

Historic mansions are endangered, in need of saviors

by Herb Belanger
Times suburban reporter

Private Property. No Trespassing.

Walk along Minor Avenue in Seattle and those are the signs you see posted on the unkempt grounds of three dilapidated old buildings sitting side by side between Union and University Streets.

But despite broken windows, sagging porches and rusted roofs, they still retain some of the grace that many years past made them fitting partners of the elegant Simonson Green House only a block away.

The Simonson-Green House, Hollywood Farm in Woodville, the Acres Newby Mansion in Auburn, the R.D. Merrill House in Seattle and a number of other old homes around King County have one thing in common. They are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

They also are symbols of growth living in a more leisurely time than that in which we now live. But times and tastes change and the high cost of maintenance, inefficient use of space, difficult access and other considerations have made the old buildings obsolete.

Few individuals are willing or able to retain them. Many that have been have found that national register already have gone the way of the bulldozer with high-rise, high-density condominiums or office buildings replacing them.

Some of them, such as the Simonson-Green House, are well maintained, in good or excellent condition, and their future preservation seems assured.

Others, such as the Newby Mansion, are in a state of severe deterioration and urgently need attention. The Newby Mansion is undergoing a five-year restoration to give it a "new" look circa 1890, by St. Simons, a Seattle architect whose the Conservation Co. in Seattle specializes in the preservation of old buildings, and each mansion has to stand on its own merits in order to be preserved.

"If it is in private ownership and the owner is sensitive, there is a chance it will be maintained," if the owner is interested just in speculation on the land, has no interest in restoration, the building usually is left to deteriorate.

The major concerns about old buildings are the costs of restoration and operating expenses. Skolnik said, Mansions are a "lucrative row. They are too big and require too much care."

One way in which a mansion can be preserved is by lease. Through a donation, much like the tax advantages enjoyed by people who buy art and donate it to a museum, a donation can be a tax write-off, Skolnik said.

Skolnik draws a fine line between the restoration and rehabilitation of an historic building. Restoration returns it to what it was, he says, while rehabilitation makes it habitable, or suitable, complying with building codes that were built when it was built.

Rehabilitation can be complex especially when the building must conform to a variety of codes.

As an example, he said, "the way may say restored and preserve, but when you overlay this with codes, you are in conflict."

When the Simonson-Green Mansion in Seattle needed a new roof, it was decided that the original plan would be followed with wood shingling replacing asphalt.

But the use of a wood roof was restricted in the fire zone and a running battle with the Fire Department developed until a compromise could be reached.

The Green Mansion has had only five owners since it was completed in 1891 by C.D. Simonson, early-day lumber tycoon. The Simonson lived there until 1914, when Joshua Green, then in the steamship business, bought it.

Joshua Green and his wife, Masy, lived in the houses until their deaths in 1975.

The Seattle Preservation and Development Authority bought it from the Green's estate for \$125,000 to save it from demolition. The house now carries covenants protecting it from demolition.

In 1977, the house was sold to three partners, Bartle Reilly Charles Richardson and Kerif Murphy, for \$40,000 on the condition the exterior of the Tudor-style building and the main floor would not be altered. The group began some restoration work and catered weddings and receptions to raise funds.

Cleveland & Associates, a Seattle advertising firm, acquired the mansion last spring for \$70,000 and is continuing careful restorations and receptions with conducted tours for groups during the week. Weekend functions at the mansion are booked through March.

The advertising firm has consolidated its offices by moving from a downtown location to the carriage house behind the mansion.

According to Pam Jarvis, resident manager of the mansion, the advertising firm is dedicated to making the building a better condition. Structurally, it is sound, she said, but through the years little maintenance work was done.

The floor of a large porch and parts of its basement floor are sagging, and much refurbishing is needed on the second and third floors of the second floor. Priority will be given to repairing the sagging floors, she said. "We take safety first and cosmetics second."

