

History: houses, cemeteries and more

Eugene's history alive and growing

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Of the Emerald

Oregon's governor Robert Straub says people of the state need a "shared imagination" when it comes to history. Straub also says that, considering the state's phenomenal growth, Oregonians need to take an active interest in preserving our past and restoring the symbols of the state's heritage.

"In a period when Oregon is faced with enormous growth — which we neither invite nor welcome — the preservation of historic monuments is vital to our state's heritage," Straub told an audience a month ago when he dedicated two University halls as national landmarks.

A group of Eugene citizens and city employees have taken that challenge seriously for the past three years and have worked for the preservation and restoration of some 57 historic sites around the city. Most are within walking or biking distance from the University.

The sites, which range from a downtown hardware store that features the old style clothesline tube messenger system, several hotels, countless houses, several University buildings and three area cemeteries, cover an area from three miles west of the campus to nearly two miles east of the campus and north and south for about a mile.

There may be nearly 60 designated historic sites, but there are more that could be historic, says Judy Rees of the city's Housing and Community Conservation Department.

Unfortunately, while most of the other landmarks were designated with relative ease, most of those others not already designated might not become landmarks without a fight.

According to Rees, a member of the city's Historic Review Board, there are "tons" of houses, buildings and parcels of property that could be designated historic sites, but most owners don't want that distinction.

"There are a lot of people out there who feel that their land is theirs and they can do what they want with it," Rees says. There are even more who don't like the historic designation as much as they don't like the city's zoning laws.

Right now there are only the 57 historic sites inside the city limits. Those include the downtown Palace Hotel, built just one year before the automobile reached Eugene; the Smeede Hotel, the oldest surviving brick masonry hotel in the county and stopping point of presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan during the late 1800s; the Oregon-Electric Depot, now a restaurant; and the Soultz-Westfall duplex, now a plant shop on Pearl Street.

The University's Deady and Villard Halls, officially designated national historic monuments during a ceremony last month, were placed in the city's register of historic sites six years ago. Both halls were the first buildings constructed on campus over 100 years ago.

Despite these already historic landmarks, there are still several others the Historic Review Board would like to designate, but has met opposition, Rees says.

One of those caused a minor controversy late last year, when owners of cemetery plots in the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) cemetery at 18th Avenue and University Street wanted the land designated a landmark, and the owners of the cemetery did not, Rees says.

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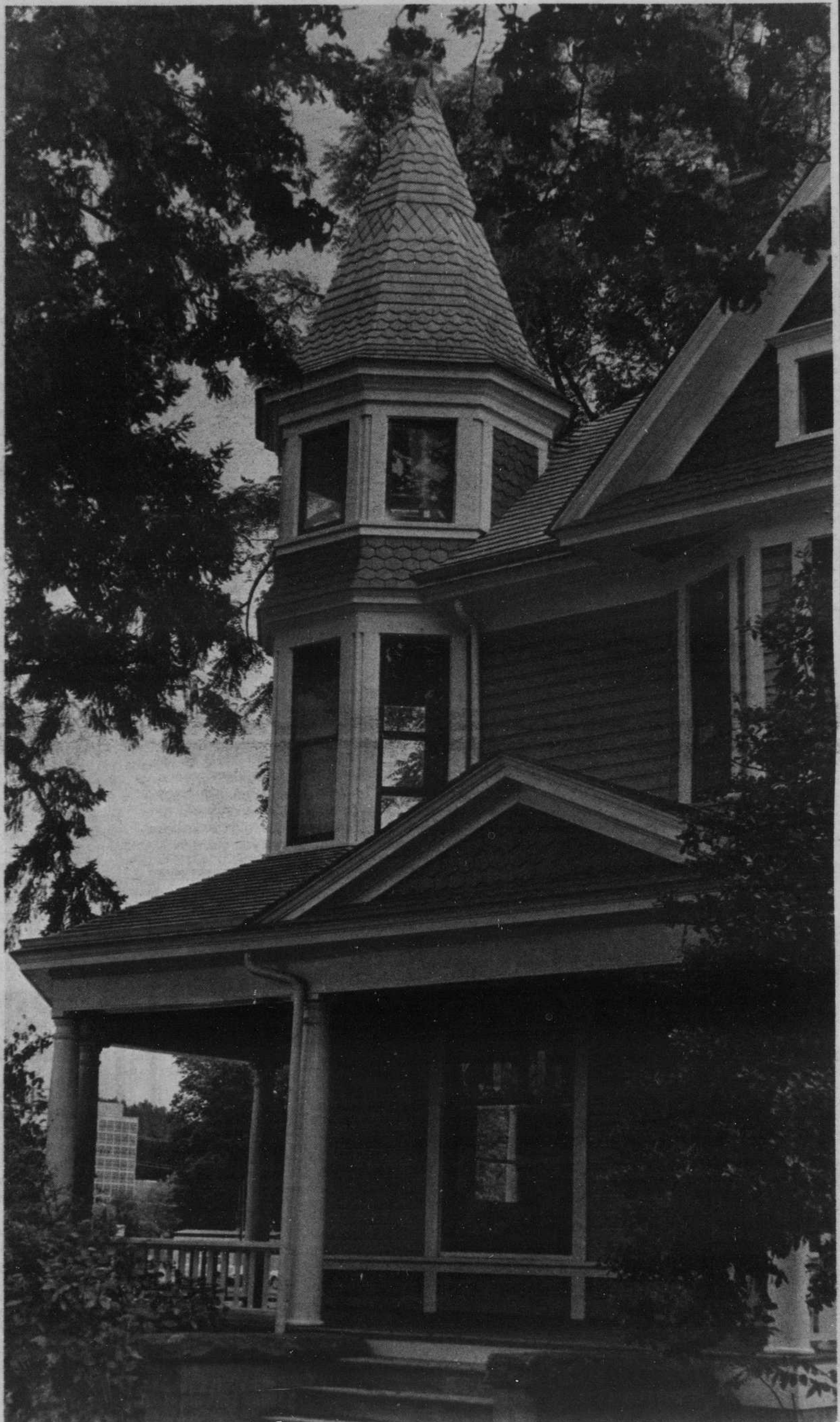


Photo by Greg Gawolski

This historic house, located at 11th Ave. and Patterson St., is just one of nearly 60 other historic sites in and around the Eugene area. Some of those sites are within walking distance of the campus. But, while many people welcome the

preservation of historic sites, some city residents would rather not have their property designated as a historic monument.