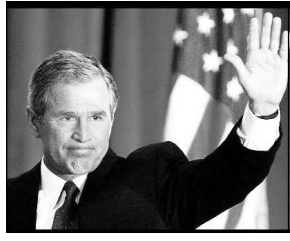


DAILY PLANNER

TODAY

Today is Wednesday, Dec. 12, the 346th day of 2018. There are 19 days left in the year.



TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT

On Dec. 12, 2000, George W. Bush became president-elect as a divided U.S. Supreme Court reversed a state court decision for recounts in Florida's contested election.

ON THIS DATE

In 1787, Pennsylvania became the second state to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt nominated Oscar Straus to be Secretary of Commerce and Labor; Straus became the first Jewish Cabinet member.

In 1913, authorities in Florence, Italy, announced that the "Mona Lisa," stolen from the Louvre Museum in Paris in 1911, had been recovered.

In 1917, during World War I, a train carrying some 1,000 French troops from the Italian front derailed while descending a steep hill in Modane; at least half of the soldiers were killed in France's greatest rail disaster. Father Edward Flanagan founded BoysTown outside Omaha, Nebraska.

In 1937, Japanese aircraft sank the U.S. gunboat Panay on China's Yangtze River. (Japan apologized, and paid \$2.2 million in reparations.)

LOTTERY

Megabucks: \$5.4 million
7-12-22-36-43-46

Mega Millions: \$262 million
4-38-39-54-59-12 x2

Powerball: \$230 million
14-32-34-46-61-PB 10-x2

Win for Life: Dec. 10
3-9-13-69

Pick 4:

Dec. 11

• 1 p.m.: 5-0-0-8

• 4 p.m.: 3-9-7-0

• 7 p.m.: 6-0-1-3

• 10 p.m.: 0-5-7-0

Pick 4: Dec. 10

• 1 p.m.: 7-3-5-4

• 4 p.m.: 5-1-3-9

• 7 p.m.: 8-1-0-0

• 10 p.m.: 8-2-7-8

ROAD REPORT

Numbers to call:

• Inside Oregon: 800-977-6368.

• Outside Oregon: 503-588-2941.

NEWSPAPER LATE?

Every effort is made to deliver your Observer in a timely manner. Occasionally conditions exist that make delivery more difficult.

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If your delivery is by motor carrier, delivery should be by 6 p.m. For calls after 6, please call 541-975-1690, leave your name, address and phone number. Your paper will be delivered the next business day.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"To escape criticism — do nothing, say nothing, be nothing."

— Elbert Hubbard, American author and publisher (1856-1915)

Man recalls 'historic' house restoration project

By Jayson Jacoby
WesCom News Service

Richard Langrell chuckles as he tells the story about his kids, the pancakes and their garnish of sheetrock dust, but it's pretty clear that this tale, however silly it might sound, is grounded in reality rather than fantasy.

It is perhaps the perfect anecdote, the only one that could compress into a couple of sentences one family's 39-year commitment to their house.

Langrell, 62, is walking in the basement of that 118-year-old house, at the corner of Second and Estes streets in Baker City, when he picks the pancake story to illustrate what it was like for him and his wife, Lynne, to raise their four children — daughters Frances and Robbie, and sons Asa and Sterling — in the same house they were restoring.

"To this day my kids don't like pancakes without a little sheetrock dust on top," he says.

The purpose of this little joke, of course, is to try to explain, to someone who wasn't there, just how much the restoration — the thousands of hours of measuring and sawing and nailing — became enmeshed into his family's history over four decades.

"We've enjoyed the house," Langrell said on Monday afternoon. "We raised our kids here. We've done what we set out to do. Now we're ready to go on to another project."

Which explains the "For Sale" sign wedged into one window.

But there is quite a lot more to this story than Langrell might imply with his "we've done what we set out to do" comment.

This was not simply a matter of a couple buying an old home and then sanding off its rough spots, both figuratively and literally, in a leisurely fashion.

Because in the Langrells' case what they ended up doing was much different from what they originally planned when they bought the home from Richard's father, Grier Langrell, in 1979.

"We were going to make it into six apartments," Richard Langrell said.

But then fate, partially in the form of the federal government, intervened.

First, in the early 1980s, the Housing and Urban Development agency built more than 100 subsidized units in Baker City.

Langrell wasn't pleased at the time, but he acknowledges now that the feds' construction boom, and its effects on the local rental housing market, ended up being "a good thing."

And that's because not long after, around 1982, the Langrells learned the home they bought — Richard describes it now as a "huge pink square" — was all but unrecognizable from its original form.

This revelation came from the granddaughter of Orson Taylor, the first person to live in what became known as the Kolb-White House, a two-story, 2,800-square-foot Queen Anne-style brick home at 1503 Second St.

She gave the Langrells several historic photographs

of the home before its many modifications, but those weren't the true treasure.

The Langrells also inherited, as it were, the original blueprints drawn by Michael P. White, a Baker City architect who designed several of the city's finest homes and buildings, including the Natatorium (today's Baker Heritage Museum) and the White Apartments on First Street between Washington and Court avenues.

The Langrells then made a decision that turned out to be a momentous one — they would see whether it was possible to restore the home.

This was not an easy question to answer.

Previous owners hadn't merely altered the original structure — although they certainly had done that, including removing staircases and interior walls. But they also obscured the home's graceful lines by tacking on sheds and garages and porches.

"We spent two years tearing off additions to see if there was enough house left to restore," Langrell said.