Cleveland & Associates estimates it will take four or five years to bring the building to a condition desired. At present, the first floor is open for receptions and other functions and a second floor bedroom, now used by brides and their attendants to dress for weddings, may be made into a bridal suite.

Other possibilities include using some of the rooms for small business meetings and booking conferences.

The role other notable homes will have in the future is not as clearly defined. Also on the national register, but with no definite use proposed as yet is Hollywood Farm, the former Frederick Stinson summer home at the St. Michelle Winery in Woodville.

The building is owned by the winery and occasionally is used for tastings, meetings and company functions, according to Fay Tucker, but otherwise the building is vacant. Some gradual remodeling and renovations are being done, she said.

Last May the home was made available to the Woodville Historical Society for a designer to purchase any furniture and brooch on the interior.

Simonson, a lumber magnate and brother of C.D. Simonson, began Hollywood Farm in 1910 as a model to demonstrate the commercial feasibility of the newest dairy industry. It was fashionable for the wealthy to own summer-home farms in those days.

Marymore Farm in Redmond, built by James W. Clise, and also on the national register, was a similar farm estate.

The Simonson Farm became a highly successful project and in 1918 the Simonsons moved there permanently. The farmhouse with its carriage house and caretaker's cottage are little changed from when the Simonsons lived there.

One line estate not on the national register whose future is unclear is that of the late Louis Marsh in Kirkland, built in 1928 with handsome details, such as Joe Erickson's oakwork. The 7,000-square-foot house was bequeathed to the Children's Home Society of Washington by Marsh, one of the first engineers em-



Kirkland's Marsh home is up for sale.

Peter Lissner / Seattle Times

played by The Boeing Co. Marsh died last year.

Paul Swenson, a society spokesman, said a study had been made and it was determined the home could not be used for one of the city's programs.

"We must provide service for needy children of the state and must maximize our resources," Swenson said, consequently, the property is up for sale. A valuation of \$5 million was set, "but in the present real-estate market it appears \$2 million is not quite attainable."

The agency "may lower its sights. We are quietly marketing it and are ready to listen to any reasonable proposal," Swenson said.

But he said the agency would be concerned about what use a new owner would make of the site since there is community interest in what happens to the property.

But Swenson said to maintain it, "we must keep it from deteriorating, maintaining the grounds, paying the taxes and providing someone to stay there as caretaker," costs nearly \$20,000 a year.

The future of the Newby Mansion "is very uncertain," according to Mrs. Don Craig of Auburn Arts Council, which purchased the 87-year-old house and decided it to the county for a short-plot 30-year lease two years ago.

Government funding for the renovation project is running out and the county has requested that the building be given over to commercial development, but the

Art's Council opposes that idea, she said.

In very poor condition when it was acquired by the council, the building since has been rejuvenated so that it will not deteriorate further, Mrs. Craig said. About \$300,000 has gone into the project.

primarily involving state and county grants which were used to raise and level the building, install a new foundation and sidewalks, roof and chimney and architects fees.

The council's intent was to bring the building to its original

state, but with funds virtually exhausted, the building may remain as is, Mrs. Craig said. With the county pressing for its commercial use, "if we are going to finish it, we will have to have some agreement with business (Continued on G-3.)"

We're Getting It All Together!

After October 10, 1981, We will be under one roof at 185th and Aurora Ave. No.

Help us move NOW, and

\$\$\$ SAVE \$\$\$

Special Hours:
Monday thru Saturday, 9:30 am to 5:30 pm
Sunday, October 4, 12:00 to 5:00 pm



Pierre Liorance
INTERIORS, INC.

Sale Only At
10107 Main Street, Bothell 485-9777

lynwoods oldest fireplace and woodstove store has moved to a new location. Come see one of the Largest Selections of Woodstoves and Fireplace Inserts!

HEARTH-SIDE SHOPPE

October 1-2-3

FRANKLIN OPENING STOREWIDE SALE



"LOPI"