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Historic 'Miss Belle's' house in limbo as Owens farm in Richardson goes up for sale



Jennifer Burr, president of the Junior League of Richardson, says the farmhouse known as Miss Belle's Place is "such a part of the history of Richardson." (Andy Jacobsohn - Staff Photographer)





By dallasnews Administrator

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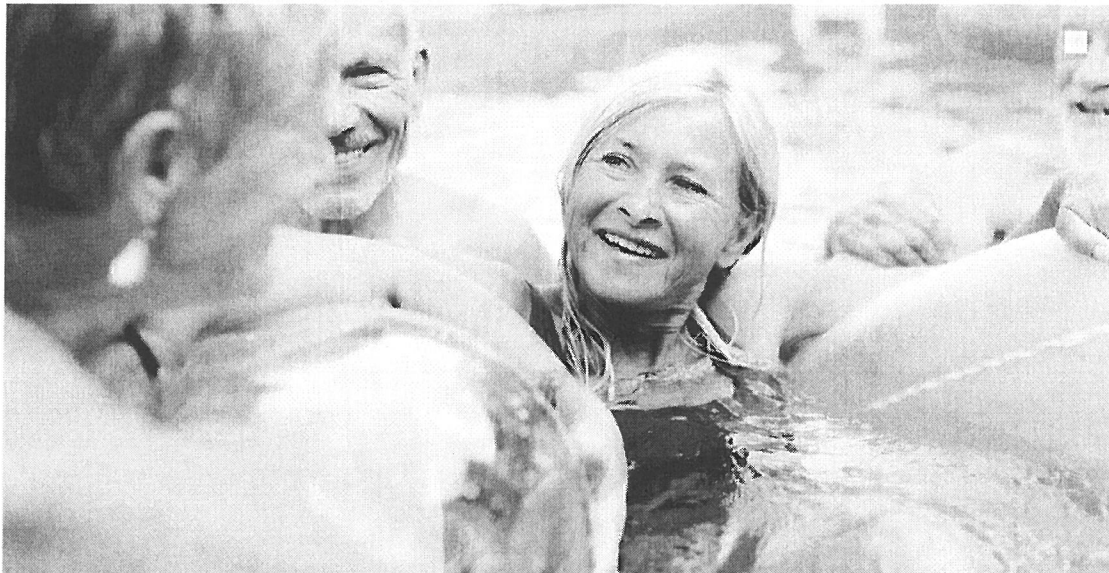
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For years, children learned about Richardson's rural history at Owens Spring Creek Farm, where they were able to pet farm animals, play on hay bales and tour a two-story Victorian farmhouse known as Miss Belle's Place.

The farm closed more than a year ago, and the land, owned by Ohio-based Bob Evans Farms, is up for sale.

The future of Miss Belle's Place, one of the city's oldest remaining structures, remains unclear.

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“We don't know what's going to happen to Miss Belle's house. It's such a part of the history of Richardson,” said Jennifer Burr, president of the Junior League of Richardson.

The group provided tours of the 19th-century home where Virginia Bell Robberson, known as “Miss Belle,” taught school for nearly 40 years.

Preserving historic structures is often challenging for cities that want to safeguard the community’s heritage but have to deal with practical concerns like restoration costs, upkeep and security.

Last year, Plano announced that a house built in 1861 would have to be moved to make way for development of a new park. City officials were worried that the Collinwood Farm house would be vandalized in a public park and didn’t have funding to restore and maintain it.

But preservationists said moving the house could affect its historic value and asked city officials to consider proposals to keep the house on the site. The Plano City Council is expected to discuss the matter on Monday.

In Garland, two century-old houses were recently moved to make way for new development in the downtown area.

The Lyles House was relocated to the Heritage Crossing greenspace and pedestrian corridor. The Pace House was moved to private ownership in Travis College Hill, the city’s first designated residential historic district.

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These old structures help growing communities retain their history and sense of place, said Chris Florence, a spokesman for the Texas Historical Commission.

“It’s more important than ever to preserve these buildings because Texas is changing so much,” he said.

In Richardson, officials want to ensure that Miss Belle’s Place will have a permanent home in the city.

If a buyer of the land doesn’t want to keep the house at the Owens site, “the city is committed to finding an appropriate location to relocate the structure,” Richardson spokesman Greg Sowell said.

An independent assessment concluded that the structure is sound enough to be moved, he said.

“Parks and Recreation is trying to come up with a short list of where we would put it,” Sowell said.

But nothing will be done until the property is sold and the city can determine if the new owner wants the house to go or stay.

In the meantime, Burr said she’s fielded a number of inquiries from residents who want to know what will happen to the old house.

While she can’t give them a definite answer yet, “I feel like we’re going to do what we can to keep it in Richardson,” she said. “I don’t want to lose that piece of history.”



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