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Bed, breakfast and whisky

Pendleton House owners recover Prohibition stash during renovation

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

They say a good Scotch whisky only gets better with time.

Tracy Bosen and Kevin Michel will test that notion when they uncork one of the three vintage bottles of whisky they found during a renovation project at their Pendleton bed-and-breakfast, at 311 North Main St.

The owners of Pendleton House are in the process of remodeling the 1917 Italian Renaissance-style home by removing closets in five second-floor guest rooms and replacing them with private bathrooms. The whisky bottle discovery came in the bedroom once inhabited by original owners Lowell and Minnie Rogers.

"The master bedroom has two large closets," Bosen said. "On the blueprints, one closet is marked 'Mr. Rogers' and the other is marked 'Mrs. Rogers.'"

A few weeks ago, Bosen and Michel decided to tear out a built-in chest of drawers from Mrs. Rogers' old closet before the carpenters arrived the next day. As they removed the five-foot-long drawers, they noticed a hidden compartment in a place where the dresser and a perpendicular shoe bin converged.

"I wonder what's in there," one of them mused.

But, distracted by the task at hand, they forgot about the box and continued removing drawers.

"We forgot about it until the next day when the construction guys came and one of them started tearing out the shoe bin," Bosen said. "They took the lid off and inside were three bottles of Scottish whisky."

One of them called to Bosen and Michel, who trooped to the second floor and gazed with incredulity at the trio of bottles of Teacher's Highland Cream Blended Scotch whisky. An inspection showed no date on the labels or molded into the glass, but one bottle was wrapped in a strip of yellowed newspaper, bearing the date Dec. 19, 1930.

"Immediately I got onto Google and researched when Prohibition was," Bosen said.

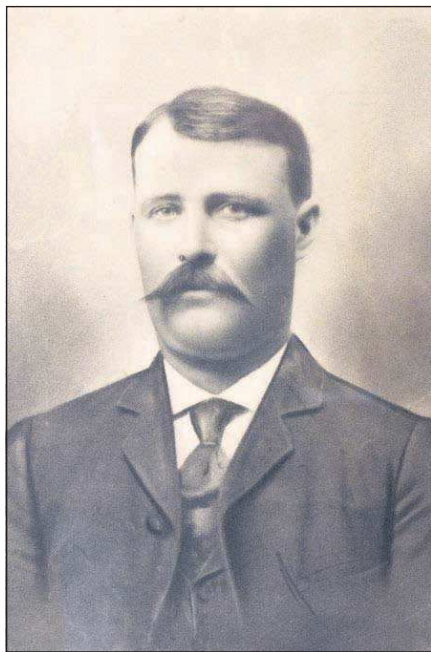
He discovered that the nationwide ban on alcohol lasted from 1920 to 1933. The bottles each have a U.S. Internal Revenue tax stamp, a thin strip of paper that loops over the top. Since William Teacher & Sons LTD is still in business, the men may attempt to contact the company and pin down a manufacture date.

Besides the whisky, the men have discovered other clues to past occupants as they renovated the house they purchased in 2013. When they tore out the dumbwaiter, which had not worked for years, they discovered that Mr. Rogers was likely a cigar smoker.

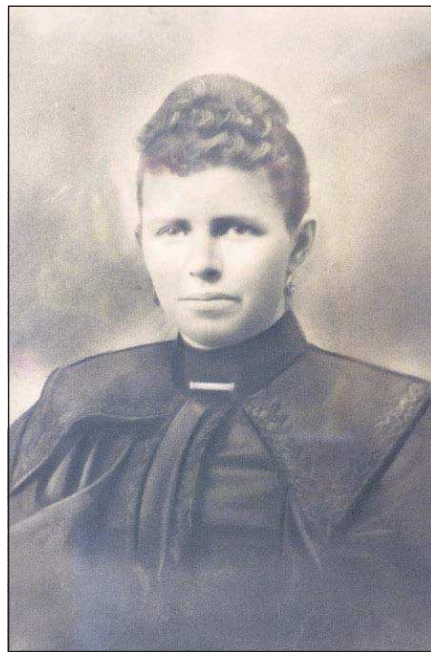
"There were a bunch of stogie butts on top of the dumbwaiter box," Bosen said. "He had stuck them through a knothole and they had landed there."

