

The Old Stagecoach Stop - Keeping The Past Alive

By Jan and Terry Primas

Old Settlers Day is nominally about remembering the pioneers that settled and tamed this western frontier county of Pulaski. The *Old Settlers Gazette* is dedicated to telling the history and stories of days past in its pages. There has been another effort to keep the past alive that is in its eighteenth year. It is the Old Stagecoach Stop, standing on the east side of the Waynesville square today as it has for 140 years. But not so long ago it came close to becoming a vacant lot!

The Old Stagecoach Stop fell into severe disrepair during the 1970's, and the city building inspector condemned the building as derelict and a fire hazard. It was scheduled to be demolished on December 29, 1982. A group of county citizens, who dared not to let this antebellum building pass into oblivion, mobilized and formed the Old Stagecoach Stop Foundation. They purchased the building in 1983 for \$40,000. The Foundation secured a matching grant from the Department of Natural

Resources' Historic Preservation Program. These funds, \$13,200 local and \$13,200 state, would be used to stabilize the structure to prevent, as much as possible, further deterioration. The exterior was returned to its 1890 style. By 1993, after a decade of fundraising events and generous support from the community, the Foundation retired the debt of the principal and interest on the loan of the original purchase.

After saving this historic building and paying off the mortgage, the Foundation was now bound to act on the rest of its charter, which stated the Foundation's purpose: "To preserve, restore, protect and maintain the historic structure in Waynesville, Missouri, known as the Old Stage Coach Stop, in order to permit its educational value to be appreciated by future generations; to engage in educational and charitable activities related to the Old Stage Coach Stop."

Restoration of the interior began in earnest in 1994. The plan of action adopted by the board of directors calls

for the house museum to reflect different periods of the building's history. Following is a brief timeline and description of the room-by-room restoration and the periods the rooms represent.

Dentist Office (1994):

This was the first room restored. It is on the south side of the lean-to addition to the original log cabin. Dr. James Titterington maintained a dentist office in the building from 1936 until 1941. Adjacent to the dentist office is a small room used by Titterington for supplies and scrubbing, and is now the Foundation's office and storage.

McDonald Cabin (1995):

The one-room log cabin on the south front was the beginning of the entire building, built by W. W. McDonald in the 1850's. Layers of wallpaper, walnut paneling boards, and tongue-and-groove beadboard were removed to expose the original white-washed log walls. It is furnished in the manner of a pioneer family residence, complete with rope bed. The building tour begins here with a short orientation video titled *Doorways to the Past*.

Civil War

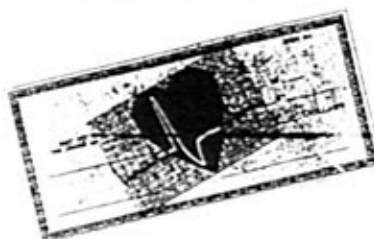
Display/Archaeology Room

(1996): These two rooms represent different approaches to the history of the building. The dogtrot, a small space between the two original log cabins, is a recreated hospital area, as it might have been during its occupation during the Civil War when McDonald's building was used as the post hospital. The small bedroom area in the north lean-to houses an artifact collection. In 1989, students in the Learning Enrichment and Acceleration Program (LEAP), Waynesville Schools, started a salvage archaeology and dirt removal project so that piers could be installed to support the floor joists. Since then, these students in grades 4-8 have found thousands of artifacts, including Civil War buttons and bullets, bottles, children's toys, and other items associated with habitation. A short video illustrates the archaeology project.

Stagecoach Tavern

(1997): The north log cabin has been restored to what it might have looked like when this part

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of the building was a stage stop on the old Wire Road. McDonald was also the Postmaster from 1856-1859. A mail window and mailboxes reflect this use of the building. The original fireplace hearth was discovered under the floor, and is being restored.

1950's Room (1998): A flurry of activity in April of this year converted this second story room from one of materials storage and sagging ceiling to a bright floral wallpapered room, complete with blonde furniture and turquoise pole lamp. Partly reflecting a 1950's apartment, the room also serves as "The Waystation", offering a selection of publications and souvenirs. It also contains a window into the ceiling area over the lean-to, showing the 1880's log stud and rafter construction.

1915 Kitchen (1998): This is the last room to undergo restoration on the first floor. Work began in June and will continue through the summer. It will be a turn-of-the-century kitchen reminiscent of 1915, the last year Eliza Black and her daughter, Amanda, operated the Black Hotel together.

Yet to be restored is the large north second story room (at one time two rooms) which temporarily houses a large personal World War II memorabilia collection. The upstairs kitchen and bathroom remain untouched.

By far, most of the restoration has been by volunteer labor. Although several significant contributions of furnishings have been made, many have had to be purchased, in addition to the material required to restore the rooms and make them functional. The downstairs bathroom was refurbished, marking the return of water/sewer to the building after a 25 year absence.

The funds necessary for restoration are being raised in a variety of ways. Sales of the Old Stagecoach Stop Cookbook,

authored by former resident Louise Morgan and featuring recipes from the Black Hotel era, have contributed a great deal. LEAP sells marbles, jacks, tops, yo-yos, and activity books to county fourth grade students who participate in their "History Begins at Home" living history tour program. Not incidentally, membership dues, sales in the Waystation museum shop, and donations are earmarked for the ongoing expenses of maintenance, utilities, and insurance.

Last summer, the Foundation launched the "Friends of the Foundation" program. A "friend" purchases a paving brick with three lines of engraved lettering of his or her choice. The message may be one's name, or that of a family, an organization, or a memorial to a loved one. The bricks, \$25 each, are being laid in the grassy area between the Old Stagecoach Stop and Lynn Street. These public declarations of support are greatly aiding the current work.

The Old Stagecoach Stop Foundation is certainly a shoestring operation, but it is proud of the polish being brought to the building. Its restoration and education efforts have been recognized by several awards. In 1996, Midwest Living Magazine bestowed its Hometown Pride Award for Historic Preservation on the Old Stagecoach Stop as one of sixteen winners from a field of 650 entries. In the spring of 1997, LEAP's historical interpretation program presented to area fourth grade students won two statewide awards for innovative curriculum. This living history program utilizes both the Old Stagecoach Stop and the Old Courthouse Museum, with the support of the Foundation and the Pulaski County Historical Society. Additionally, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary



Before



After

Education produced a video about the students' efforts in keeping the past alive.

The Old Stagecoach Stop is a restoration work in progress. Pass through its doorways to the past. It is open

on Wednesdays from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. and on Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Become a Friend of the Foundation and have a brick with your name on it, as we pave the way to restoration while keeping the past alive.

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