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. **Historic Akin House has a future**

By TOM TIMBERLAKE, Standard-Times correspondent

Posted Aug. 10, 2005 at 12:01 AM

Updated Jan 13, 2011 at 11:21 PM

DARTMOUTH -- When the British attacked during the Revolutionary War much of Padanaram Village was destroyed by fire -- but not the Akin House.

"This is a little house with a really big story to tell" said Lisa Sughrue the executive director of the New Bedford-based Waterfront Historic Area League.

"It would be a tragedy for it to be lost. Its history is too important."

WHALE is hosting a benefit Sunday as part of ongoing efforts to preserve the 243-year-old Elihu Akin House which is believed to be one of the oldest homes in Dartmouth.

With a blue tarpaulin covering its roof to keep out the rain the Akin House sits on about a half-acre of land at the corner of Dartmouth and Rockland streets in South Dartmouth.

Money raised at the event will be used to "stabilize" the circa 1762 six-room two-story home which has been vacant for more than 25 years according to Ms. Sughrue.

WHALE purchased the property about two years ago from descendants of the Akin family. Dartmouth Town Meeting approved spending \$185000 from the town's Community Preservation Fund to buy the site.

"We've been doing work behind the scenes researching the property so that we can learn more about its historical significance and the people that lived here" Ms. Sughrue said.

WHALE has cataloged the house going room-to-room salvaging items to be reused and determining what needs to be done to shore up the structure in order to restore it.

Ms. Sughrue said it will take about \$100000 to stabilize the building. WHALE has received some grant money and private donations toward the project but only a fraction of what is needed has been raised.

"We still have a long way to go."

Hints of the home's long-lost beauty still survive its many fireplaces a testament to a lifestyle long passed.

Now the windows are shuttered with plywood. Its creaking floors are sinking and warped.

"We need to make sure the roof isn't going to cave in" Ms. Sughrue said.

Pointing to exposed-beam ceilings she talked about how WHALE hopes to repair the sagging beams floors and other structural elements suffering from age and lack of care.

"This is just the first step we're not yet ready for complete restoration. We have to stabilize it first."

On the day of the Revolutionary Restoration Party two large tents will be set up to accommodate guests. There will be an open bar and a varied menu which includes many area favorites hors d'oeuvres and desserts.

The Akin House will be open for self-guided tours. WHALE staff and architects will be available to answer questions.

Free parking is available at the nearby Cushman School. It's a short walk to the Akin House but shuttles will be available for those who wish to ride.

The Akin house was featured in the 1922 silent film "Down to the Sea in Ships" which was filmed in New Bedford and the region. Still photos from the film as well as other pictures and architectural drawings will be displayed during the party.

A sag in the house's peak which is visible in the movie will be left when restoration of the home is completed Ms. Sughrue said.

WHALE officials are still considering options for the future use of the Akin House when the restoration is completed including its use as a cultural heritage and education center.

"It can tell the history of Dartmouth and be a working classroom" Ms. Sughrue said. "There is no single place that does that at the moment."

This story appeared on Page A1 of The Standard-Times on August 10 2005.

