

Falls Lodge is back to basics

by SHARON NESBIT

Multnomah Falls Lodge is showing its age. And that is good.

The historic lodge, built in 1925, is beginning to look like it did when it was new. A restoration of the Roaring Twenties lodge has stripped away the 1940s knotty pine paneling, the 1960s plastic wagon wheel light fixtures and the 1970s aluminum windows. Underneath is a lovely, old building.

And a hidden balcony.

Harold Buck, general manager of the lodge, is not quite ready to unveil the balcony room tucked away in the lofty eaves of the lodge. There is furniture to buy and he wants everything to be just so.

But by July 1, the cozy room overlooking the main dining room should be ready for company. It has its own fireplace and a unique triangular window. It has been hidden away behind a bamboo curtain for years. Buck plans to furnish it with Mission-era furniture and antiques and use it for small receptions.

He will call it the A.E. Doyle room in honor of the architect who built the lodge.

The balcony room may be the most obvious of the new improvements at Multnomah Falls Lodge, but other changes are occurring as well. And they are all according to plan — the original plans.

"About four years ago, we discovered that all the plans for the lodge as well as all the specs (specifications) and receipts were in the library at the University of Syracuse," says Barbara Kennedy of the U.S. Forest Service's Columbia Gorge Ranger District.

The university in New York state sent out four boxes of materials and Kennedy, in charge of cultural resource management for the ranger district, studied every item.



Harold Buck, general manager, gives a sneak preview of balcony that will open July 1.

The well-trod lodge has had improvements over the years, Kennedy points out, but none were aimed at restoration. The first stab at bringing the building back to original condition began four years ago when aluminum windows in the gift shop were replaced with multi-paned glass.

When it came time to replace the wagon wheel light fixtures in the coffee shop, Kennedy discovered that pioneer lighting designer Fred C. Baker did the originals. The new light fixtures are duplicates. Even

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What emerged was a restoration plan for the lodge. The way it works is this. In recent years the Forest Service has let Buck take the rent money he would ordinarily pay the government for the lodge concession and apply that money to preservation and maintenance of the building.

Kennedy's expertise, gleaned from the boxes of historic materials, and Buck's enthusiasm are not enough, however. They rely on the guidance of architect Robert Dortinaq of Allen McMath-Hawkins, a Portland firm that specializes in historic restorations. George McMath, one of the principals of that firm, is, coincidentally, A.E. Doyle's grandson.

Since work began in 1981, approximately \$60,000 has been spent on restoration of the lodge. Another \$200,000 went to develop the plaza outside the lodge where wild strawberries grow in planter boxes and rustic benches invite falls-watchers to sit a spell.

Multnomah Falls is the most popular tourist site in Oregon. It draws 2.5 million people a year. "And sometimes on the Fourth of July, you think they're all here at once," says Kennedy.

the electric switch plates fit the specifications Kennedy found in the material from Syracuse. They are black metal.

Gresham contractor Walt Armstrong is doing the most recent phase of the restoration. Painting contractor Ken Harrison, also of Gresham, has stripped seven different colors of paint off the woodwork in the coffee shop.

"If you can believe it," says Kennedy, "this room was all pink once."

These days colors are more subdued. The woodwork has a gray-green stain that took Harrison several tries to duplicate. Walls are cream. Light fixtures are black. And the carpets are a soft gray-green. Draperies are an off-white linen weave. All according to the original plans.

The changes have been subtle, and Kennedy says her feelings were hurt at first when people didn't seem to notice.

"And then I figured out that that's the way it should be," she says. "It fits in so well that it's perfect. People come in here and they look around and they say, 'You've done something, but I'm not sure what.'"

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