

## **Now in their 90s, Helfand sisters visit, recall tales of historic Dartmouth farmhouse**

### **Thursday**

Posted Aug 13, 2015 at 8:06 PM

Updated Aug 13, 2015 at 8:06 PM

By Auditi Guhaaguha@s-t.com

DARTMOUTH — Sophie Helfand was about 10 when she planted a horse chestnut in the yard behind the historic Chase Road farmhouse that is thought to date back to 1871.

"We were born in this house," she said at a ..... fundraiser Wednesday evening at 318 Chase Road.

Now in their 90s, Sophie and Edith Helfand were special guests at the event where officials described their plans to preserve the recently endangered house and build their headquarters there.

"To me, this room was so much bigger when I was young," said Edith, standing in the parlor and looking around. "It still has its grandeur in my books."

She pointed out the alcove off the parlor where she slept for some time. There were geraniums there (her mother Gussy's favorite) and burgundy velvet draperies, she recalled. She also remembered the two working horses they had on the farm — Nellie and Dick — along with cows, dogs and cats, not to forget the wild animals on the farm.

Sophie told historian Robert Harding that the previous family who lived there once came by to look at the house and asked to take the engraved door knob as a memento. They replaced it with a plain one.

Their parents came from Russia, Harding said. The father, Harry, lost a leg working on the farm and had a wooden peg. When there was a problem with the well, he jumped in to check it out, much to the dismay of the children. But he managed to get out fine, he said.

Life was not easy living on a farm. They read a lot and helped around the place. Once they started to work, they walked about two miles to the trolley, the sisters said.

"We were a big family and when we look back, we struggled, but at that time we didn't think of it," Edith said.

There were 13 of them in the house and the sisters lived there until about 1947. Their cousins who lived next door took over the house and later bequeathed it to DNRT in a trust.

DNRT acquired it in 2013 and originally thought to tear the old house down, given the lack of maintenance and the costly repairs. But they met opposition from local residents who delved into its past and found it had some unique features and dated back Dartmouth's few Jewish farming families — the Helfands and the Goldsteins.

After a 6-month demolition delay last September, the DNRT reassessed its plans, sought CPA funds and agreed to preserve a part of the house if they could build an addition to create its headquarters.

Visiting the house after many years, the Helfand sisters who now live on Slocum Road, said they never thought it would be preserved for posterity.

"I never expected something like this to happen," Sophie said. "It's very nice."

Standing outside the white Greek Revival style house, DNRT president Clifton Rice said they thought it would be nice to invite the sisters as they presented their plans. "We think it will be terrific for DNRT and the community," he said.

DNRT recently launched ..... to build a permanent home at the 36-acre Helfand Farm. Rice said they have reached the halfway mark but still have a ways to go.

*Follow Auditi Guha on Twitter* .....