



February 12, 2014

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Demolition of D-Street Corral homestead halted

Historic piece of Portlandia preserved

It was slated for the wrecking ball. Just an old house, abandoned years ago, broken into by vagrants, windows broken, copper piping stolen until it was finally boarded up by the City of Portland. Ah, but in reality it wasn't any of that. The old house on Division Street, once home to a thriving family, turned out to be a priceless piece of Portland's history, an absolute sleeping beauty.

Tony Monroe, property maintenance manager for Portland Habilitation Center Northwest (PHCNW), was asked to check out the old house situated on a parcel of land on Division street PHCNW had obtained a year ago on which it plans to build its new affordable housing project. He had been told the house was slated for demolition and was to evaluate the extent of work that would entail.

"What I found instead was a lovely old house with beautiful wood floors, two fireplaces, cedar closets – all in fairly good condition despite what the people who broke into it did," he said, as his crew hurried to install new windows to secure the old house as a February snowstorm bore down on them.

Meanwhile a police car idled outside, guarding the old house.

"We have to get the house secured as soon as possible," Monroe said. "We're getting fined everyday by the city."

Monroe reported to Deb Houston, vice president of building maintenance at PHCNW, the old house still had some life in it. She decided to not demolish it, but rather work on a complete restoration. In a couple months, after it's closed up, protected from uninvited intruders and the harsh winter elements, the crew will return and restore the old house into a beautiful home for another family to rent.

The house, formerly owned by the late Charles and Adoline Ceciliani, was built in 1948. The couple had also built and operated the once lively D-street Corral dance hall, which had one of

the largest dance floors in the country. The home was built nearby on the 10 acres of the corral's grounds. The couple operated the dance hall until it was destroyed by a fire in 1979.

The dance corral was a hot spot for Portland's young party crowd from the beat generation through the rock and roll era, drawing national celebrity performers as Johnny Cash, The Temptations, Hank Williams, Bobby Darin, Roy Orbison, Paul Revere and the Raiders and The Kingsmen, among others.

Running the dance hall was a family affair. Their three children grew up with music in their home and treasured their years in the lively and vibrant atmosphere of the dance hall.

As Monroe noticed, their old home, which clearly had seen better days, hinted at the large lively family who once lived there. The house, now silent, almost echoes with the lingering laughter and happy voices of a family actively engaged in an exciting limelight of the national entertainment industry. After school and before or after shows, they might have warmed up from Portland's cold damp winter days by their fireplaces. One can imagine dinner cooking in the large kitchen, which opened into a large living room where the family gathered to watch an Ed Sullivan show on a black and white television as a fire kindled in the large brick fireplace. Large bedrooms upstairs had enormous closets in which one would imagine once hung dance costumes and other clothing worn by performers at the dance hall.

Today, the old house sits silently on a city street shadowed by 21st century condominium-style apartments. It almost looks out of place, clearly from a distant time. But, with some TLC from PHCNW's construction team, the beautiful old relic from Portland's heyday will once again be a gentle home for a growing family.

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