



SUMMER 2004

Thunderbird Tales

Buildings and Grounds Receive Multiple Facelifts

Returning the property to its period of significance is our mission and, while it's not accomplished yet, we are making giant steps forward. Just look around.

The buildings and grounds put their best face forward this summer thanks to steady efforts of staff and volunteers who work tirelessly to ensure a quality experience for visitors touring the estate. Contract tradespersons also have been brought in to tackle the larger preservation projects when funding is available.

Two of the larger projects early in the season were dry-rot repair and masonry work on the exterior wall in the servant's sitting room. The finish pine boards were removed to investigate the damage. Framing members were replaced and epoxy applied to stop more damage. The finish boards were salvaged when possible and new ones milled with the v-rustic tongue and groove.

Kevin Palo of Ten Mile Planing Mill, a master craftsman and restoration specialist from Astoria, Oregon undertook this work. During his time at the Lodge, Kevin also took on other projects such as retrofitting the Rear Admiral's House and building, and staining and installing a period appropriate screen door for the Caretaker's House.

On the job for six weeks, working on masonry projects, were master mason Brian Schneider of Tahoe City and his assistant Roman Faraco. Brian and Roman scraped away old mortar, rebuilt stairs, pathways, the waterfall lower pond wall, and the Old Lodge patio. They mixed new mortar to reset the stones in an effort to stop leaks and to create safer paths for our visitors and event guests.

The masonry work at the Lodge is an ongoing challenge. We are pleased that just over half of this project was funded by a grant from the Tahoe Yacht Club Foundation. We have heard that every summer when Whittell was at the Lodge, masons were here ahead of his scheduled arrival, making needed repairs to the masonry and coating the pathways and chimneys with linseed oil.

Ongoing infrastructure projects are the domain of maintenance engineer Skip Martin, who receives valuable assistance from volunteers



Master mason Brian Schneider repairs the waterfall wall.



The Lodge, Circa 1940

Hal Bernheisel and Bill Dohrmann. Hal and Bill have taken on many tasks this summer, including exterior and interior painting of doors, walls and trim. Bill is practically a fixture on the property and twice a week, rain or shine, you'll find Hal working at the Lodge.

A few of the many projects Skip has tackled include: restoring electrical wiring to outside lights near the waterfall and fountain; restoring lights to many of the small follies (whimsical stone structures) along the paths, and renovating the search light near the lakeside flag pole behind the Lodge.

While repairing the signal lights on the chimney, Skip made an exciting discovery. The original wiring schematic, dated February 26, 1939, was sketched high in the rafters by Whittell's electrician.

Now that these five lights are operational, you should know how we speculate the lighting codes might have been used by George Whittell, from the top down: RED – stay away (wife at home!); PURPLE – party time, bring show girls; CLEAR – booze is flowing; GREEN – card game in progress, come on over; RED – stay away, this means you!

Gardeners Make Major Contributions to Interpretive Restoration

Master Plan Lays Solid Foundation for Future

Where are we now? Where are we going? How do we get there from here?

In early 2004, our Board gave the green light to develop a Master Plan – a roadmap for the next five to ten years for the Thunderbird Lodge Historic Site. The plan will address restoration and preservation needs for all aspects of the property, including architecture, infrastructure, landscape, and interpretive documents. When completed, the numbers generated for priority preservation and interpretive projects at the property will provide the funding goal for an important capital campaign.

Beginning in mid-April, a small army of highly qualified consultants covered every inch of the property. Under the direction of lead consultant David Slusarenko from an Oregon architectural restoration firm, independent consultants have completed Stage 1 – the gathering of information. A preliminary report was presented in July. A final report draft will be presented to the Board in September, and the complete plan will be finished by October.

In addition to Slusarenko, the consultants include: Bob Mather with Westlake, Reed, Leskosky, an architectural firm from Phoenix, Arizona, whose team includes electrical and mechanical engineers and plumbers; structural engineer Tobey Wade of Truckee; geo-technical engineer Bob Joslin; surveyors Arnett & Associates; and Alice Parman, a museum consultant associated with the University of Oregon who is writing an interpretive plan for the property.

The work of the consultants is being guided by the recently completed organizational Strategic Plan that outlined the Society's vision for the property. Important in-house coordination for the Master Plan rests with Executive Director, Michelle Schmitter and Board member Bill Dohrmann. Michelle's background in the museum and preservation field along with Bill's background with Bank of America as a project coordinator for outside architectural firms, and as project manager with the worldwide architectural firm, Gensler & Associates, assures that our Master Plan is in good hands.

