be set beside his wife’s grave. The stone was a solid block of unpolished Georgia granite that weighed about 27 tons and measured about 10-feet long, six-feet wide and five-feet high. It took from nine to 14 days to ease the monument from the Tennessee Central Railroad Station on South Maple to Cedar Grove Cemetery. The sixth man from left is Walter Smithwick Sr., and the eighth man is Claude Seagraves.



Young Nan Winfree sits on the front steps of the Mitchell House in 1960. She spent the first six years of her life living in the house with her parents, who worked for Castle Heights.

Elizabeth Mitchell died in her upstairs bedroom. It was said that her grieving husband never entered that room again nor did he sleep in the house after her death, although he would return at times in the dead of night to work in his library and leave before sunrise.

The room supposedly was left untouched for 16 years, and Elizabeth’s comb and hairbrush remained on her dressing table, still holding strands of her hair.

Mitchell makes, loses two fortunes

After his mate’s death, Mitchell turned the care of his children over to his in-laws, the Smiths. According to the 1920 U.S. Federal Census, he, his children and in-laws lived on Coles Ferry Pike, no longer inhabiting the big house on West Main. It seems the businessman left Lebanon abruptly in 1922 or 1923, but before departing, due to bankruptcy proceedings, he deeded the mansion to his offspring for \$1.

In 1923 the Smiths and their two grandkids relocated to Bradenton, Fla. Mitchell went West and stayed with a friend from Lebanon, Sam Doak, who owned a profitable gold mine.

The mansion was practically abandoned for seven years, but in 1930 Dr. O.N. Smith and his wife, who were friends to the Mitchell family, got permission to live in it for a short time after their house burned down.

There also were uninvited guests. A few years before the structure was bought by Castle Heights Military Academy, two visitors explored the house. One of them commented later, “It was a sad picture. We remember dresses hanging in the closets in the upper floor that actually fell apart when touched, bath fixtures that fell from the wall when you entered, deep-velvet carpets eaten by moths and mice until they were only a patchwork of bygone days.”

Mitchell is believed to have been deep in debt when he left Lebanon. The brilliant businessman evidently made his second fortune in cattle, minerals and lumber out West and reportedly later made good on the debts he left behind.

Goobers invade the big house

From the mid-1930s to the mid-1980s, the Mitchell House became a home again, only this time for young Castle Heights students, nicknamed goobers.

“They had cadets housed on the first two floors. On the second floor were



David and Elizabeth Mitchell made their home in the Mitchell House less than 10 years. In the fall of 1919, Elizabeth, 42, was struck down by typhoid fever and died in her bedroom. It was said that David never entered that room nor slept in the house again.

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four rooms and an enclosed room for house mothers. There were some triple bunks in one room that slept 15 to 20,” recollected Castle Heights archivist and alum Rob Hosier.

“As a day student in the seventh grade, I dressed for P.E. in the attic that had lockers up there,” said Hosier, whose father taught at the school.

He mentioned that the Castle Heights Memorial Garden, located on the West Lawn of the Mitchell House, holds engraved brick pavers with the names of every graduate from 1905 to 1986 as well as those who would have graduated in 1987.

Brooklyn boy loved Heights home

There may be no Heightsman who more cherishes his memories of residing in the Mitchell House than Lebanon, Ky., lawyer Ted Lavit, a Brooklyn native who started his Heights education in the second grade in 1946 and graduated in 1957.

“I lived upstairs facing Highway 70 (West Main Street) all those years. I remember when I was very small. We had bedtime stories downstairs by the fireplace in the library, and we had house mothers who lived there,” rem-

inised Lavit.

“There was a large glass enclosure in the hallway where they had a house-mother who was there for us if there was something we needed to be done, like making arrangements for us or getting new shoes or clothes sewed. She was right there at the ready for us.”

Lavit recalled hearing music lessons going on downstairs taught by Mrs. Stroud Gwynn, while Ma Kremer gave singing lessons to the glee club and May Gregory Rousseau offered public speaking lessons.

“We ate downstairs. The food was always good. We had a dietician, Mrs. Eskew. There were two dining rooms and two massive doors that they would open and have announcements after each meal,” he said.

