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Ron Campbell/Johnson City Press

Johnson City Press
Mon. April 4, 2005

Fred Kitzmiller holds a framed newspaper and photos of the Kitzmiller home, which today has been reduced to mostly brick and some foundation on property belonging to the Gray National Guard Armory.

Kitzmiller house was said to be showplace in earlier time

By BEN INGRAM

Press Staff Writer
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Fred Kitzmiller Jr. says the Kitzmiller house in the photo on last Monday's History/Heritage page was, during its time, the fanciest mansion from Knoxville to Roanoke, Va.

"My great-great grandfather David Kitzmiller built the spacious house sometime around 1828," Kitzmiller said from his residence not far from where the imposing house once stood.

Today what remains of the Kitzmiller house, mostly brick and some foundation, can be found on property belonging to the Gray National Guard Armory.

"The house, at one time, originally stood on farmlands numbering 1,200 acres," Kitzmiller said. "The house itself was a two-and-a-half-story brick antebellum home. Each brick was hand-made. There was a fireplace in every room; the large living room downstairs and the ballroom upstairs had two fireplaces each."

Every room in the house is said to have had 10-foot ceilings and the walls were lined with gold leaf wallpaper. Other notable pieces included the mantles, which were all hand-carved in Knoxville. The door and window casings on the inside were also all hand-carved.

Much of the 1,200 acres was farmed during the Civil War. Barns and slave quarters also once were a part of the estate.

Kitzmiller added that this residence wasn't the first of the family's noted houses in Washington County. "David Kitzmiller's father, Martin, had a house built in Boones Creek before David built the one in Gray," he said.

"This other house was another large two-story structure on Highway 36 built of stone. The family actually owned several hundred acres in Boones Creek."

Known in those times as a "gentleman farmer," David eventually went on to successfully profit from his land. Kitzmiller said he was widely recognized as one of the best farmers and stock raisers in all the state.

"He was most notably known for his hogs," Kitzmiller said. "He raised them for the Confederacy and fed their soldiers during the Civil



Mr. and Mrs. James Gray, couple in right foreground, pose with guests in front of their home, the Kitzmiller house.

War. His smokehouse held as many as 600 head of hogs."

Kitzmiller said during David's prime years as a stock raiser, it was the custom to drive the stock to market.

"I was told that David drove 1,800 head of hogs to South Carolina at one point," he said. "I just can't imagine that."

David died in 1895 and was at the time of his death the oldest citizen in the county at 96. Kitzmiller said David was also among the first settlers of Washington County.

Kitzmiller said the house still stands tall in his memory from when he young.

"Oh, we used to run around in the house when I was a little boy," he said. "My aunt and David's great-granddaughter lived in the house until it became condemned."

"It was eventually torn down in the early 1970s. The house, even in decay, was beautiful."

Several other readers responded to last week's request for information about the Kitzmiller house.

We appreciate the responses of Aaron I. Guinn, Martha Culp, Norma Tucker, Toni Rendano, Mary Nelle Bacon Roberson, Bill Fox, Cameron Canaday, Betty Jane Hylton and others.