

# Markham House to Be Saved

*New Owner's Plans for Historic Site Include Learning Center*

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The two-room Markham house where Chief Justice John Marshall as a boy transcribed Alexander Pope and read Horace was bought recently by a Los Angeles technology firm executive who says he is interested in restoring the 236-year-old building and turning it into a learning center for kids.

David C. Collins, CEO of Learning Tree International Inc., a technology training firm, last month purchased the 322-acre tract, just off Interstate 66 near the Markham exit, where Marshall lived from about 9 to 17.

"The idea will be to connect kids to their history and their country," Collins said.

Preservationist groups in northern Fauquier have for years hoped to preserve the property, which Marshall called "The Hollow," sometimes working at odds with the previous owners of the property where John Marshall, his father, mother, teacher and 10 siblings lived in the mid-1700s.

According to Tom deButts, a Washington lawyer who is a sixth-generation descendant of Marshall and the president of Friends of the Hollow, the owners did not want a historical designation for the property because that would have prevented them from selling the land to developers.

The house itself was in bad shape,

and deButts said he feared the worst. "The place was under a serious threat," he said. "It could have been bulldozed and burned."

"It should have been preserved a long time ago," said Collins, who four years ago purchased a house in nearby Delaplane. It was a coincidence that that property included the burned ruins of Mont Blanc, a mansion owned by Marshall's son, John Marshall Jr., during the 19th century. But that, Collins said, sparked his interest in Fauquier County's most famous son, which led to his recent acquisition.

After persuading one of the partners who owned the land to sell her share, the group agreed to a \$1.38 million price for the property. The deal was smoothed by Warren Montouri, a minority partner who was sympathetic to the preservationists.

Montouri, who owns a cattle farm in Markham, said, "I'm thrilled to see the Hollow move closer to historic preservation."

One of Collins's first acts as owner was to build a sturdy fence to protect the house from the cattle that still graze the property. DeButts said the original intention of Friends of the Hollow was to save the house, but now Collins is making plans that far exceed those expectations.

"We had limited goals. We had hoped to just save it and get a historic easement on it . . . and a road sign, at

least stabilize it," DeButts said. "He has big plans."

In the last few years, Collins has brought Fauquier schoolchildren out to his Delaplane property under the supervision of professional archaeologists to dig at the remains of Mont Blanc. He said he envisions the Hollow, "the mother of the Marshall homes," as a learning center, with restored buildings, hiking trails and fishing ponds.

"We will probably let adults come, but only because they have the keys to the vehicles," he said.

He said that he intends to contact Colonial Williamsburg experts to help with the project and that the Friends of the Hollow will be involved in the redevelopment.

The importance of Marshall, who died in 1835 as the longest-serving Chief Justice of the United States, cannot be overstated, Collins said. Marshall was born in 1755 in southern Fauquier and lived there until he was 9 when his family moved to Markham. He left the Hollow to study and fight in the Revolutionary War. Later, he would be instrumental in establishing judicial review of legislative and executive decisions.

"He took something that didn't have any form or function and basically created the Supreme Court out of it," Collins said, "and fundamentally created the Constitution as the law of the country."