“We were scattered throughout the second floor. They were large rooms with probably 30 to 35 bunks. There was a lot of roughhousing upstairs, like a bunch of monkeys. A few boys would get homesick. I never got homesick. ... We drilled every day with Marine Corps dummy wooden rifles and stored them in the roundhouse behind the Mitchell House. We had racks for rifles inside and bicycle outside.

“I remember the custodian, Claude Hicks, and he would take care of keeping that beautiful downstairs polished. He had a large electric polisher. It was full of gorgeous wood, and he kept the walls and fluted pillars shining.

“As far as the Mitchell House, I had a great childhood there. To me that was boy’s heaven, a great place to grow up,” said Lavit.

See MITCHELL HOUSE on B10



Castle Heights Junior School goobers, who lived in Mitchell House (in background at right), enjoy bicycles and merry-go-round during a break from classes.

MITCHELL HOUSE

From B9

Lass enjoyed life in the big house

Nan Winfree was one of the few girls who spent her early childhood in the house. That meant the Castle Heights campus was her playground.

Her mother, Oleta, got a job at the school and discovered they needed a math teacher, which led to her husband, Cordell Winfree, getting the job and later becoming commandant of the Junior School. They moved into an apartment in the upstairs of Mitchell House in the spring of 1957 when Nan was six months old.

“When we were there the thing I remember is that Castle Heights was so formal and elegant. On Sunday afternoons they had band concerts on the front lawn with the band on the front porch of Mitchell House. It was a very formal affair. They had waiters in white coats and gloves and served ice cream,” she recalled.

“I slid down the banisters and ran up and down the steps. There was a commissary where the boys could buy things. Mrs. Katherine Pritchard lived upstairs. She wasn’t 5-feet tall, and she made them toe the line and was quite the seamstress and would darn their socks.

“Downstairs was off limits to everybody. The downstairs was very formal, and receptions were held there. The Junior School boys would have a dance and invite town girls to come. There were boys there from South America and Central America who didn’t go home on holidays, so they went with us when we would go to our grandparents.

“I lived 12 years on campus, my first six in Mitchell House, and then we moved to another house on West Main next to where Wilson Bank & Trust is, beside the Hooker House, and 18 boys moved in there. It was like a dormitory. It was so neat because we could run around the track and football field and swim in the indoor pool and use the tennis courts. That was like our backyard. It was like a huge extended family.”

One small detail Winfree recalls about the Mitchell House concerns a column that ran down a wall in the downstairs hallway. “At about the two-foot level they (the cadets) fixed a little shelf or drawer that pulls out, and the boys would hide cigarettes and magazines there and leave them there for the next person.”

Architect addresses 1997-98 restoration

It was about 20 years after the Winfree’s moved off the Heights campus that Wilson County architect Mike Manous captained the restoration of the Mitchell House for its new owner, Cracker Barrel Old Country Store. Manous remembers the house was in poor condition when Danny Evins hired him to tackle the project.

“The building had been abandoned for nearly 10 years when I got involved. It was obvious when I gained access to the interior for the first time that many people had been inside through the years. What really hit home to me was the fact that there was zero vandalism. People could have broken the leaded-glass cases in the library, defaced the marble mantels and spray-painted graffiti, but again the building had

suffered degradation only from the elements,” said Manous.

“I distinctly remember thinking at the time, ‘Wow, this is a really great community filled with good people.’ Sadly, I fear the fate of the building would have been different were it to have been built in a different city. Start to finish we were completed with the restoration in a little less than a year.”

Not only was the transformation of the mansion done in less than 12 months but, even though it was remodeled into functional, modern office space for a national corporation, it was accomplished in a manner that preserved its status on the National Register of Historic Places.

Manous understood the project was not just another job but that he was putting his hands on a building that was one of the architectural jewels of the community, a structure valuable in more ways than simply function.

“All too often it is much easier, cheaper and more expeditious to tear down an old building than to renovate (case in point McFadden Auditorium). Also, old buildings can rarely be used in exactly the same manner in which they were originally intended. Old buildings typically must be re-purposed to maintain relevance in today’s real estate environment,” said Manous.

