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This home at 805 Central Ave., one of the oldest still standing in Faribault, is set to go up for auction Oct. 18. Rice County Historical Society Executive Director Sue Garwood believes it may have housed a business, making it one of the oldest commercial buildings in the state.

HISTORY FOR SALE

House built circa 1855, to be auctioned on October 18



Rice County Historical Society Executive Director Sue Garwood says the home is largely unchanged from when it was built, except for a two-story addition on the back. (Suzanne Rook/southernminn.com)

By JANE TURPIN MOORE
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A notable, if not frequently noted, piece of Faribault's history is scheduled to go on the auction block Oct. 18.

Preceding that fateful date is a 10 to 11 a.m. open house Monday that will allow prospective buyers a chance to tour the tax-forfeited property at 805 Central Ave.

The modest Greek revival-style structure was built in 1855 with lumber that likely arrived via oxen teams from the Red Wing or Hastings areas.

"Yes, it's in danger of extinction," said Susan Garwood, executive director of the Rice County Historical Society.

"There aren't a lot of homes from the 1850s in Faribault that are in relatively good condition, but this is a unique home that remains close to its original 1855 layout — it's only had one addition to it, at the back — and because there's a chance a business was run out of it at one time, it may possibly be one of the oldest commercial buildings still standing in Minnesota."

The house, as well as its storied history, is somewhat up for grabs. Despite having weathered more than 166 Minnesota winters and an unknowable number of tenants, 805 Central Ave. may be close to outliving its metaphorical nine lives.

See HISTORY on 3A

Williams murder trial begins with jury selection

By PHILIP WEYHE
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Over three years after the alleged fatal stabbing of a Faribault man by his romantic partner, jury trial began this week, as prosecutors aim to prove the guilt of the sole suspect.

Judana Catherine Williams, 28, is on trial, charged with felonies for second-degree murder and second-degree assault with a dangerous weapon. Prosecutors say that Williams killed her boyfriend at the time, 53-year-old Michael Bongers, by stabbing him with a knife on Sept. 7, 2018.

Williams, who had a history of domestic violence in which Bongers was the victim, was found by police kneeling over Bongers and covered in blood, according to the complaint. The knife, allegedly used to stab Bongers, was close by. Williams and Bongers were the only two people in the home at the time of the murder, and her statements to another officer that "he ran up on me, he ran up on me," can be used against Williams.

However, a recorded confession from Williams will not be admissible, because she was not read her Miranda Rights ahead of time. In April 2020, the Minnesota Supreme Court declined to take up an appeal filed by the Rice County Attorney's Office, which viewed the evidence as a potential linchpin in its case against Williams. The decision to bar the defendant's testimony from use at trial was originally made in July 2019 by Rice County District Court Judge Christine Long, subsequently upheld in January by the state Appeals Court.

Rice County Attorney John Fossum still feels the office has a strong case against Williams, and, led by Chief Assistant County Attorney Adam Johnson, the prosecutors will present evidence and witnesses to prove their case over several days of trial. Williams' defense will be led by attorney Kassius O. Benson, of Minneapolis.

The first week of the trial consisted of jury selection, which attorneys and Judge Long were able to finish by the end of Thursday, meaning presentation of evidence and witnesses can begin Monday, Oct. 11. The jurors were interviewed individually, an atypical process brought on by COVID and the complexities of this case. Attorneys on both sides were able to select and deselect, ultimately coming to a consensus jury.

According to Rice County Court Administrator Lisa Kuhlman, the trial will take place in Courtroom 5, a temporary setup in the Rice County Government Services Building. The media and public will be allowed to watch from Courtroom 2 at the courthouse, where the trial will be displayed via Zoom.

Fossum expects the trial to last a couple weeks. "Presentation of evidence, examination of the witnesses, the whole shebang, I guess," he said.



Williams

Plans in the works to honor past, present veterans with banner program

By MICHELLE VLASAK
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While on a recent vacation, Virginia van Sluis came across banners in a community that recognized military personnel through the Hometown Heroes Banner program.

Van Sluis, who comes from a military family, is the chair of the Veterans Committee at the Faribault Elks Lodge and was

one of three chairs who brought the Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall to Faribault in 2016. For her, adding another way to honor those in the military who give so much of their time was an easy decision. She found out the banners were part of the Hometown Heroes Banner program, which first started in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in 2006.

Hoping to bring this project to Faribault, van Sluis has tak-

en part in meetings with city/chamber staff, including the Faribault City Council's most recent work session, on how to make the project work in the community.

Parks and Recreation Director Paul Peanasky led the discussion during the council's Oct. 5 work session, and van Sluis was in attendance to answer questions.

See VETS on 3A



The original Hometown Heroes Banner program first ran in Harrisburg, PA in 2006. The banners are meant to honor past and present members of the armed forces and their families. Pictured is one type of hometown hero banner as seen in Lansdale, Pennsylvania. (Suzanne Rook/southernminn.com)

