The Alki Homestead gets a Facelift and Local Restauranteurs
by Sarah E. Miller, Operations Coordinator

When West Seattleites come into the Log House Museum, they have one thing on their mind: “What’s happening with the Homestead?” For years this striking log building down the street from the Alki Statue of Liberty has been pretty quiet. Within the past few months however, there have been noticeable changes. Observers can see clear signs of indoor and outdoor construction, landscaping and a new wheelchair access ramp.

For the unfamiliar, the Log House Museum was originally the carriage house of the Homestead (formally known as the Fir Lodge due to the Douglas Fir logs used) in 1904. Since then, the carriage house has been moved to pave the way for streets, while the Fir Lodge has gone through many transformations of its own.

When Doris Nelson purchased it in the 1960s, the Fir Lodge became the iconic restaurant known as the Alki Homestead. The Homestead was famous for their fried chicken dinners and was usually booked solid year around. 

BIG THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS!

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Upholding Our Mission at the 2019 Winter Board Retreat
By Sarah E. Miller, Operations Coordinator

The 2019 Board Retreat was filled with new ideas on how to nurture our educational and fundraising programs. Over the course of two Saturdays, our mission, “To promote local heritage through education, preservation and advocacy,” was an anchor in helping to showcase the significance of Duwamish peninsula. Lisa Kramer, Board of Trustees member, introduced us to non-profit teaching tools which help show the crossover of cost versus our mission. Using this technique and with lively discussion, we evaluated each of our activities. As a result, we are looking forward to wonderful and revitalized programs for the coming year and beyond!

The Southwest Seattle Historical Society is the Heart and Soul of our Peninsula
By Kathy Blackwell, President of Board of Trustees

As the new President of the Board of Trustees, I am happy to have the opportunity to share with you my interest and fondness for this organization. I have frequently said that the Southwest Seattle Historical Society is the heart and soul of our peninsula, because we are telling the stories and promoting the value of our unique heritage in the midst of development. We hope that you will enjoy this issue of Footprints which describes some of the activities going on in the museum now and in the future as well as highlighting a very special building that we were instrumental in preserving – the Alki Homestead, soon to re-open as Il Nido.

Last year our Champagne Gala theme was “History is Happening Now!”, and the year before, the theme was the “Power of Community!” These themes are so relevant right now. It will take powerful support of our citizens to galvanize our community voice in appreciating, preserving and promoting that special Duwamish Peninsula / West Seattle / White Center / South Park heritage. We encourage you to become a member of SWSHS, attend our events and be part of the SWSHS family. We also invite you to support our programs and community involvement through consideration of a financial donation. We look forward to your involvement in this wonderful organization and community!

Effervescent and soft spoken, Castro Luna is the first immigrant and woman of color to assume the role of Washington State Poet Laureate. When arriving in the US with her family at age 14, she spoke no English. As a result of Castro Luna’s father, a scholar, she learned to appreciate the values of reading as he insisted on bringing along a cumbersome box of books— including works in mathematics, social science, and language arts. These books resulted in the first source of her education.

Her rediscovery of that box in her attic years later prompted her to write a short story for Humanities Washington’s annual fundraiser, “Bedtime Stories.” The story touched upon the importance of literature in forming identity, and also included part of a memoir she is currently writing entitled Like Water to Drink.

From 2015 to 2017, Castro Luna was appointed by the mayor as Seattle’s first Civic Poet. In that position, Castro Luna won acclaim for her Seattle Poetic Grid, an online interactive map that showcases poems about different locations around the city.

At the event, she shows the audience the poetry grid as well as beautiful pictures which inspired some of her own poems. Some of which include, “Farmers’ Market” in El Salvador, “No Eggs” with her husband and their three children.

Finally, Castro Luna explained that building awareness and appreciation of poetry, including the state’s legacy of poetry, is part of the Poet Laureate workshop.

Living in both English and Spanish now, Claudia Castro Luna writes and teaches in West Seattle where she gardens and keeps chickens (which no longer lay eggs) with her husband and their three children.
"Seattle Transfer Co." and is full horse drawn omnibus marked away for Seattleites. Here’s a Alki used to be a summer get town in a pink Cadillac!

In the 1960s, the restaurant owner of the Homestead Doris Nelson, used to drive around town in a pink Cadillac!

Nelson, used to drive around owner of the Homestead Doris. In the 1960s, the restaurant Seattle Lodge, William Bernard, was the original owner of the Fir. The original owner of the Fir. We move to the fireplace which is the large focal point of the front room. The original fireplace was covered in river rocks from the local area, but was heavily destroyed by an earthquake a few years later. The Schillings had to completely rebuild of the fireplace with a careful attempt to perfectly recreate the original. They used the same small river rock design atheistic that is fairly specific to the west coast area. Patrons can enjoy its historically-striking features as one of the main centerpieces of the building.

Across the way is another fireplace, the point fireplace, and original fireplace. We got many of them from Second Use, " Schilling explains. Second Use is a Seattle company that utilizes salvaged materials and repurposes them for other houses and buildings. The courtyard boasts a seating area perfect for summer and a circular concrete planter, fit for landscaping.

Walking inside one of the empty apartments, one can’t help but notice the windows which light up the main room. All the windows are original, and the apartment has stairs connected to a loft space for a bedroom. The room is light, partially due to the skylights on the ceiling.

Walking through the building, Matt discusses the finer details of restoring such unique landmark.

