

LEGION HALL RESTORATION

Update #1

It is already time to update our community on what has happened since Crockett took ownership of the World War I Memorial Hall in October. This building is known locally as the "Legion," short for American Legion Hall. My assumption that it was built and paid for by C&H Sugar Co. is apparently false. We do have evidence that C&H donated the land and also paid the architect. A 1925 newspaper article reports, however, that the Memorial "is the gift of the citizens of this section of Contra Costa County." Could it be that our county built it? Or was it the American Legion? Anyone who knows the answer is invited to share it with the Crockett Community Services District at 787-2992.

In January, we received an engineering proposal from the San Francisco firm of Holmes Culley for structural analysis and design of a seismic retrofit system to protect the building and public from structural collapse during an earthquake. The Legion was built of unreinforced masonry. Seismic retrofit is a fundamental requirement before spending any money on the building or trying to put it back in public use.

We have also applied to the County for a grant of \$35,000 to begin the engineering study. The oral presentation of our grant application went well, and I am optimistic of success. Grants are to be determined in March. Meanwhile, we have no money to spend and can't even turn on the electricity.

Ron Wilson and I held a neighborhood meeting in February to begin a dialogue with those who know best how this property has affected nearby residents. There is a history of vandalism and other problems at the Legion that our decisions should address. The meeting was well attended and much information was shared. I found the neighbors to be very supportive of efforts to restore and use the Legion Hall again for public benefit. They were also in favor of finding ways for this World War I memorial to serve today's veterans.

I am now working to produce architectural drawings of the building. Frances Dahl is helping me measure every aspect of it. These 'as-built' drawings will help to hold down the engineering costs, and they will also provide a detailed record of this 85-year old monument in combination with photos being taken by Mike Kirker. One important discovery so far is that the large arched windows, long hidden from sight, were built of wood and not iron. It will not be safe to uncover them nearly as soon as I had hoped.

Tony Dahl has donated the American flag used at his father's recent funeral. I am hopeful of many more donations of military service memorabilia to help us carry on the fundamental message of honoring those who have served our country in times of war. I plan to make a special donation of my own from the 1968 Tet offensive in Vietnam. My intent is certainly not to celebrate that war or any other war, but rather to recognize that young men and women are always being called to active duty and sacrifice in conflicts far beyond their comprehension. They have earned our respect through their sacrifice, and the restoration of our memorial will perpetuate its role of honoring the service of the ordinary citizen who is called upon by our government to take up arms. In this opinion, I am not speaking for the District Board of Crockett Community Services District. It is my own and partially explains why I am volunteering my time to lead this project. By expressing this opinion, I hope to attract many more volunteers to this restoration effort who have similar feelings.

We have a growing list of local residents who want to be kept informed by e-mail as we move the project along. You are all invited to add your e-mail address to our list by sending it to manager@town.crockett.ca.us. Please join us in getting the whole community behind our effort.

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