



Preserving Forest Grove

Newsletter of the Historic Landmarks Board

Holiday 2000

If The Walls Could Talk

Discovering the History of Your House

by Janet Lamb

Every old house has a story to tell. Finding out when your house was built, who has lived there, and how it has been changed can be great fun. Ten years ago when my husband and I fell in love with our house, little was known about its history. Through the years we discovered that tracing the history of an old house is like making your way through an overgrown garden maze. Discovering its history has been a challenging and fascinating journey.

Launch your old-house investigation by visiting the City of Forest Grove's planning department. Research has been compiled by the city and local volunteers on many properties within the original town plat (including the Harvey Clarke proposed National Historic District), the Cherokee Strip, Walker's Addition and Naylor's Addition. If your house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it has been researched. Contact the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in Salem to receive a copy of the original nomination form. Another great resource is the Forest Grove History Room. Perhaps local historians have already gathered information on your house.

Since no research existed on my property, I began the grueling undertaking of a deed search at the Washington County Office of Assessment and Taxation. Although for me it meant several

long days staring at microfilm, completing the deed search provided a list of every individual who had owned my property. Initially part of Harvey Clarke's Donation Land Claim, Clarke donated the land to Pacific University in 1851. After multiple owners, the land was subdivided to create a residential subdivision in 1891. D.A. and Lucy Watters bought the property in 1905; they sold to Albert C. Brackenbury in 1906. By 1909 Mary House was the new owner. Then came A. E. Scott in 1921, and Charley D. Minton owned the property after marrying Scott's widow. After Minton's death in 1944, Minton's daughter inherited the property. On went the arduous search until six owners later I was listed as one of the new owners.

Although a county deed search doesn't document your house's exact construction date, a sudden increase in assessed property value may signal the year your house was built or when other major improvements were made.

Determining the style of your house can also narrow down a construction date. With the help of some excellent architecture books (available through the public library) you should be able to determine the core style of your house. My favorite books for this task are *A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia and Lee McAlester, and *Architecture Oregon Style* by Rosalind Clark. Compare the overall form or silhouette of the house and its layout, as well as the style of the windows, doors, and other features with houses

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How to Research Your House, Cont'd

in the books. Maps provide another avenue for determining a construction date. During the 1880s Sanborn Insurance maps were first issued in Forest Grove. These maps, updated periodically by the company, gave excellent descriptions of size, layout, and materials of the structures. They tell if the building was wood frame or brick, how many stories it had, the footprint of the structure and if there were any other structures on the property. If you look at the maps in chronological order you can determine when your house first appeared. Historic photographs also help determine when your house first appeared in town. The Forest Grove History Room (run by Friends of Historic Forest Grove) is an excellent source for old photographs. After 1910 postcard photographers were busy in Forest Grove selling pictures of our town.

When all the available clues are considered, the possible construction date of your house should fall into place. County deed records, the Sanborn maps, my house's architectural style and a providential postcard photograph indicate that our house was built in 1907. That year is when our house's rightful history began. It's numerous occupants have revealed through a variety of sources many stories to me. I hope soon I can share them with you.

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The activity that is the subject of this publication has been financed in part with federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, as provided through the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. However, the contents and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of any trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The Charles Roe House Undergoes Restoration

by Mark Everett

Rehabilitation has begun on a historic Forest Grove property, the Charles Roe House. Mike and Dina Wetzloff received the house from Dina's uncle and are descendants of the original owners. The Wetzloffs are beginning work on the 1897 house by having a foundation installed; simple brick columns supported the original house. The house is located at 2120 17th Avenue and the project is partially supported by funding from the Historic Landmarks Board's grant program. The process of installing a foundation under a house that is over one hundred years old is no easy task. The prep work requires removing old skirting around the bottom of the house, removing the steps and decking and removal of some of the vegetation. The house will then be raised and a foundation will be poured. The house will remain raised for a period until the foundation is ready to support the weight of the house. The house will then be lowered onto the foundation and the last and most important part of the process, leveling of the house occurs.

The house has been a family treasure for over one hundred years. It has been handed down from generation to generation. Charles Roe built the house that presently sits on a single lot. At one time the house sat on a larger plot of land that was owned by Thomas Roe, who was Charles' father. The Roe family built both of the houses to the left of this old home. The yellow one directly next door was first and the white house on the corner was last. Contractors who have an interest in promoting the preservation of historical homes are undertaking the rehabilitation project. Barry Disdero, Mike Heino and Kevin Clemo are all involved in the project. This will be an ongoing project; "It'll never really be done because there's always more that can and will be done," says Dina Wetzloff. At any rate the fact that another historical home is being refurbished and restored is outstanding news for the communi-

The Wetzloffs will be working on the house for a time before they move into it and invite neighbors to stop by if they see them working at the house.

