



## A house finds pride of place

*An energetic group of volunteers restores a Marpole home to its simple working-class glory*

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It's a sturdy little house, small by modern-day standards, but solidly rooted in history on a Marpole side street just north of the Fraser River.

Its gambrel roof, wood siding and compact living space -- built by a local carpenter in 1912 and typical of a Vancouver working-class house of the period -- tell the story of a community.

Which is exactly why the Marpole Museum and Historical Society thinks the house at 8743 Southwest Marine Drive should be preserved.

Evelyn Bulteel has a more personal reason. She's 65 now, but in 1939, the year she was born, her family lived in the cottage that today bears her family name.

The Colbourne House, bought by her parents Henry and May in 1936, would be home to their family of five until 1982, when Evelyn's widowed mother moved out and into an apartment.

The house was then bought by a young couple, who Bulteel says weren't thrilled with cooking on the wood stove, and then by the city, which rented it out for a number of years before it was abandoned and overrun -- and almost destroyed -- by squatters.

Today, Colbourne House is being meticulously restored by an energetic group of volunteers, including Bulteel.

In 1994, the city of Vancouver granted the society a 60-year lease on the house, and the fundraising since has attracted private donations and a recent cash injection from the B.C. Gaming Commission.

The cost of the renovation, so far, is about \$250,000 and the volunteers hope to have the job done by next summer.

"It's neat to save a working man's house, rather than a Shaughnessy mansion," says Bulteel, who still lives in the community and joined the project 10 years ago after the society tracked her down.

"It's nice to see it come back to life."

Jan Wilson is also among the area residents leading the restoration charge, and says the shared vision for Colbourne House is that it be returned to the community, in all its simplistic glory.

Schools will be invited to tour it, and social events will be held in the back garden, which is part of the adjacent city-owned William S. Mackie park.

It is hoped that seniors in the area will use the restored house for a meeting place.



CREDIT: Ward Perrin, Vancouver Sun

Evelyn Bulteel poses next to one of the fruit trees that she climbed as a kid while growing up at the Colbourne house on Southwest Marine. She remembers playing on the sand dunes down at the river and listening to the late-night rattle of the interurban train.



CREDIT: Ward Perrin, Vancouver Sun

Evelyn Bulteel (from left), her mother, May Colbourne, and sister Myrna outside the Colbourne home on Southwest Marine Drive in 1950.

"It's meant to be a little museum, a living museum," says Wilson, "but this is an everyman's house and it's important that it not be fussy."

Which means there's a great deal of function, but little grandeur in the place. The furniture and fittings now being gathered and installed might once have come from Woodward's, or ordered from the Sears catalogue.

Today, the main floor -- kitchen with nook, dining room, living room and bathroom with a clawfoot tub -- is showing signs of its once busy past. The fir floors have been refinished, there are donated schoolhouse lights to install and the original kitchen cupboards are awaiting new hardware.

The top floor, accessed by a narrow stairway with a hinged riser on the bottom step for storage, has a cramped landing and three tiny closetless bedrooms, one with a whimsical doorway that requires one to stoop to enter.

The basement, raised and refitted with an outside elevator to allow handicapped access to the upper public floors, will serve as the society's office, and has a new kitchen, rental meeting room and additional bathrooms.

Outside, heritage paint colours and fresh landscaping have given the old place a new polish.

The Colbourne family has donated the original dining table and chairs, as well as the gramophone and wringer washer, along with some books and accessories.

But the house still needs a wood stove, not necessarily in working order, as well as iron beds, area rugs, linens, pictures and all manner of household goods, circa 1912 through the 1930s.

They're hoping to have it prettied up in time for a Nov. 20 open house, sort of a sneak peek Christmas present.

Meanwhile, the society's website has historical photographs, and is maintaining a log of the restoration process.

Says Bulteel, whose memories of the house include playing on the sand dunes down at the river, listening to the late-night rattle of the interurban, and having chickens and a big vegetable garden:

"My father loved living in Marpole and I think he's looking down and saying, 'Great.'"

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CREDIT: Ward Perrin, Vancouver Sun  
Evelyn Bulteel outside the house in 1958.



CREDIT: Ward Perrin, Vancouver Sun  
Evelyn Bulteel's mother and father, May and Henry Colbourne, at the Colbourne home in 1960.