Stay tuned for further developments as TLPS continues the important work of preserving and interpreting this valuable community resource. And thank you to our donors for contributing financial support for the Master Plan.

Under the able direction of Master Gardener M.J. Cross, 17 volunteer gardeners have implemented the objectives of the interpretive plan created in 2003 including recommendations made by preservation architect David Slusarenko (see Master Plan article). The goal is to restore landscaping to the property's period of significance, 1936 – 1940.

Important landscape areas identified and addressed by our gardeners include removal of ivy from rocks near the Gazebo waterfall and the original boat house, and non-native plants such as juniper from in front of the Admiral's House. The areas have been cleaned and the stonework at the Admiral's House scrubbed to nearly the original condition. This was a tough job. Thank you, gardeners!

Container planting on the lakeside patio now provides a protective safety barrier around the perimeter. According to Michelle, potted plants do not need to be native or original to the time period (although some are.) The plantings, which are all perennials except for trailing Verbena, include: brilliant yellow Yarrow, purple and scarlet Huechera, and Euphorbia with its distinctive blue-green leaves and chartreuse yellow blooms. Flanking the door to the old Lodge are pots of Yarrow, Autumn Joy, variegated Sedum, Rudbeckia (commonly known as perennial Black-eyed Susan), Delphinium, Huechera, and Euphorbia.

"Gardening in Nevada is challenging," said M.J. Cross. Rabbits and ground squirrels eat buds and flowers. Chipmunks nibble tender leaves and dig up dirt in the pots. "Many things we've planted have been mowed down by the squirrels," she said.

Gardening and repairs are on-going at the Lodge. So is our dedication to restore and maintain this magical site.

Thank You to Our New Members Since January 2004!

Mrs. Harriet Agius	Mr. & Mrs. Hank Harriman
Mr. & Mrs. Riley Beckett	Richard Harris
Ann Berkebile	Mr. & Mrs. Robert John
Mr. & Mrs. George Biddle	Mr. & Mrs. Mark Kimbrough
Mr. Bob Bowles	Karen Logan
Roger Christiansen and Sandra Carnpodonico	Mr. & Mrs. Dick McConnell
Marin Cortese	Mr. & Mrs. Richard Patsey
Shirley Dale	Mr. & Mrs. Dean Raitlon
Mr. & Mrs. Morris Daley	Cory Ritchie
Mr. & Mrs. Ron Dollens	Mr. & Mrs. Ron Schlegel
Mr. & Mrs. Dick Fauver	Larry Schultz
Mr. & Mrs. Tom Fawcett	Mr. & Mrs. Marshall Small
Mr. & Mrs. Harvey Fennell	Mr. & Mrs. Manny Sylvester
Mr. & Mrs. Darin French	Mr. & Mrs. Larry Tiller
Mr. & Mrs. Ross Gould	Judith Tulloch
Mr. Harold Harms, Jr.	Bill Watson
	Mr. & Mrs. Dick Wilson

Interns Bring New Energy and Expertise to the Lodge



L to R. interns Diana Bolander, Stephanie Long and Christy Fockler have made great progress in cataloguing the collections and documenting the buildings.

Dream jobs come along once in a blue moon – that’s two full moons in one month – and we just had one in July. Perhaps that’s a good omen for the four young women working as summer interns at the Lodge.

Stephanie Long, Diana Bolander, Kara Long, and Christy Fockler, graduate students in museum studies and historic preservation, wake up each morning in the Admiral’s House and stroll down the driveway to work – not a bad commute at all.

Currently, Stephanie (whose home is Denver and graduate school is in Cooperstown, New York) and Diana (who lives in Michigan and studies at the University of Oregon) share the two bedroom cottage. “It’s quiet and serene,” said Diana. “A lot nicer than my apartment,” agreed Stephanie.

Christy, who hales from Reno, drives to the Lake several days a week and spends nights in the small building behind the Admiral’s House, formerly used for water treatment in George’s day, and now aptly named the ‘Rear Admiral’s House.’ Kara, from Alabama, who is in a graduate program at Eastern Illinois University, arrives in mid-August.

Under Michelle’s direction, Stephanie, Diana and Kara spend their days cataloguing and documenting historic artifacts and photographs from the

1930s and 40s, including over 250 new objects received in the last year, plus five boxes of archival materials received from donors.

