



S. John Collins / Baker City Herald

The main living room displays the Christmas setting that welcomed visitors during the historic homes tour last weekend. The colored window behind the tree is original to the structure finished in 1899.

RESTORE

Continued from Page 1A

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 to its original appearance.

This was not an easy question to answer.

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

"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 (*see boxed story, "The History of a Home," at right*).

(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



Photo Courtesy Richard Langrell

When the Langrells acquired the home it had been extensively modified as the Beatty Funeral Chapel. Compare to the photo below.



Photo Courtesy Richard Langrell

The Langrells received this photograph, along with the home's original blueprints, from the granddaughter of original resident Orson D. Taylor. The smaller house to the right was removed in the late 1920s.

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 dimensions, 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

The History of a Home

Although records are sketchy, Richard Langrell believes his family's home, known as the Kolb-White House, was finished near the end of 1899. Langrell and his wife, Lynne, added a decorative stone plaque in the home's foundation that reads "Langrell House, 1900."

Richard Langrell said he talked with historical preservation officials who told him it was appropriate to use "Langrell House" since his family lived in the home for 39 years, longer than any previous owner.

That foundation, by the way, is made of Pleasant Valley tuffstone, a volcanic rock that also makes up the exterior walls of several notable Baker City structures, including City Hall and the County Courthouse.

Mary Kolb bought the property, then a bare lot, for \$800 in 1890, according to deed records. Jan M. Prior, a student at Eastern Oregon University, compiled a history of the property for an architectural geography class at EOU in 1990. Kolb's husband, local architect Michael P. White, designed the home built at the southeast corner of Second and Estes streets.

The Whites never lived in the home. After moving into and taking over management of the hotel her father owned, Mary rented the Second Street home to Orson D. Taylor, a mining broker and minister. Prior's research also showed that a smaller home just to the north was moved from McEwen. Helen M. Stack, a teacher for whom the current Baker Middle School building was named, lived in the smaller home.

The Kolb-White House was later run as a boarding house and remodeled into a duplex. That change, the first of several major modifications, was made before 1917, as the city directory for that year lists two separate addresses for the home.

Around 1928, R.H. and Hazel Crosthwait opened the Baker Funeral Home in the home, which Mary White still owned. The Crosthwaits made several changes, including removing the home where Helen Stack had lived, building a large garage on the north side of the property, remodeling the front porch and removing one of the home's distinctive features — the witch's cap atop the turret at the home's southeast corner.

Mary White sold the home to Hazel Crosthwait in 1942. Three years later Thad and Genevieve Beatty bought the funeral home from Crosthwait and changed the name of the business to The Beatty Chapel.

The Beattys also extensively modified the house — although fortunately most of the changes involved tacking on additions to the home rather than removing any of its structural elements. The Beattys installed a wooden section to the front of the home that was covered with stucco and rendered the home, from some angles, all but unrecognizable from White's original design.

The Beattys sold the funeral home to William and Angela Lackey in 1975, according to Prior's research. In lieu of foreclosure Genevieve Beatty took the home back a few years later and soon after sold it to Richard Langrell's father, Grier, who then sold it to Richard and Lynne Langrell.

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 adjacent 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."

Thatcher's ACE Hardware & La Grande ACE Hardware

SALE \$19.99 each

Ace 100 Pc. Screwdriver & Bit Set 2300209

Ace 10 Pc. Pliers Set 2300212

Craftsman® 17 Pc. Easy-to-Read SAE or Metric Socket Wrench Set 2300226, 2300218

BLACK+DECKER

\$69.99 - \$20 with card

\$49.99

Black & Decker® Project Pak™ Cordless Combo Kit includes drill/driver, dual sander, LED light and battery. 2815371

Limit 4 at this price. Digital Battery™ and USB Charger. 2300283. SALE \$29.99 - \$10 With Ace Rewards Card. You Pay \$19.99. Limit 4 at this price.

Now through December 31st

Thatcher's Ace Hardware
2200 Resort St, Baker City • 541-523-3371

La Grande Ace Hardware
2212 Island Ave, La Grande • 541-605-0152
Monday-Friday 7-6 • Saturday 8-6 • Sunday 9-5

photos for illustration only

