



Evelyn Bulteel at her childhood home on Southwest Marine Drive.
Photo-Dan Toulgoet

House shows early 20th century life

By Naoibh O'Connor-Staff writer, Vancouver Courier

It's been 42 years since Evelyn Bulteel married and left her childhood home in south Vancouver, but on Monday she returned to reveal the results of an ambitious restoration effort designed to illustrate how families lived in the early 20th century.

Bulteel is a director with the Marpole Museum Historical Society, which spent the last 11 years refurbishing the property. The group, founded by retired MLA Val Anderson, held the official opening of what's been dubbed the Colbourne House, at the end of May.

For Bulteel, the Colbourne, the experience has been nostalgic. Many of the items decorating the house at 8743 Southwest Marine Dr. belonged to her parents, Henry and May Colbourne. They include the chesterfield, matching chairs and gramophone in the living room, the dinner table, chairs and table cloth in the dining room, and the ancient wringer washing machine in the bathroom. Her mother used the machine until she moved out in 1982.

Many other antiques and collectables were donated by others to breathe life into the exhibit such as a china dish set and the wood burning stove in the kitchen.

"I think it's marvellous we can finally get the school children to be able to come in and see what a meat grinder is and that there wasn't always all these electrical things," she said. "I mean, you played the gramophone by winding it up."

The 65-year-old also recalled heating a brick in the wood stove to warm up her bed at night and her mother canning fruit from the peach, cherry and plum trees in the backyard.

"[My mother] cooked on [a] wood stove right up to the very end. Then she went into an apartment and couldn't get her chocolate cake to go right in an electric stove-it just wouldn't do what she wanted," Bulteel said.

Her parents bought the property in 1936 and owned it until 1982, raising three children-Evelyn, Myrna (now Parker) and Neil, on a CPR conductor's salary.

The relatively small main floor includes a kitchen, living room, dining room and washroom, while the second floor has three bedrooms. "It's a working man's house,"

Bulteel said. Each of the rooms is decorated with appropriate period objects, such as photographs, books, glasses, nightgowns, dressers, suitcases and brush and comb sets.

What would have happened to the house if the society hadn't started the renovation is unknown.

In 1982, another owner bought the property, but he soon moved away. It fell into disrepair with squatters taking over. Although the city took over the land and planned to run a road through, those plans were never fulfilled. In 1994, the city agreed to lease the house to the Marpole Museum Historical Society for 60 years.

The house was raised to create office space in the basement for the society and the exterior was painted a heritage colour-Edwardian buff.

The project took 11 years and cost \$230,000, much of which was raised through grants. "We would wait till we had another lot of money and then the contractor would come back," Bulteel said.

The society is looking for additional donations to decorate the interior, including pillows, pillowcases, sheets, a wall mounted bathroom cabinet, braided rugs, rocking chair, and china cabinet or serving table as well as several other items.

The public's next chance to view the Colbourne House is July 9 when the West Wynds Canadian Folk Celtic group plays in the back garden during the society's third annual summer concert.

The society can be contacted at 8743 SW Marine Dr., Vancouver, B.C., V6P 6A5. Phone 604-261-0103 or visit the website at www.marpolehistorical.ca.

posted on 06/09/2005

All contents of this site are copyright by Lower Mainland Publishing Group Inc., A Canwest Company.