How to Find the Right Contractor

by Scott Rogers

Given the existence of the Historic Landmarks Board Renovation Grant Program (which supplies grants of up to \$1,000 for exterior and structural work done to houses on the local historic register) and that spring, the beginning of the construction season, is just around the corner. The Board felt it was time to answer a question that may plague a new homeowner. What are the steps to go through when trying to hire a contractor to work on your house? This is a question that we felt we should help our readers answer.

First and foremost, understand the scope of the work to be completed. Before calling a contractor for a quote, know what is to be accomplished. In the case of exterior painting, how much prep work is acceptable? Are you willing to tackle some of the prep work yourself to save money, or would you rather the painter handle all of it? Defining the project before calling out a contractor will insure that the bid you receive is specifically for the work you are looking to have completed, and will help the contractor know precisely what time and materials to estimate.

After having clearly established what work is to be completed, the next step is to decide whom to call. Where do you get a good contractor? One of the best resources available is right outside the front door. Are there houses on your block that have had work done recently? Were the owners pleased not only with the work completed but also with the level of service provided by the contractor? Another great resource is Parr Lumber in Forest Grove. Parr keeps a list of general contact information for various contractors and a list of references to call for each. Keep in mind that Parr is not necessarily referring these contractors, but rather the contractors have asked that their information is available upon request. Finally, when presented with a stack of contractors, try to find one who specializes in the work you are looking to have done, and also find try to find one who is local. A local contractor not only has to work in the community, but they live there as well. There is a great deal of pride associated with doing quality work in the town in which you live, and a good

contractor will go out of their way to uphold that level of service and work.

Now that you have selected several contractors to bid the job, make an appointment to meet face to face and discuss the work involved. It is far better to meet the contractor in person to have them take a look at the task at hand. Remember that you are going to be working with this person, and you need to be comfortable speaking with them. Don't be rushed, and if a question pops up while walking through the bid, ask. It's better to have all issues out on the table prior to agreeing to any work or bid. Once you have received bids, compare them against one another. The lowest bid may not necessarily be the one to go with - the contractor may be using lesser quality materials, or may have missed an important element of the job and didn't bid it out. Find the bid that you are most comfortable with, then call their references and see how the contractor rates. If it is positive, make the call and schedule the work to be completed.

Despite all your best efforts though, sometimes things just don't work out as planned. What steps can be taken to get the problem resolved? First and foremost, don't pay for work that you are not completely satisfied with. If the work is not within the scope of the duties outlined in the bid, then bring this to the contractor's attention. Let the contractor know that you would like for the work to be completed as per the contract, and until you are satisfied no money will be exchanged. Remember, you are dealing with a professional businessperson, and they should take pride in their work. Approach it with that attitude, and stand your ground. Don't become hostile; unsatisfactory work can usually be corrected. Work with the contractor to come up with a viable solution, and make sure that it is followed through.

Good luck, and if you become entangled in a situation don't hesitate to contact the Historic Landmarks Board. Odds are that the Board can provide some assistance and help you get your project back on track.



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Preserving Forest Grove is a quarterly newsletter published by the Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board to help fulfill its duty of public education regarding the preservation of cultural resources. If you would like to be on the mailing list, please call James Reitz at 992-3233.

Open Houses Around Portland Area This Holiday Season . . .

Visit these homes during your holiday break . . . each one is on the National Historic Register and the owners hold open houses once a year for 4 hours. Contact James Reitz at 503.992.3200 for a complete list if you're interested.

HILLSBORO

Wass House, 5611 NE Elam Young Pkwy, 12/29/00, 9am - 1pm

PORTLAND

Gustav House, 1810 NE 15th, 12/26/00 10 am - 2 pm

Beebe House, 2168 SW Kings Ct., 12/28/00, 9 am - 1 pm

Metschan House, 1556 SE Maple Av, 12/28/00, 9 am - 1 pm

Coburn-Mather House, 1665 SE Holly, 12/30/00, 1- 5 pm

Ormonde Apartments, 2046 NW Flanders #21, 12/30/00, 2 - 6pm

Morgan-Elrod House, 3115 NW Thurman, 12/31/00, 1 - 5 pm

Sutton House, 1643 SE Ladd, 12/31/00, 9am - 1 pm

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