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2015 Ashland Conference Report

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**MARION DEAN ROSS/PACIFIC NORTHWEST CHAPTER
SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS**

**ANNUAL CONFERENCE
ASHLAND, OREGON, OCTOBER 23-25, 2015**

By Diana Painter, Chapter President



Chautauqua Park in downtown Ashland pays homage to the Oregon Shakespeare Festivals beginnings as a Chautauqua venue. Photo: D. Painter

The 2015 MDR SAH conference was held in Ashland, Oregon, with side trips to Medford, Jacksonville and the Oregon Caves. Friday afternoon began with a tour of Hillcrest Orchard, which is one of the oldest continuously owned family orchards in the Rogue River Valley. Our host Judson Parson, whose family has owned and operated the orchard since 1908, led a tour of the National Register-listed house, barns and outbuildings, all of which were designed by venerable Rogue River Valley architect Frank C. Clark. Hillcrest Orchard is known for its fine quality fruit and produce, quality maintained today under the guidance of the grandchildren of Reginald and Maude Bemis Parks (The Parsons family donated the historic Parsons Garden Park on Queen Anne Hill in Seattle).

The evening's festivities began at Elements Tapas Bar in downtown Medford, with a rousing talk by historian George Kramer on the history of downtown Medford and Medford's Downtown Historic District. Kramer has worked on the restoration of several buildings in downtown Medford, including the Palm building, where the reception and talk was held. The Palm Building was built as two separate buildings and then unified by architect Frank C. Clark in 1916.

The theme of the 2015 conference was “Artifice and Authenticity in Architecture! To Play or Not to Play?” in honor of our host city of Ashland, home of the 81-year-old Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Paper sessions began Saturday morning at Pioneer Hall, a 1921 building in Ashland’s historic Lithia Park. We were welcomed to Ashland by Dr. Phil Long, Board President of the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

In addition to honoring our host city of Ashland, the conference theme was meant to focus attention on heritage tourism and questions

Vice President Amanda Clark and host Judson Parson at Hillcrest Orchard. Photo: D. Painter



Dr. Phil Long welcomes SAH MDR to Ashland. Photo: D. Painter

of authenticity. Many of the papers and presentations addressed this theme, both directly and indirectly. Papers began with a presentation by Amy Crain, historian with the California Office of Historic Preservation. Her paper, “Synagogue Architecture as Metaphor: Standing Out or Blending In,” discussed synagogue architecture on the west coast and the variety of styles and building forms expressed in synagogue architecture. Her presentation was followed by a paper by Julianne Parse Sandlin, an instructor in the Art Department at Portland Community College. Sandlin’s paper, “The Ca’ d’Zan: Whimsical Play or Serious Business?” reflected on time she had spent researching the Venetian Gothic mansion developed by John Ringling and his wife Mabel in

Sarasota, Florida. The 1926 mansion, now open to the public, was designed by New York architect Dwight James Baum. Our third paper, entitled “Authenticity and Artifice in Alvar Aalto’s Mount Angel Library,” focused on this architectural landmark in Oregon, one of three buildings designed by Aalto in the United States. It was presented by long time SAH MDR member and contributor Henry Matthews. Matthews is Professor Emeritus in architectural history from Washington State University.

The late morning session kicked off with a fascinating discussion by Noah Guadagni, a recent graduate from the Master of Landscape Architecture program at the University of Oregon. His research, presented in the paper, “Ten Principles of Pacific Northwest Landscape Architecture: How Authenticity is the New Regional Commodity,” attempts to define those principles that can be found in landscapes that successfully convey a sense of local identity and culture. His paper can be found in our chapter archives at the UO Library (see links below). It was followed by the discussion of another landscape which is attempting to recover its roots, “The Weippe Prairie” by Robert Franklin, formerly with Spokane Falls Community College and now an archivist and historian at Washington State University. Next was a presentation on the Molalla Log House by retired historic preservationist Pam Hayden and historic building contractor Gregg Olson. In conjunction with their work to restore of this early log cabin, possibly Oregon’s oldest structure, they are attempting to authenticate its origins with early Russian settlers in Oregon.

Liz Carter, now our regional representative from Oregon, followed up on her 2013 Elisabeth Walton Potter Research Grant with a presentation entitled, “Mid-Nineteenth Century Dwelling of Oregon Black Pioneers: A Brief Historical Context.” In conjunction with this research, Carter, an independent architectural historian, nominated the Hannah and Eliza Gorman House in Corvallis to the National Register of Historic Places. The Gormans were African American slaves who arrived in Oregon via the Oregon Trail, gained their freedom, and built a home and business in Corvallis, Oregon at a time when African



Liz Carter, 2013 recipient of Elisabeth Walton Potter Research Grant. Photo: D. Painter

Americans were not allowed to own property in Oregon.

This was followed by an update and call for participants for the Society of Architectural Historians Archipedia project by Washington regional representative Phil Gruen. Gruen, who is Washington State University associate professor and director of the School of Design and Construction, undertook this effort with Robert Franklin. This challenging project will place 100 of the most significant buildings and structures from every state in an online encyclopedia that is free and available to the public. Gruen and Franklin were the recipients of a 2014 Elizabeth Walton Potter Research Award for this project.

As is our usual practice, lunch was combined with the Annual General Meeting. Liz Carter was welcomed as the new regional representative from Oregon, replacing former SAH MDR president Ed Teague. One of the topics of discussion at the meeting was the location of next year's meeting. Baker City, Oregon and Sun Valley, Idaho were discussed enthusiastically. Former SAH MDR president Martin Segger invited the membership to have their annual meeting in Victoria in 2017. More on that later.



