



Southwest Seattle Historical Society

c/o "Birthplace of Seattle" Log House Museum, 3003 61st Ave. S.W., Seattle, WA 98116
206.938.5293 www.loghousemuseum.info
Our mission: to promote local heritage through education, preservation and advocacy

HISTORIC SEATTLE PRESERVATION AWARD NOMINATION

Fir Lodge / Alki Homestead

NAME OF PROJECT/PERSON/GROUP:: Restoration of Fir Lodge / Alki Homestead

NOMINATION CATEGORY:: Best Preservation Project

PROPERTY OWNER: Dennis Schilling and Matt Schilling

TEAM WORKING ON THE PROJECT: Dennis Schilling and Matt Schilling as well as a four-organization coalition: Southwest Seattle Historical Society, Historic Seattle, 4 Culture and Washington Trust for Historic Preservation

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT: Originally known as Fir Lodge, the Alki Homestead is one of West Seattle's most beloved landmarks. Built in 1903-1904 for William and Gladys Bernard, it became one of the first permanent dwellings in the area. After the building changed hands several times, Doris Nelson purchased it in 1960 and for the next 44 years created an old-fashioned, family-style restaurant that became a popular destination in Seattle. In 1995, the City of Seattle Landmarks Preservation Board designated the Fir Lodge/Alki Homestead a Seattle landmark, and in 1996 the Seattle City Council approved the designation.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBqW8bl_0u8&feature=youtu.be

In January 2009, five years after Nelson's death and with the Homestead under new ownership, a fire caused considerable damage, destroying much of the main dining room, the massive stone fireplace, the second floor, and roof. While the owner promised to repair and restore the building, the plans languished.

At this point, four organizations (the Southwest Seattle Historical Society, Historic Seattle, 4Culture and the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation) formed a coalition to develop a strategy to keep the building viable and in the public eye. A highly visible demonstration of support and interest in the restoration of the building was the July 4, 2000, "This Place Matters" rally in which West Seattle residents and others came together to be photographed in front of the Homestead to show their affection for this important community landmark.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9GdFiiOl4&t>

The coalition continued to meet and report progress regularly. In March 2015, with the cooperation of the Southwest Seattle Historical Society, which holds an easement for the Homestead parking lot and whose nearby Log House Museum was the original carriage house for Fir Lodge, Dennis Schilling purchased the Alki Homestead with the purpose of restoring the building. Dennis and his son, Matt, began restoration work immediately.

The story of the restoration of this building speaks to the ingenuity and determination of the coalition and the community to bring this unique building back to its original condition.

Logs

The fire heavily damaged two large sections of the exterior log walls, making it necessary to remove and replace the logs. The original logs were Douglas Fir, and in order to maintain the style of the building new Douglas Fir logs were sourced from southern Washington. In order to actually replace the walls, a large cantilever beam system was devised that allowed them to remove the damaged, yet load bearing wall. Once the wall was supported and removed, a new wall was built to meet the roofline. The next challenge was to prepare each log. Using a small chainsaw, a type of saddle cut for the joinery was made that matched the original style.

Windows

Since a large part of the building exterior is made of historic single pane windows, there was great effort to save all the original windows. This was a long project that involved pulling all the windows from the frames, removing the paint, replacing the broken glass panes and re-applying the putty. The second floor windows are all double hung, and for those, replacement weights were found to make them operative, since the ropes and weights were either burned or lost. Several of the original windows were damaged beyond repair. Replica windows were made in-house using traditional methods, making every effort to match the original profile.

Floors

The original floors were ruined by the fire and water damage and had to be removed in order to get the supplemental foundation installed. In order to adhere to the original look of the building, new CVB fir flooring was installed on the first floor of the building.

Fireplace

The original fireplace, made of large square river rock, was damaged during an earthquake and in order to hide the damage, previous owners built a large rock arch. Because the fireplace needed to be removed in order to repair part of the building, the damaged fireplace was demolished with the Landmark Board's approval, and the building behind the fireplace repaired. The fireplace was then rebuilt to match the original, pre-earthquake design. The stone was purchased in Seattle, and the log was sourced from a lumber mill on Orcas Island.

Sign

The large iconic "Alki Homestead" sign was removed from the roof and repaired at Western Neon's facility. The exterior sheet metal was reinforced, the neon was replaced, and the entire structure was repainted with the original colors.

Structural

In order to bring the building up to code seismically, large steel moment structures were installed that provide security in the event of an earthquake as well as assisting in supporting the load on the second floor. The steel structures are tied to a new and extensive concrete foundation.

Neighborhood – Re-Use of Building

The community is eagerly anticipating the Alki Homestead's return to being an important part of the Alki neighborhood. A new restaurant will open in May 2019, contributing to the year-round vibrant beach community and bringing economic benefits to the area.

WHY DOES THIS PROJECT DESERVE TO BE HONORED BY HISTORIC SEATTLE?

Fir Lodge/Alki Homestead has citywide significance. Along with the Log House Museum, these buildings are the earliest extant year-round structures on Alki Beach. With a few exceptions in the 1850s, Alki was primarily a seasonal hunting, fishing, and gathering place for the Duwamish and a summer getaway spot for city-dwellers until the early twentieth century. It is also situated a stone's throw from the site of where, in 1851, the two-dozen-member Alki Landing Party arrived and met the Duwamish Tribe as well as one of their leaders, Chief Seattle. Later, the Alki Landing Party and indigenous people founded the city of Seattle. In other words, the Homestead is a significant part of Seattle's birthplace.

The Homestead is a tangible link to Alki's past. For generations, community members have used this building as a place to meet, a place to stay for the night, and a place to get a hot meal. Preserving the Homestead means that people can still visit the building to enjoy a meal and appreciate the craftsmanship and history of this 115 year-old building.

This restoration is a tangible and inspiring example of how state, regional and local heritage organizations can collaborate to create a focused strategy and produce a positive outcome. The four organizations involved – the Southwest Seattle Historical Society, Historic Seattle, 4Culture and the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation – worked continuously for six years to produce a victory for the preservation community and the public at large.

NOMINATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION:

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