

Adventures in McCloudland

By Marilyn J. Ogden

Chapter 29

April, 1994

Meanwhile, we were making some progress on several fronts.

The paint on the outside of the building was badly peeling. The painting contractor Ray had hired met with us and told us he couldn't guarantee the job for more than twelve months unless all the loose paint was removed. He hadn't figured the scraping in his bid, but could take care of it for an additional \$10,000.

Instead, Jeff got some of his friends together; we borrowed scaffolding from Ray, and began a summer-long process of sanding this building. We tried scraping with a hand tool, then using a power water spray (which totally chewed up the wood siding), a palm sander and finally a huge disk sander. Like the Saws-Alls we quickly depleted Siskiyou County's supply of coarse sandpaper. A sheet was lasting no more than ½ hour. So, with a little bit of research, we found a company in Sacramento which made the roughest, coarsest sand paper I could have imagined.

Jeff wore out some of his friends, but others stuck it out for the entire building. One sander, Carol Carl, donned her work clothes, breathing apparatus and climbed up on scaffolding and ladders for week after week guiding heavy sanders hour after hour until the job was finished. Later, when we opened, she joined our housekeeping staff.

When we began the task, it looked impossible. The size of this building is hard to imagine if you haven't seen it. But little by little, the ladders and scaffolding would creep around the building.

Meanwhile, Ray and his crew were replacing exterior siding boards which were too rotten to save. At one point with the lath and plaster removed from the inside walls, and the damaged siding coming off the outside, we had a cross breeze through the building that would whisk up big piles of sawdust and grime and throw them everywhere. I'd find grit in my food cabinets, bath tub, and clothes drawers.

The drawings and permit process was crawling ever slowly along. Debra continued to take drawings and specs to the building department where she would be met with indifference and briskly dismissed. The head of the building department would then call Ron to discuss the new issue. Likewise the same person would call the hotel and ask for Mr. Ogden. "He's not here," I'd say, "could I help you with something?"

The response was always a curt "No, I'll call him later."

"He won't be back until Friday, I'd be glad to help."

"No."

Come Friday and it was a simple question I could have easily answered.

This little dance cost us precious time and added a great deal of frustration to the process.

The building department mostly flexed its muscles around issues involving implementing the historic building codes. Their position was that we would restore this building bringing it up to today's standards in all areas except the previously accepted central stairway.

They wanted the transoms removed and incorporated into the wall.

They insisted we remove the room doors and replace them with metal, one-hour fire rated doors.

They demanded that we remove all the exterior doors and replace them with fire rated doors which would swing out with panic bars

They wanted the head room over the stairwell increased to today's code which would require us to remove the header beam, cut into the upstairs landing, and reconstruct the landing replacing the railing with higher one with new materials.

They wanted all the outside stairwells removed, widened and fitted with gripable, continuous handrails.

At every turn they would tell us what they wanted, and called the requirement a matter of "health and safety." "If you want to do anything else, than you take it up with Sacramento," he'd say. "I'm personally accountable for the public health and safety in that building, and if someone gets hurt 10 years from now, they can come and sue me. I'm not going to carry that kind of liability just because you want to keep those old transoms." Or the doors, or the headroom, or whatever the issue-of-the-day was.

Ron, Lee and I reviewed those items which were at issue. We picked out those about which we felt most strongly like the room doors, exit doors and stair headroom clearance. We'd have to pick our fights carefully, or we wouldn't be open for another five years. We agreed to let some of the other issues go.

Even today, I know where every issue is that we decided not to fight any longer. I look at a laundry chute I wish we could use, but had to close and I remember having to give up. I look at the beautiful restored brass fire hose racks with original hoses and nozzles re-installed on the hall walls, and then the ugly fire extinguishers we had to mount next to the antique nozzles, or, "someone would assume the old ones worked and be unable to put out the fire." People remark about the beautiful restored porches and railings and I recall the wrangling over railing height and rung spacing.

We called the Office of the State Architect in Sacramento and asked for help. He was most interested in our project and appalled by the local building department's attitude. Through a series of conversations and confrontations that we were not privy to, the State Architect and the head of the building department agreed they had little respect for one another. On one occasion the State Architect came to Yreka to "work out the differences," only to be insulted and told that he had "no jurisdiction down here," and "to get his butt back to Sacramento." Letters and words were flying and we could only stand in the wings and watch the hailstorm.

In the end there were no winners. After dozens of more skirmishes we were allowed to keep the guest room doors, the exit doors and the 1-1/2" variance on the stairway headroom. But the animosity it all created would resurface regularly throughout the project and stall the work while the building department flexed its muscles and found new requirements and created new fights, the last one just three days before our scheduled opening.

(Editor's note: The State Architect at the time was Paul R. Neel, FAIA. Paul and I were classmates at the Cal Poly School of Architecture, and graduated together in 1958. The Office of the State Architect maintains the State Historic Building Code which applies to all historic buildings within the State, which does apply to the hotel since it is listed on the National Places of Historic Interest. L. Ogden)