“It takes people with vision like Mr. Evins to understand the priceless nature of such structures as the Mitchell House. They tell the community’s story. Every city and town in this country are unique in their own way. If we as a society decide to destroy iconic architecture such as the Mitchell House and replace these structures with homogeneous fast-food restaurants and gas stations, we completely alter and vanquish our collective history.”

Historical home getting upgrade

Lebanon Mayor Bernie Ash saw the house through similar lenses after close inspection and looks forward to moving in.

“I am a bit overwhelmed to realize that we will be working in such a historic building. The fact that this is the house that David Mitchell built and he and his family lived here, and that Castle Heights cadets roamed these hallways, and Danny Evins, a former cadet and founder of Cracker Barrel, had an office in this very building is just amazing to me and quite a responsibility.”

Mayoral assistant Debbie Jessen detailed the improvements that will be done before city administrative offices relocate.

“We plan to repaint the exterior woodwork, refinish the hardwood floors and replace the carpet. The interior has beautiful wainscoting, fluted columns and coffered ceilings made from tiger-eye oak and Philippine mahogany. All will need polishing. The light fixtures will be rewired for LEDs,” she said.

“The landscaping has an English-garden feel. We will freshen up the landscaping including the beautiful fountain. To the rear of the building stands the springhouse. The Castle Heights cadets referred to it as the Armory. This round structure is surrounded by



Castle Heights Military Academy archivist Rob Hosier, left, and architect Mike Manous, who led the restoration of the Mitchell House in 1997-1998, stand near the bottom steps of the double winding staircase in the mansion.

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This circa 1911 image shows the Mitchell House with six columns in front. At one time Jersey cows munched grass on its front lawn.

Doric columns. It will also be restored.”

Stunned by the opulence of the historic house, which Mitchell built as a gift of love for his wife, Jessen noted that it has eight fireplaces and a number of original chandeliers, while the Rose Parlor features brocade fabric on the walls. “I’m sure distinguished ladies from days gone by sat by the fireplace enjoying a cup of tea,” she imagined of the room that soon will be her new office.

Mitchell’s massive monument

As for the final resting place of Mitchell and his wife, Tennessean writer Hugh Walker, a Lebanon native, penned in 1980 that a few years after Elizabeth’s death, Mitchell asked Seagraves & Smithwick to order a monument to be set beside her grave. He selected a solid block of unpolished Georgia granite. Approximately 10-feet long, six-feet wide and five-feet high, it weighed an estimated 54,000 pounds and cost about \$5,000.

It took between nine and 14 days

to move the massive stone from the Tennessee Central Railroad Station on South Maple to the cemetery and was accomplished by using block and tackle to take it off the flat car near the Fakes & Hooker lumber building. There was no truck that could hold its weight; thus, a wooden track was laid. A crew of about a half dozen men helped Marvin Head, who hitched his truck to the monument with a chain and pulled it at a snail’s pace down South Maple to the cemetery.

The chunk of granite remains the largest monument in Cedar Grove Cemetery. Writer Walker recalled that his father told him, “When the trumpets blow for Judgment Day that stone will be there.”

Twenty-six years after Elizabeth’s death, Mitchell would join his mate in Cedar Grove Cemetery. Newspapers announced that the educator, churchman, philanthropist, geologist and investor died of pneumonia July 30, 1945, in Williams, Ariz. He was 69.

He had lived in California the last nine years of his life, and the 1940 U.S. Federal Census listed him as residing in Glendale, Calif., with his son, daughter, son-in-law Joseph Aparicio and two grandchildren. He was survived by his second wife, Ellen Jones Mitchell, and his children, Elizabeth and David Jr.

Newspaper obituaries did not mention it, but H. Rogers Thomson, author of “Guardian of the Legacy: The Mitchell House,” reported that Mitchell died financially destitute and owed a gas station \$350, a debt paid by his son.

While the academy Mitchell co-founded gave up the ghost in 1886, his legacy lives on as Cumberland University flourishes and last year boasted a record enrollment of 2,405 students. With City of Lebanon offices moving in, the house that Mitchell built more than a century ago will continue to wear his name and maintain its stature as a sparkling architectural gem in the City of Cedars.

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This massive monument marks the final resting place of David and Elizabeth Mitchell. It is the largest monument in Cedar Grove Cemetery.



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