Archivist Debra Griffith speaking on the history of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival . Photo: D. Painter

Lunch was followed by a presentation by Debra Griffith, archivist for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, on the history of the festival and early festival buildings. Chock full of historic photos of buildings and people, this presentation offered a glimpse into the festival's modest beginnings and many early challenges.

Our next venue was downtown Ashland and the Downtown Historic District, for a walking tour led by Terry Skibby, an Ashland native and member of the Ashland Historic Commission. Skibby has been leading walking tours of Ashland for many years, and has an amazing collection of historic photographs of the town.



Members Susan Boyle and Henry Matthews sample Lithia Springs water at the fountain in downtown Ashland. Photo: D. Painter

Our annual banquet began with refreshments at Ashland's four-story Elks Lodge, which has a beautifully situated top floor sun room overlooking the hills northeast of Ashland. Our keynote speaker was Jeff LaLande, a 45-year resident of the Rogue River Valley and author, archaeologist and historian who is retired from the Forest Service. LaLande's entertaining talk about Ashland also touched on our theme of authenticity and introduced us to the term, "Tudorized."

Sunday began with a tour of the historic Jacksonville Cemetery by Dirk Siedlecki, president of the Friends of the Jacksonville Cemetery. The Jacksonville Cemetery is one of the oldest and largest in the state of Oregon, with its first burial occurring in 1859. The cemetery is the final resting place for over 5,600 residents of the Rogue Valley and continues in use to this day.

This was followed by a walking tour of downtown Jacksonville by Scott Clay, Rogue River Valley native and former consultant and historic preservation planner for the City of Jacksonville. Jacksonville owes its impressive and intact architecture to the fact that gold was discovered in the area in 1851, but the town was ultimately bypassed by the railroad. The outstanding historic integrity of Jacksonville's downtown was recognized in the 1960s, and it was designated a National Register Landmark District in 1966, the same year as the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act. The tour culminated at Jacksonville's impressive Jackson County Courthouse, which is undergoing a restoration.



Tour leaders Dirk Siedlecki and Scott Clay chat between showers at the Jacksonville Cemetery. Photo: D. Painter



The height of fall color in downtown Jacksonville. Photo: D. Painter

The morning was capped off with lunch at the Schoolhaus Brewhaus on the Biggam Knoll campus in Jacksonville. The Schoolhaus, known historically as the Jacksonville School House, is a historic school whose ground floor is occupied by the German restaurant, brew pub and beer garden. The 1907 building was designed by Medford architect John McIntosh. After lunch, those who participated in the post-conference event headed west toward Cave Junction for an evening event at the Chateau at the Oregon Caves.



Enjoying beers and bratwurst at the Schoolhaus Brewhaus. Photo: D. Painter

The evening at the Chateau at the Oregon Caves began with a “backstage tour” of the Chateau’s renovation, led by Sue Densmore, Executive Director of the Friends of the Oregon Caves and Chateau. The Oregon Caves and Chateau is a National Historic Landmark. The Chateau sits amidst several rustic buildings and a 1938 Civilian Conservation Corps-built landscape, all of which is part of a National Register of Historic Places District. The Oregon Caves is additionally a National Monument, established by President Howard Taft in 1909. The tour was followed by a banquet for about ten of the SAH MDR members and another half dozen board members of the Friends of the Oregon Caves, which allowed us to learn more about the National Park Service-led renovation of the building. The visit culminated in a tour of the Oregon Caves on Sunday morning.

So ends another year of scholarship and fellowship at the 61st annual meeting of the Marion Dean Ross/Pacific Northwest Chapter Society of Architectural Historians meeting. Stay tuned for news of a Victoria meeting in 2017!



The west wing of the Oregon Caves Chateau. Photo: D. Painter

LINKS (in order of appearance in meeting)

Peterson, Joe, "Chautauqua in Oregon," *Oregon Encyclopedia*, http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/chautauqua_in_oregon/#.VuWVNH0rJD8 (http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/chautauqua_in_oregon/#.VuWVNH0rJD8)

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Medford Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commission, "Medford Oregon History," <http://www.ci.medford.or.us/SectionIndex.asp?SectionID=576> (<http://www.ci.medford.or.us/SectionIndex.asp?SectionID=576>)

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Society of Architectural Historians, "Classic Buildings," *SAH Archipedia*, <http://sah-archipedia.org/> (<http://sah-archipedia.org/>)

"Our History," *Oregon Shakespeare Festival*, <https://www.osfashland.org/about/our-history.aspx> (<https://www.osfashland.org/about/our-history.aspx>)

"Historic Commission," *City of Ashland*, <http://www.ashland.or.us/CCBIndex.asp?CCBID=195> (<http://www.ashland.or.us/CCBIndex.asp?CCBID=195>)

The Friends of Jacksonville's Historic Cemetery, <http://www.friendsjvillecemetery.org/> (<http://www.friendsjvillecemetery.org/>)

"The historic small-town that never gets old," *Jacksonville, Oregon*, <http://jacksonvilleoregon.com/> (<http://jacksonvilleoregon.com/>)

"Welcome to Bigham Knoll in historic Jacksonville, Oregon," <http://bighamknoll.com/> (<http://bighamknoll.com/>)

Friends of the Oregon Caves and Chateau, <http://friendsocac.org/> (<http://friendsocac.org/>)

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