

Bonnie Beeks, vice president of the Klickitat County Historical Society and Presby Museum volunteer, stands inside the children's room exhibit at the museum, which will celebrate its 50th year in 2012.



Looking Forward to 50

Presby Museum volunteers work on historic home in preparation of its golden anniversary

By Jeanie Senior

Presby Museum closed to visitors for the season in October, but volunteers work through the winter at the 109-year-old house.

Members of the Klickitat County Historical Society, which bought what is popularly called the Presby Mansion in 1958, are there every week, working on exhibits and doing research.

Everyone on the society's nine-member board works at the mansion, says Bonnie Beeks of Sundale, vice president of the historical society, "and there are quite a few other helpers that come in frequently."

Looking ahead to 2012, there is much

planning to do for the celebration that will mark the museum's 50th anniversary.

Meanwhile, this autumn included a first-ever appraisal fair and wine-tasting on October 22. The Historical Society's annual meeting is November 5.

The majestic old house will be aglow for Christmas lighting on Sunday, December 4, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. The popular event includes refreshments and seasonal music played by the Goldendale High School jazz band.

Volunteers pick a theme and plan the Christmas decorations accordingly.

One year, the house was decorated for a pending wedding. Another year, the decorations suggested there was a new baby in the house.

"Gosh, we've had fun with it," Bonnie says.

With three floors and 20 rooms—a total of 5,700 square feet of space—the Presby house is a splendid setting to tell the story of Goldendale and Klickitat County history.

"I always feel so blessed that we have a house to display all this," Bonnie says during a recent tour.

The house was built in 1902 for \$8,000 by Winthrop Bartlett Presby and his second wife, Zoe. It was home to the family for little more than a decade. The couple divorced, and Presby, who variously served as Goldendale city attorney, Goldendale mayor, Klickitat County prosecuting attorney, U.S. land

commissioner and a state senator, died in 1914.

When he died, records revealed the Kayser family of Blockhouse held a \$2,500 mortgage on the house.

It subsequently was sold to the Shepard family, who lived there until 1962, when Pearl Shepard sold it to the historical society for \$12,500. She donated \$500 toward the purchase.

Oregon publisher and historical society charter member Peter Binford contributed \$1,000 to start a building fund.

When the house was purchased, local residents were so pleased to have a museum as a repository for their artifacts that donations poured in, Bonnie says. As a result, it took some time to catalog items and find the best way to display them.

Bonnie, whose mother-in-law also volunteered at the museum, initially enlisted to wallpaper some of the rooms. Gradually, Bonnie became more involved, she says, enjoying all that she has learned along the way.

The house's expansive size allows for a variety of displays. On the second floor, for example, is a child's room and a young lady's bedroom, as well as a capacious bathroom. Another bedroom has been furnished as a general store.

The walls of another small second floor room are lined with the coffee mill collection—127 in all—amassed by Leland Huot of Bingen.

"Zoe wanted everything," Bonnie says of Presby's second wife, including four fireplaces and an abundance of decorative woodwork.

One of the fireplaces is in Presby's office, which has a separate outside entry.

A sideboard in the dining room is the only piece of furniture original to the house. But donated pieces of furniture came with their own history, Bonnie says, pointing to a handmade bent-twig highchair in the kitchen that dates from the 19th century. It is one of the oldest pieces in the collection. ■

With a \$4,000 historic preservation grant from Klickitat County, the historic society's collection of some 3,000 photographs will be scanned, cataloged and indexed, with the goal of making them available online at www.presbymuseum.com.

The Little Engine That Could ... Again

When Jim Fisher met with the Klickitat County Historical Society board in September 2010 and offered to restore the 1897 Russell steam traction engine that sits outside the Presby Museum in Goldendale, "the board was astonished," Jim Link wrote in the summer KCHS News Notes. "It was an offer that was too good to be believable."

A retired locomotive engineer for the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Co. and a longtime steam enthusiast, Jim said he would clean the grease, grime and rust from the engine, prime it and paint it, even supplying the paint—all at no cost to the historical society.

The board concluded, Link wrote, "that the offer was genuine and sincere. We understood that Jim was a person of integrity who just wanted to preserve the old machine. We sent him a letter of thanks and asked, 'When can you start?'"

Sometimes assisted by his son Jimmy and grandson True, Jim began work on the traction engine on June 17.

"It was kind of looking a little pathetic," he says of the Russell, which was moved to a covered concrete slab in front of the museum in 1965. Until the early 1990s, it occasionally was fired up to run in a local parade, according to Jim, who lived in Klickitat County in 1964 and from 1967 to 1986, working out of Wishram.

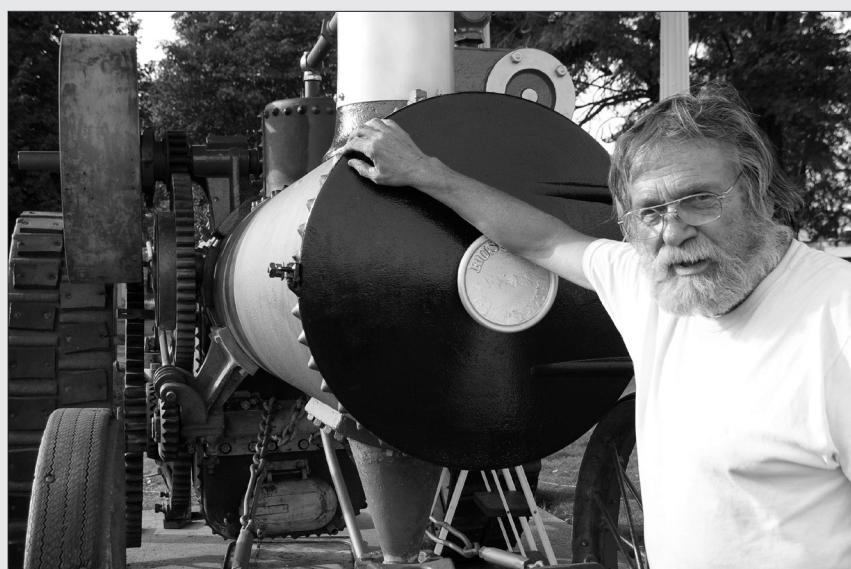
He initially estimated it would take six weeks to get the engine cleaned and repainted.

Although he worked four and sometimes five days a week, "we didn't even get all the grease off in six weeks," he says.

By early October, with some of the paint and most of the primer done, he was hoping to work into November, but also expecting to get shut down by the weather. If necessary, he plans to finish the job in 2012.

The big engine originally was used by Brokaw Bros. for threshing. In 1913-14, it heated oil for paving the streets of Goldendale, then powered the grain mill at a local warehouse.

In 1936, it was moved to Cort Miller's museum in Yacolt, and returned to Goldendale in the fall of 1964.



Jim Fisher with the 1897 Russell steam traction engine that is parked outside Presby Museum in Goldendale. Jim began restoring the relic to working condition in June, and hopes to have it up and running in 2012.