

Minding their manor

By Lisa A. Soloway

Staff Writer

WAYNE — The family of the 24th vice president of the United States, Garret A. Hobart, took great pride in the 200-acre "country retreat" they purchased in Wayne for \$5,285 in 1902.

After Hobart, a prominent Patersonian, died in office while serving under United States President William McKinley his wife Esther Jane purchased the mansion and property now owned by William Paterson College.

At the turn of the century the 40-room grand mansion served as a weekend and holiday retreat for the Hobarts and a place where dignitaries and prominent businesspeople gathered for extravagant balls and dinner parties. It was the center of Paterson social life, said Dennis Santillo, director of relations for William Paterson College.

But once Hobart Manor — now declared a national and state historic site — was purchased by the state in 1948 and

■ See **MANSION**, B3



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Dennis Santillo, right, director of relations at William Paterson College, and Peter Spiridon, vice president of administration and finance, stand in center of Hobart Manor Monday.

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MANSION/

Continued from Page B1

handed over to the college, the beauty and history of the mansion was sacrificed for efficiency.

Over the years, the mansion was transformed to accommodate the growing needs of the college. Sheetrock partitions were put up to divide the manor's spacious rooms — creating what looked like a "rat maze," Santillo said — and the leaded glass windows were removed to accommodate air conditioners.

Now the college and its Alumni Association are raising funds to restore the mansion to its past elegance and to make the manor the most impressive building on campus, said Peter Spiridon, vice president for administration and finance and an active participant in the renovation project.

The goal is that once again the manor will be visited by prominent businesspeople and dignitaries for parties and social functions, Santillo said.

"Initially, the Hobart Manor was 'the' building on campus," Santillo said. "Almost everything took place there ... But as the college grew and developed the manor was continually changed to accommodate the growth."

But in 1985 everyone was removed from the building and the college began to refurbish the manor, a project estimated at \$200,000.

The partitions were removed, the leaded windows were replaced and the original hardwood floors were restored.

At the same time, the college decided to unveil a new image it has been striving for — one that

could be accomplished with the help of the Hobart Manor, Santillo said.

"The college decided that we would become an integral part of Northern New Jersey and we took a much more intense regional focus," Santillo said. "We want to pursue a strong cultural, educational and economic interaction with the region. The Manor will serve as a nexus of our activity."

The recruiting and admissions office, the community affairs office and the alumni association's offices quickly were moved into the manor after the initial work was completed in 1987.

With the same sense of pride the Hobarts took in their home, the college and its alumni, having accomplished the basic restoration, now want to see the house returned to its full grandeur.

In their first capital fund-raising campaign the Alumni Association has reached about half of its \$150,000 goal over the past year. The college also plans to apply for a state grant to help fund the project, Spiridon said.

In the bare rooms — once again spacious — there are pastel drawings of what the rooms in the manor could look like. They show the about 14 intricately hand-carved fireplaces and the central spiral staircase restored. Elegant furniture and paintings adorn the rooms.

On the floor, still waiting to be hung in the finished ballroom where they once could be viewed, lie the portraits of President McKinley and Vice President Hobart.