Oddly, they also found a fire alarm card in the dumbwaiter that listed fire alarm boxes throughout the city. Another discovery was a blank check from an account at Inland Empire Bank, where Rogers served on the board of directors.

The men are partnered in business



Lowell Rogers



Minnie Rogers

"There's no other home like it in Pendleton. It's just very unique. It's cool to own a piece of Pendleton history."

— Kevin Michel, co-owner of Pendleton House

and also in life. Bosen said Michel was especially drawn to the home several years ago after they spotted it. They drove around the block twice to get a better look.

Serendipitously, they became friends with the last owner, Marijo Baird. When Baird put it up for sale, they bought the place.

"There's no other home like it in Pendleton. It's just very unique," Michel said. "It's cool to own a piece of Pendleton history."

In renovating the 6,000+-square-foot home, the men must straddle the line between historic and modern, Michel said. They are

bringing the central vacuum and intercom systems back to life and are maintaining an old European shower with a network of pipes that surround the bather and spray from multiple angles. They wouldn't dream of removing ornate ceilings, old ice delivery doors, the bathroom chandelier or a four-person elevator installed in 1947 for the Rogers' daughter, Gwendolyn, who had polio.

"We want it to be kind of a time capsule," Michel said of the house.

In a nod to modernity, they made some adjustments so guests can stay connected.

"The walls are so thick in this house," he said. "We have to have router boosters all over the house so everyone can use their devices. Everyone wants Wi-Fi."

Back in the day, Bosen said, the home "was kind of a party house. There were lots of social events held here."

One year in the '20s, Pendleton High School held the prom in the home's basement ballroom, which has a floating floor.

Pink is a prominent color at the Pendleton House.

"Pink is the most noticeable aspect of the house," Bosen said. "It's pervasive. Mrs. Rogers loved pink. They must have bought pink by the barrel."

They've heard stories about Mrs. Rogers driving a pink Caddie and coloring her poodle pink. The elevator and many of the rooms remain a pale pink and the outside is painted a salmon color. In the '50s, the couple financed a fellowship hall at Pendleton's First Presbyterian Church with the caveat that pink would always be included in the color scheme. The hall, dubbed the Rogers Room, still has pink accents.

The couple's wealth came from growing and canning peas. According to local historian

Keith May, Lowell and his brother-in-law Harold Bennett planted wheat and peas near Adams. They developed a method of canning peas and started the Rogers Canning Company in 1935.

Lowell died in 1954 at age 70 and Minnie died in 1950 at 77. Gwendolyn lived in the house until she died in 1987. Black-and-white portraits of Lowell and Minnie hang in the upstairs hallway.

Bosen and Michel, the home's fifth owners, said the Rogers built the house for \$50,000. The property is now appraised at \$380,000. The list of past owners includes Ernie Rostock who bought it in the late '80s, Sandy Parker who purchased the house in 1993 and Baird, who bought it in 2006.

The owners encourage long-time Pendletonians who knew the Rogers to share stories about the place. One such tale involves the Rogers' grandson Berkeley Lowell "Pat" Davis, the son of the Rogers' daughter Mildred. One day, the story goes, young Pat hid from his Aunt Gwendolyn, who was babysitting. When she couldn't locate her nephew, she finally called the sheriff, who found the boy in one of the home's many nooks and crannies.

"The sheriff took care of the discipline," Bosen said.

