

2012-08-03
FROM PATRICIA HEINZ

My name is Patricia Heinz and I presently own the property at 212 High Street which is commonly known as The Admiral Pratt House.

When the realtor first presented me with the offer on my property and the proposal to create a preschool and day care center I must admit I was a little surprised. Then I began to visualize this possibility and in the days and weeks since the reality and common sense of the idea have had a chance to settle into my heart and my head.

One of the first things I recalled was how many older homes...say 100 to 200 years old like my house which was built in 1812...have been re-purposed as the saying goes: many of those homes into projects involving children and many of them right here in Maine. Of course, I first noticed just down the block to the north of my property...a Head Start located in what was once housing and located right across the street from the Anderson School...which has itself been re-purposed as Waterfall Arts center.

Then I began to take a closer look at my neighborhood on Primrose Hill. Almost every single house on the block has served more than one purpose at some time. In the 20 years I've owned my property, which operated as The Inn on Primrose Hill for eight years, at least two others have served the community as a Bed & Breakfast. One of those also had an antique business in the barn; the other showcased an art gallery in its barn. A third home has an artist's studio and retail showroom on the first floor.

This diversity of uses led me to remember the original use of some of these homes...particularly the house two doors south on Church Street which was referred to as "the Homestead" by the Johnson family, but was more commonly known as the Whitter Tavern. Can you imagine what it must have been like in 1801 when this tavern was built and began operation? Imagine the noise and commotion day and nite coming from a combination stagecoach stop, bar and restaurant as well as overnite lodgings for travelers. One history

tells us at that time it was also the post office. Another property on Primrose Hill once housed a doctor's office and, rumor has it, a brothel though not both at the same time.

We all long for the "good old days" although on closer inspection they may not be exactly as we'd like to remember them. And however much we may long for them to return or even stay a bit longer...time only flows in one direction. If we choose to be good caretakers of the time and space we are given, then perhaps a closer, more thoughtful look at our legacy of beautiful old homes here in Belfast will show us how best to move forward into the future.

Come to think of it, I really envy those little kids. Just imagine going to a school that was more like a day at Grandma's house.