

Saling through time

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Weston's Saling House is lit by a single lamp on the ground inside the historic building's front hall. With its windows boarded to prevent vandalism, the house's top two floors are almost completely dark.

Built in 1880, the Saling House in Weston served as a home until its owners, Isham and Melinda Saling, died.

Eerie slivers of light shine through above the windows in places where old brick walls have cracked.

The original residents, Isham and Melinda Saling, died within its walls in 1910 and 1938, respectively. Still, Sheldon Delph, president of the Weston Historical Society, assures visitors that there are no ghosts in the old building.

"None that we know of," he says with a twinkle in his eye.

In addition to his position at the Historical Society, Delph is the president of the Saling House Restoration Committee, a group working to bring the historical home back to its former glory.

The group's progress has been slow, due to lack of funding, but recently the building was listed as one of the state's most endangered buildings by the Historic Preservation League of Oregon.

Delph and other committee members met with league representatives on July 12 to discuss the future of the home. The league will work with the committee over the course of the next 15 months to come up with a plan for restoration and to help identify grants and funding sources.

The goal is to have restoration significantly under way by Oct. 14, 2014, which is when the league will designate a new group of Most Endangered Buildings.

"We need to be moving very quickly," said Delph.

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Built in 1880, the Saling House served as a home until the Salings died, at which point it was sold to pay taxes. Later owners operated it as a boarding house, taking advantage of six upstairs bedrooms, and then a canned food warehouse. But by the 1970s, the house had been abandoned and fallen into disrepair.

The restoration committee began work in 1975, after the house was acquired by the Umatilla County Pioneers Association, its parent organization. Volunteers have redone the front porch along with other small projects in the interior.

But to truly restore the house a foundation would need to be added, at a cost of at least \$275,000. The total bill for restoration would come to about \$750,000.

Why spend so much restoring a historical building?

For some, the chance to get a glimpse of Weston's past is reason enough.

Tim Adams, another restoration committee member, pointed out details in wall construction, marveling at the way people built homes before drywall existed.

"I love this kind of stuff. The age. The quality of the craftsmanship," he said.

The house, with interior brick walls and lime mortar, was built in a modified Georgian or Italianate style, depending on whom you ask. Without a solid foundation, the house deteriorates easily, as mortar weathers and walls pull apart.

Delph's excitement walking through the home is palpable, and his eyes widen with enthusiasm every time he points out a new detail in the woodwork. Still, it's not just his personal love of history which has motivated his fight to restore Saling House.

"It's a really visible piece of Weston's history that is a sign, a symbol of what can and should happen for a community," he said.

He listed other towns in the area, like Dayton and Joseph, Ore., which have been successful in attracting visitors and revitalizing town through a focus on history.

Saling House also represents a piece of Oregon Trail history. Many settlers who came out to settle in the Willamette Valley later retraced some of their steps back east, ending up in places like Walla Walla. Weston was one of the towns that grew out of this reverse migration, and the Salings were among families that came to the town as a result of the Oregon Trail.

Delph hopes that, with the help of the Historical Preservation League, Saling House can become a symbol of historical Weston, perhaps functioning as a bed-and-breakfast with a small museum.

“I think the house is beautiful, even with the cracks and the sags and the holes in the floor,” he said. “We’ve got a lot of work to do.”