We move to the fireplace which is the large focal point of the front room. The original fireplace was covered in river rocks from the local area, but was heavily destroyed by an earthquake a few years later. The Schillings had to completely rebuild of the fireplace with a careful attempt to perfectly recreate the original. They used the same small river rock design atheistic that is fairly specific to the west coast area. Patrons can enjoy its historically-striking features as one of the main centerpieces of the building.

Across the way is another fireplace, the smaller of the two, and made with brick.

"This is all original," Schilling points to the structure, "We had to use graffiti remover to remove all of the cinder and ash that was on top of the bricks."

The Schillings used seismic metal to reinforce the building to be earthquake safe.

The Schillings plan on handing over the keys in February to their restaurant tenants, West Seattletles Mike and Victoria Easton. For the unfamiliar, the Eastons own Il Corvo, a lunch-only Italian restaurant in downtown Seattle. Il Corvo means "crow" in Italian, and the new restaurant will be named Il Nido, which fittingly means "nest."

From the West Seattle Blog, "It’s going to be sort of our permanent, home-base restaurant," says Easton. "The nest just seemed to make perfect sense."

Though Il Nido won’t be serving the iconic fried chicken dinner, they will be serving their famous handmade pasta. Unlike their downtown lunch location however, Il Nido will be dinner-only. They will be featuring seasonally fresh produce, a rotating menu, and a lively modern atmosphere to balance out the rustic feel of the log cabin. If all goes to plan, Il Nido is slated to be open in April of this year.

Changes, Inside and Out
Outside in the back, Schilling leads us up a wooden staircase overlooking the restaurant’s outdoor courtyard. The upstairs space is fully renovated and utilized as three private apartment units.

"A lot of materials we’ve used aren’t conventional. We got many of them from Second Use," Schilling explains. Second Use is a Seattle company that utilizes salvaged materials and repurposes them for other houses and buildings. The courtyard boasts a seating area perfect for summer and a circular concrete planter, fit for landscaping.

Walking inside one of the empty apartments, one can’t help but notice the windows which light up the main room. All the windows are original, and the apartment has stairs connected to a loft space for a bedroom. The room is light, partially due to the skylights on the ceiling.

New Tenants
After the tour, we discuss the future of the Homestead. "It’s been a long time in the making," Schilling says, outside on the upper deck overlooking the water. "But we’re almost done."

Nearly all the windows are original to the Homestead, including the upstairs loft apartments.

The Schillings actually made the Homestead square footage smaller, "It virtually unheard of in development."

"We’re trying our best," he says, in regard to keeping historical details intact. Considering the unusual building, Schilling notes how difficult it’s been to find appropriate materials. He points to the logs at the front of the house, "Most of those logs had to be replaced due to years of damage. We used a beam system, lifting up the corners of the walls without a crane."

"This is all original," Schilling points to the structure, "We had to use graffiti remover to remove all of the cinder and ash that was on top of the bricks."

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VHS Digitization Project Gets Major Publicity with the Seattle Channel

By Sarah E. Miller, Operations Coordinator

Since 2016, Jen Zook, a Southwest Seattle Historical Society volunteer, has been digitizing our deteriorating VHS tapes in an effort to preserve videos and imagery of Seattle history. Working with MiPoPs (Moving Image Preservation of Puget Sound), Zook has helped digitize over 100 tapes ranging from ten minutes to three hours. These tapes are now duplicated as digital files for films, research purposes and archival preservation. Once the project is completed, they'll be a part of a large catalog available to researchers and community members alike.

On February 28th, The Seattle Channel aired a segment of Zook's efforts. Zook explains the beginning of this undertaking, “We sort of knew what we had: a few oral histories, a few meetings and things like that on tapes, but then when we found all the other ones, we got really excited.”

Due to the size of this digitization and preservation project, Zook surveyed all of them and took inventory. Then, with the help of MiPoPs, loaded them into their players, VCRs and other similar players, which were hooked up to computers. Digitization programs captured the images and converted the information to digital formats and are now saved on new hard drives.

Our former curator and current board member Lisa Kramer explains to the Seattle Channel what happens to VHS tapes when they start deteriorating. “The longer they sit without being processed they become demagnetized, and so you're literally having information, for lack of better word, dissolving off the tapes.”

The tapes include extensive interviews with Southwest Seattle residents called “oral histories,” where they describe multigenerational families growing up in the Duwamish Peninsula, discussion of the founding Seattle/Alki Denny party from direct descendants, and important periods of US history. With help from a 4Culture grant, this project has taken on a life of its own.

Zook furthers, “It’s really exciting for them to be up and digitized. I’m excited for them to be searchable.” Looking forward to the potential of these tapes, Zook is optimistic about having fascinating local history available to the public.

Collections Vault: THE SOUTH END NEWS

Rachel Regeln, Registrar

The SWSHS has a small but mighty collection of historical documents, objects, and photographs. Among collected items are Southwest Seattle newspapers, several of which exist only in our collection. One of these papers is The South End News, first published in 1915, and continued until an unknown date, possibly the 1920s. We have three issues in our collection and have been unable to locate the existence of copies in other museums and archives.

Curation Levels Project

Tessa Williams, Curator, and Cameo Kale

In December, our staff and collections volunteers wrapped up a grant-funded project to survey our collection and assign curation levels to our storage containers. The curation levels indicate the level of work needed to be accomplished so that our collections are safely and efficiently housed in archival storage. Full inventories are an ideal way to know what’s in a collection and how to care for it; unfortunately, full inventories take a lot of time, money, and people power.

Starting with a survey like this is a great way for smaller institutions like the Southwest Seattle Historical Society to efficiently take care of the most pressing collections needs first, then systematically continue to care for the rest of the collections.