They were pleased to find that there was.

Indeed, Langrell said the house, despite its seemingly haphazard treatment over the decades, was structurally sound.

"It was solid and level," he said. "Usually when you restore an old house the first thing you have to do is make sure everything is straight."

Which is not to say the Langrells, armed with their photos and blueprints, had a straightforward restoration ahead of them.

Their goal was to replicate, as closely as possible, the home that White designed and built for his wife, the former Mary A. Kolb.

(The couple never actually lived in the home, however; Mary Kolb took over management of the Kolb Hotel from her father, and she and White lived there. The hotel was later removed and replaced by the White Apartments, named, of course, for the architect.)

"It's been very challenging," Langrell said. "Unlike a remodel, we were trying to restore the house. Everything had to be period-correct. Everything we've done since then has been toward restoring the house to its original condition."

Achieving that goal was more difficult because the Kolb-White House is a true brick structure.

Its walls consist of two layers of brick with space between them, Langrell said. Many homes with a brick facade actually have a wooden frame.

The bricks, which are rather soft because they were made in a wood-fired kiln and of unusual dimen-

sions, were in relatively good condition because they had been painted to protect them from the weather, Langrell said. The bricks, he said, were made at a kiln owned by Michael White and his brothers.

The problem was all the missing bricks.

Over the decades the previous owners had removed thousands of bricks when, for instance, they replaced a doorway with a larger window or simply hacked out part of a wall to create a door or window.

Langrell wasn't sure he would be able to find proper bricks.

Then, about 15 years ago, he happened to see an ad for bricks in The Nickel.

A woman who lived at Muddy Creek west of Haines had a brick root cellar inside her barn. The bricks were identical to those used in the Kolb-White House. Better yet, the root cellar bricks had never been mortared, which made it easier to move them, intact, to town.

"We ended up putting about five thousand bricks back into this building," he said. "We really lucked out when we found the bricks at Muddy Creek."

Luck, though, is hardly a reliable ally with a project as involved as the Langrells' renovation.

Ultimately, Langrell said, it's a matter of two things — time and money.

"Sometimes I'd work on the house for a week and it would take three months to pay for the materials I'd used," he said. "It was a very slow process."

Langrell has worked in construction so he had the skills to do much of the work himself.

He also employed local experts for some projects, such as replacing the home's archaic electrical system.

Langrell said the electrician he hired told him the system was among the worst he had seen.

"It's a wonder the place didn't burn up," Langrell said.

He also replaced the home's original coal-fired boiler, which was connected to radiators throughout the home.

"It was one of the earliest homes in Baker to have central heating," Langrell said.

The boiler was a three-ton hunk of metal that had long outlived its utility. Which isn't to say it was worthless.

"When we got it to the scrap yard it bought us lunch for a week," Langrell said with a laugh.

The restoration, as you might expect given that it extended over almost four decades, wasn't a constant process.

Over the years the Langrells also ran a couple of restaurants and built the

Always Welcome Inn motel, which they owned and operated for 17 years.

Richard Langrell was diagnosed 18 years ago with multiple sclerosis, which he said has made it more difficult for him to do some of the work at times.

The couple also managed, during what Richard wryly refers to as their "spare time," to restore a second home. That's the historic house at Fifth and Carter streets where his great-grandparents lived.

Langrell said his great-grandfather, Richard Thomas Langrell, was the first settler in Pine Valley. He retired in 1904 and moved to Baker City, where he built the home at Fifth and Carter.

Langrell said that restoration was simple compared with the Kolb-White House, in large part because his great-grandparents' home was made of wood rather than brick.

It's considerably easier to turn out wooden pieces on a table saw than to track down the right size of brick, he said.

Although the Langrells strived for authenticity in restoring the Kolb-White House, it wasn't always possible, or even desirable, to mimic history.

The home's original roof, for instance, was of cedar shingles.

But Langrell said it's difficult to find cedar shingles made from trees that are at least 100 years old and thus have the concentration of resin that ensures the roof will last.

Rather than risk putting on a roof that would crumble in a few decades, the Langrells installed a standing seam metal roof, a style that was available when the home was built.

The couple also fitted decorative tin ceilings in the dining room and an adja-

cent room. The home didn't have such ceilings originally, Langrell said, but that type of ceiling was commonly installed in homes built around the turn of the 20th century.

Langrell also made a few concessions to modern conveniences.

The upstairs bedrooms, where the family spent most of its time, weren't built with closets. That was typical for the era, Langrell said, as most residents stored their clothes in armoires.

He built closets in a few rooms, as well as converting one upstairs space into a laundry room. Automatic washers and dryers, suffice it to say, weren't available in 1900.

After the Langrells sold the Always Welcome Inn about two years ago they concentrated on finishing their home.

A year ago they moved into a home at Western Heights.

As he strolls among the rooms, fingering a section of wallpaper here and examining a piece of window moulding there, Langrell reflects on the thousands of hours he and his family have invested in this place.

Perhaps curiously, he said that when he looks at this finished project, this living piece of Baker City history, he doesn't see what it looked like before.

"The problem I have is that when I look at something I see it finished," Langrell said as he stood beside a decorated Christmas tree in a first-story room at the home's southeast corner. "To me it always looked like this and it was just a matter of time to get there."

That time, in this case, means more than half of his life is something Langrell understands all too well.

"It takes a lot of time," he said. "No sane person would do it."

Holiday Party!
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