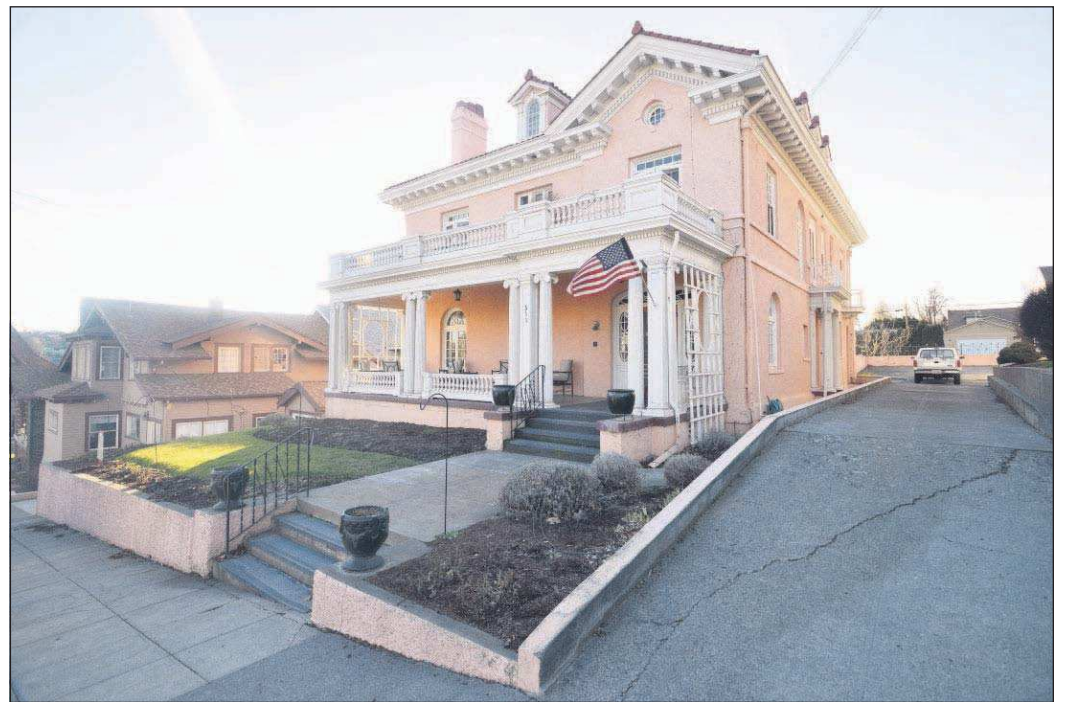
Bosen held up one of the bottles and stared into the liquid amber. He said he and Michel will likely open one of the bottles, probably the one with a label that has come partially unglued, on a special occasion.

"They say that whisky and scotch get better with age," he said. "I would assume this is probably pretty good stuff."

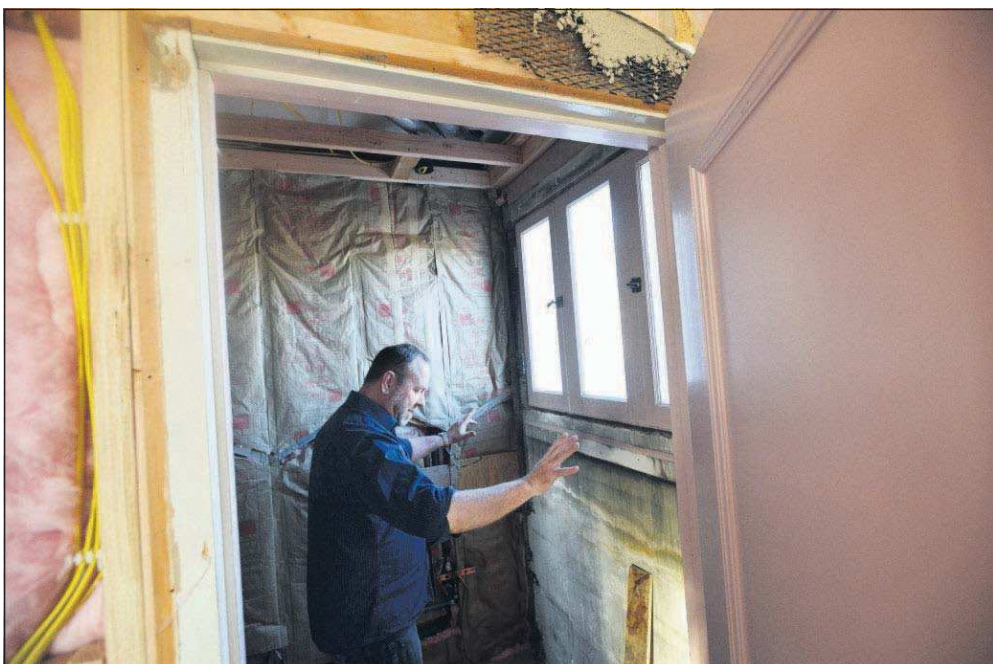
Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.



The owners of the Pendleton House found three bottles of Teachers Whiskey while renovating one of the closets in their bed and breakfast recently in Pendleton.



The 6,000+-square-foot Pendleton House was built in 1917 by Lowell and Minnie Rogers and is now a bed and breakfast owned by Tracy Bosen and Kevin Michel.



Tracy Bozen, co-owner of the Pendleton House, gestures to a built-in closet dresser where three bottles of Teachers Whiskey was discovered during recent renovations.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris