Pottstown has numerous vacant properties, some languishing for years. Here’s an example of why it is so difficult to get them fixed up.

Gail Cooper, longtime principal of Pottstown Middle School, wants to restore a historic Pottstown mansion as a retirement project.

Borough officials suggested the vacant Wainman house, next to the Cluster building on North Franklin Street.

Cooper thinks it’s perfect. The problem is, no one seems able to sell it.

The Wainman house was built in 1887 by Pottstown lumber merchant Joseph Allen Healy. Every room in the house is paneled in a different wood — mahogany, walnut, cherry, maple, redwood. The main rooms have pocket doors and all the windows have shutters that fold into recesses.

Even the bathtub in the main bathroom was encased in oak paneling. The cast-iron radiators were decorated with figures such as a stork. The fireplaces were embellished with Dutch tiles. The carriage house was built with a turntable in the floor so Healy could drive his 1908 Buick in and out without backing up.

Healy’s daughter, Josephine, Bryn Mawr class of 1909, lived in the house until her death in 1978. Her husband, Dr. Leon Wainman, practiced dentistry on High Street for decades. He died in 1975 and left a trust providing an annual gift to Pottstown High School.

Cooper has a number of business uses in mind, but Bank of America, which is the owner according to county records, says it can’t be sold. Although the property was acquired by the bank in December 2012, it has not yet been posted for sale because it may “revert” to the investor. The investor cannot be identified because of privacy laws, according to a bank spokesman.

And so a Pottstown treasure, sits, deteriorating in the cold — until, someday, it will be too late to repair.

Commentary by Tom Hylton

The 1887 Wainman house at 61 N. Franklin Street is perhaps Pottstown’s most magnificent Victorian mansion. The house is vacant and deteriorating, and a responsible person would like to buy it and restore it. Unfortunately, it’s unclear just who owns it. Bank of America is listed in county records as owner, but a bank spokesman says it is merely “servicing the loan.”