A lot of their work is determining what the objects are, any relationship between them, when they were acquired, and how they were used. “It’s very important to have good records because without them you don’t have the story behind the objects,” said Diana.

Christy, who just finished the graduate program in historic preservation at the University of Oregon, can be found almost anywhere on the property, documenting the condition of the buildings. Following the Master Plan (see article on page 2) and working closely with Board member Bill Dohrmann, Christy’s projects include: drawings and guidelines for restoring and preserving the Beacon at the entrance to the Lagoon and the Incinerator along the driveway. She also is making drawings of all the buildings seen from the Lake, as requested by the TRPA.

For Christy, who loves camping and hiking, the Sierra Nevada is like home. Stephanie and Diana will spend their days off, exploring the new area. Hiking and wildflowers are high on the list, “once we adjust to the altitude,” they agreed. You may also see Diana trying out the TLPS canoe. Kara, a movie buff, may be sad to have left her large collection behind, but, “when I saw the website, I fell in love with the place,” she said. “After reading the job description, I knew this would be a wonderful opportunity.”

It is a wonderful opportunity for the Society as well, having many good hands to uncover new ways to enrich our interpretive program. By the end of the summer many items in the collection should be ready for exhibition. Welcome to all of you, and thank you for all your help!

Visitors Listen and Learn in Route to the Lodge

Visitors are well prepared to enjoy the Thunderbird Lodge Historic Site when they arrive thanks to a new audio CD created for use on the shuttle buses coming from the Incline Village Visitor’s Center.

The goal of the audio is to provide an overview of the Lodge experience and contextual information about the development of Lake Tahoe. While the bus meanders along Hwy 28, visitors hear information about George’s vast landholdings on the East Shore. As the bus travels down the driveway to the Lodge, the narrative focuses on the architecture and development of the property. To get folks in the mood for a journey back in time, The CD also plays Louis Armstrong songs from the 30s and 40s.

Visitor response has been very positive. “The stories are fun with lots of great information, and the voice is very clear” remarked a visitor from Illinois.

The audio CD was recorded at the Lodge with equipment and technical expertise donated by Gary Jesch, of Incline Village. Operations Manager Mary Ellen provided the voice, enabling the project to be completed with very little cost to the Society. The benefit to our visitors – priceless!



Volunteer Spotlight – Visitors arriving on the Sierra Cloud catamaran with Diane Hudson as tour guide experience her boundless enthusiasm and stories about the Lodge. Four days a week, 15 hours, Diane has been a docent and volunteer at special events for the last four years. She engages people right from the start and visitors often applaud in appreciation at the end of her tours. Visitors aren’t the only ones who appreciate Diane – we all do. Thanks for being a loyal volunteer and docent extraordinaire!

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The Thunderbird yacht creates a wide wake while cruising the highway to Carson City for the summer. With Lake Tahoe about two feet lower than this time last year, there is not enough clearance at the doors to the boathouse for the Thunderbird to have access. Though we're sad not to see the "Bird" in her nest this season, time away from the Lake will be used for needed repairs and restoration projects.

Bye, Bye Bird



\$\$\$\$ Grants and Gifts Greatly Appreciated:

Nevada Tourism Commission, \$1,200 for marketing materials
Robert Z. Hawkins Foundation, \$12,500 for second reprinting of Castle in the Sky
John Ben Snow Memorial Trust, \$10,000 for exhibit and collection program
Lake of the Sky Garden Club, \$1,000 for landscape project
Schwab Fund for Charitable Giving, \$2,000 unrestricted from Robert Salz

In-kind Donations

Sierra Boat Company, Old Town Canoe
Joan Gibb, 500 wine glasses and linens
Dave Marion, redesign of website
Julie and Tom Williams, 1930 Mahogany Silver Dart, "Afton," on view in the boathouse

Coming Events...

Member Appreciation Day

Oct. 10, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. It's our chance to thank you for your support with a fun-filled afternoon at the Lodge. Save the date! Details to follow

Party like George. Shhhh. . . . It's a Surprise!

Our Special Events Committee is busy plotting and planning for the next fabulous fundraising event. You thought nothing could top the sold-out Distinctive Wine Dinners? Well, just wait and see! Details are currently under wraps, so all we can say is. . . more wonderful wines, and much more of the good life that George enjoyed at the Lodge!

Plan to be in town in October and stay tuned for details.

Educational Lecture Series

Sept. 7, 4 p.m. at the Lodge.
Phil Ballantyne, Tahoe Maritime Museum, speaks on Tahoe's maritime history.